

COUNCIL

A meeting of the Council was held on Wednesday 13 January 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors J Hobson (Chair), L Garvey (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, A Bell, D Branson, C Cooke, B Cooper, D Coupe, D Davison, S Dean, C Dodds, T Furness, J Goodchild, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, A High, S Hill, C Hobson, N Hussain, D Jones, L Lewis, L Mason, T Mawston, D McCabe, C McIntyre, J McTigue, M Nugent, J Platt, E Polano, A Preston (The Mayor), G Purvis, J Rathmell, D Rooney, J Rostron, M Saunders, M Smiles, M Storey, P Storey, J Thompson, Z Uddin, J Walker, S Walker, A Waters, G Wilson and C Wright

OFFICERS: B Carr, C Benjamin, Z Farrow, R Horniman, A Humble, T Parkinson, A Perriman, T Whitehead, K Whitmore, A Wilson and I Wright

20/57 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for Absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hubbard and Sands

20/58 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/59 **MINUTES- COUNCIL - 16 DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 December 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/60 **ANNOUNCEMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS**

There were no formal announcements for this meeting.

20/61 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY).**

The Chair advised that a question from a member of the public had been received, details of which were included at Agenda Item 5.

The Chair invited the member of the public who had submitted Question 3/2020 to put his question to the Executive Member for Communities and Education.

The Executive Member advised that the issues raised fell within two Executive Member portfolios and departments and she advised that the work to promote Black literature and media would be ongoing.

The Executive Member advised that with reference to Point 1 of the Notice of Motion, the Council had been involved in a number of initiatives to ensure that Black literature and media were represented in Middlesbrough Libraries and cultural spaces and to deliver promotion of these materials within Council settings. These included the following:

- The Council was actively purchasing books by black authors and books about black history for its libraries
- The Council promoted black literature during Black History Month in 2020 via its social media platforms, as acknowledged on the Council's weekly bulletin and it purchased new books especially for the promotion, both for children and adults.
- The Council aimed to introduce regular reader recommended titles via its social media platforms, and it would ensure that black literature was represented.
- The Council planned to produce themed children's book lists in 2021, and these lists would be diverse and include black literature.
- The Council would be promoting Black Literature during Black History month 2021 and regular reader recommended titles would be introduced which would include black literature.

In terms of cultural venues, the Council was working with a group called Culture CIC. The Council worked with them to produce an annual event called "Taste of Africa". The Council was working with Culture CIC to submit a bid for funding to the Arts Council to expand the Taste of Africa event to include African influence music and dance. They also hoped to develop a schools programme.

In terms of the part of the motion in relation to training, Democratic Services were working on developing a training programme for all members.

With reference to Point 2 of the Notice of Motion - A request for a commitment from the Council to support Black-led businesses and organisations in Middlesbrough, the Executive Member advised that this part of the Motion fell within the remit of the Executive Member for Regeneration, and he would respond to this part of the Motion in due course. .

The Executive Member urged the member of the public to get in touch if he wished to discuss the issue further.

20/62

MAYOR'S STATEMENT AND REPORT

The Mayor provided an update in respect of the following:-

The Mayor acknowledged that the previous year had presented many challenges but he paid tribute to the resilience of the members of the public, council staff and community groups for the way in which they had worked together to address the many challenges that the town had faced.

Covid-19

In relation to Covid-19. Infection rates had continued to fall but the number of people requiring hospitalisation had increased. Infection rates had peaked at 600 per 100,000 but this had fallen to 400.

The Mayor advised that the figures were encouraging but he emphasised the requirement to protect the NHS and to protect life. He stated that the vast number of people were following the rules.

Holocaust Memorial Day Event

The Mayor reminded members with regard to an on-line Holocaust Memorial Day event hosted by the Council which was due to be held on 27 January 2021. He urged members to join in with the event.

Group Meetings

The Mayor suggested that Group Leaders or those members who were not in a group should get together with him to share ideas and provide feedback on issues relating to the Council and the community. He stated that he wanted to be questioned, challenged or just to listen to any ideas that members wished to put forward. He urged members to get in touch.

Vaccinations

Members were advised that over 8000 residents had received the Covid-19 vaccination so far which was above the national average. Residents would be contacted by their GP practice to advise when their vaccination would be available.

The Mayor stated that he hoped things would get back to some sense of normality after February in order to protect jobs and mental health and create the futures that young people needed.

Councillors

The Mayor commented on the work and conduct of a councillor.

Homelessness

The Mayor stated that the Council had received funding which enabled them to provide accommodation for homeless people to prevent them sleeping on the streets. He congratulated council staff for their work with the homeless, which was ongoing.

Government Jobs – Levelling up Agenda

The Mayor advised that his fear was that Government jobs would not come to Teesside. He urged people to write to their MP, the TVCA and the Prime Minister, urging them to relocate Government offices to the Tees Valley area. The Mayor was also concerned that the offices would be located at Teesside Airport. He emphasised that the jobs needed to be located in the centre of town in order to boost the economy.

Gap between the affluent and the deprived

The Mayor stated that he was concerned about the gap between the affluent children and the deprived, particularly in relation to education. Schools could help rebalance this and it was important that children could get back to school and to ensure that children had the appropriate hardware and connectivity to enable them to catch up on lost schooling.

The Mayor advised that the future did look promising. The spring and summer of 2021 would be better and there would be many announcements.

Councillor McTigue acknowledged the comments by the Mayor about her work as a councillor, but challenged the Mayor on comments regarding the use of the Council's one-stop system and issues that she had raised with him previously. The Mayor advised that he was willing to meet with and work with Councillor McTigue.

Councillor Cooke also commented on the use of the Council's one-stop system. With regard to homelessness, Councillor Cooke advised that he attended the official count. He had attended at 4am in the morning and found many homeless people sleeping in the rain. He stated that he was disappointed that Councillor Storey's Notice of Motion on the subject of homelessness had been rejected. He advised that he was concerned about the fact that as the homeless were not registered with a GP they could be prevented from receiving the Covid-19 vaccine.

Councillor Cooke stated that he would be willing to help tackle poverty. He stated that he had experienced this situation as a child and he emphasised that it was important to challenge the issues of poverty and education.

The Mayor acknowledged the work that Councillor Cooke had been carrying out as a Councillor, particularly in relation to homelessness

Councillor Uddin queried whether the Mayor was liaising with the Combined Authority and other local authorities.

The Mayor advised that he attended regular scheduled meetings between the leaders and Chief Executives together with having regular telephone conversations between other leaders and there was a Whats App Group. It was important to balance between working as a group and working for your own authority.

Councillor Cooper highlighted the fact that the Council offered assistance and specialised services to staff and members who were struggling with issues.

The Mayor advised that people should try and recognise signs and talk to them

Councillor Furness commented with regard to child poverty and the provision of free school meals and he queried whether the Council was going to assist?

The Mayor advised that he had been involved in a number of phone calls to schools about the provision of free school meals. The Council was providing hampers and although the schools were receiving the money, the Council was involved in the provision of the hampers.

The Executive Member for Communities and Education advised that it was a decision between the Government and each individual school whether they issued vouchers or distributed hampers however the hampers produced by Middlesbrough Council were of a decent standard.

Councillor M Storey stated that it was right to say that the Council could be relatively confident with regard to the vaccination programme. He advised that he had met with some NHS representatives and they had advised that GPs were already visiting care homes to give the vaccination to residents and care staff. Over two thirds of the staff at JCUH and over 2000 care home staff had been vaccinated. TUVE the Mental Health Trust and NEAS, the Ambulance and paramedic service staff were also due to receive the vaccination. He stated that the government needed to be careful about relaxing the rules too quickly as those who had been vaccinated could still transmit the disease.

He stated that he and the MP for Middlesbrough had written to the Chancellor with regard to bringing jobs to Middlesbrough. There were new offices available in Middlesbrough to accommodate the government service.

Councillor M Storey stated that the Holocaust Memorial day service was very important. He commented that future generations needed to remember and educate themselves about it. He stated that he welcomed the Mayor's invitation to meet with groups and he looked forward to the invitation.

Councillor Higgins stated that she agreed with Councillor Cooke regarding disappointment about the fact that the Notice of Motion on homelessness had been rejected and she stated that the Council needed to look after those who could not look after themselves. She also agreed with Councillor Cooke's sentiments about children going hungry.

Councillor J Walker stated that she agreed with much of what the Mayor had said about infection rates falling and the Council's work with disadvantaged children and she acknowledged the work of community and voluntary groups throughout the pandemic. Councillor Walker stated that it was unfair to criticise members and make derogatory remarks when members were working hard at all times of the day and enforcing the rules set by the government.

The Mayor stated that his comments had not been a criticism of Councillor Walker or any political group. There had been criticism aimed at a member who had been stuck outside the country and the Mayor stated that as long as the member was working hard it did not matter where they were located.

Councillor Coupe stated that he agreed with the Mayor's comments regarding the Holocaust and he agreed with Councillor M Storey about the fact that it should never be forgotten. He stated that he was pleased that the number of Covid-19 cases was falling.

20/63

DEPUTY MAYOR AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORTS

The Chair invited Members to raise items for general discussion arising from the Information Booklet of Executive Member reports which detailed activities carried out within the respective Executive Member portfolios (Section 1), Executive decisions taken (Section 2) or to be taken where known, prior to and following the meeting (Sections 3 and 4).

Questions/Comments on Deputy Mayor and Lead Member for Children's Social Care report

Comment from Councillor Hellaoui regarding Children's Services – Leadership and Management

Councillor Hellaoui stated that as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, she wished to draw attention to the Middlesbrough Children Matter website. The purpose of the website was to provide information which would enable members and all involved in the wellbeing of children to connect with children. The Corporate Parenting Strategy had recently been revised to ensure that the foundations of Corporate Parenting were strong and fit for purpose. The guiding principles of the strategy were co-designed with young people and other partner agencies. Blogs, interviews and videos were also available.

Councillor High stated that the Council was working strategically to bring about life long changes to the services that the Council provided using a cross party approach to improve the lives of children. He encouraged all Councillors to take a proactive approach. Councillor High urged members to highlight any areas of improvement or any areas that might need including in the website. Councillor High stated that he was pleased with the progress to date.

Question from Councillor Wright regarding Children's Services – Performance

Councillor Wright referred to a recent workforce census which indicated that Social Workers handled 16.9 cases however Middlesbrough Council's social workers were currently handling 22 cases each. Councillor Wright queried with regard to how the Council proposed to reduce Social Worker's caseloads whilst ensuring that the Council was safeguarding vulnerable children.

Councillor High acknowledged that Middlesbrough had one of the highest numbers of children in care. The average number of cases was usually 15-20 but Middlesbrough Council Social Workers were currently handling just above 22. The Council could not reduce the number of children in care. The Council needed to make sure that it provided the appropriate interventions to make children safe, The Council was making progress. In July the number of children in care was around 700 but this had been reduced to just over 600.

The Council was ensuring that permanence was a proactive approach. The Executive Member had held discussions with the staff involved. The Council was working hard to reduce the number of children in care and would continue to do so ensuring that children in Middlesbrough remained safe.

Questions/Comments on Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health report

Comment from Councillor Arundale regarding the Middlesbrough Handypersons Service

Councillor Arundale stated that he wished to congratulate the Handypersons Service for receiving the Handyperson Service of the Year award.

The Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health advised that the Handypersons Service were doing an amazing job throughout the town. They had worked throughout the Covid pandemic. They had received 1230 inquiries and completed 1070 jobs. The Executive Member advised that she would pass the congratulations on to members of the Handyperson Service.

Question from Councillor Cooke regarding Performance - Covid-19 vaccination

Councillor Cooke queried with regard to how the Council could ensure that the homeless did not become victims of Covid-19 if they could not receive the vaccination.

The Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health advised that the Council had been working hard with homeless people but some refused to take up the offer of accommodation. The Council did however suggest to homeless people that they register with a GP. GP contracts had changed to enable homeless people to register so they could receive the vaccination.

Questions/Comments on Executive Member for Communities and Education report

Comment from Councillor Thompson regarding Culture & Events

Councillor Thompson commented that she had received many positive comments on the reopening of Newham Grange Farm and the Christmas Trail that had taken place at the farm. Councillor Thompson also advised that she had also received positive comments on the Christmas lights throughout the town.

The Executive Member for Communities and Education thanked Councillor Thompson for her comments and advised that she had received excellent feedback about the farm. The farm had welcomed 6000 people on the Christmas Trail.

The Executive Member for Communities and Education advised that the Executive Member for Environment had worked on bringing the Christmas lights throughout the town and it was hoped that next year's lights would be bigger and better.

Questions/Comments on Executive Member for Environment

Question/Comment from Councillor Furness regarding the Pothole Initiative

Councillor Furness congratulated the Executive Member for Environment on the recent pothole initiative but queried who had been leading on the initiative as it was in both the Executive Member for Environment's report and the Deputy Mayor's report.

The Executive Member for Environment advised that it was a joint initiative. Phase 2 of the initiative was underway and this involved major refurbishment of potholes.

Questions/Comments on Executive Member for Regeneration

Question/Comment from Councillor J Walker regarding Hemlington Grange/Stainton Way Crossing

Councillor Walker queried with regard to when the Hemlington Grange/Stainton Way crossing would be put in place.

The Executive Member advised that a report relating to the issue was due to be submitted to the March Executive meeting.

Question/Comment from Councillor D Branson regarding Tees Valley Freeport Bid

Councillor Branson queried with regard to whether the Council could foresee any detrimental effects on business rates as a consequence of the new Freeport on land owned by South Tees Development Corporation.

The Executive Member advised that the Middlesbrough port was included in the bid and there would be beneficial consequences for the town as a result of the Freeport.

20/64

CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2021/2022

The Director of Finance and the Executive Member for Finance and Governance submitted a report, the purpose of which was to set the council tax base for the financial year 2021/2022 by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2021.

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance presented the report.

The Council had a legal obligation to calculate a council tax base each financial year. The calculation of the council tax base was a part of the Council's budget strategy which forms part of the Council's Policy Framework, and as such must be agreed by Full Council.

ORDERED as follows:

That the Council note the contents of the report.

That the Council approve the council tax base for 2021/2022 as **34,484**.

That the Council approve **2,157** and **1,088** as the council tax bases for the parishes of Nunthorpe and Stainton & Thornton respectively for 2021/2022.

That the Council agree to notify the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Cleveland Fire Authority and the Parish Councils of the 2021/2022 council tax base.

20/65 **REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Council received and noted a report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board outlining the work of the Board and Scrutiny Panels.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Board provided Members with an update in respect of the 3 Call-ins received by the Board.

Members were advised that the meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 10 December 2020, which was adjourned in accordance with regulation 13 of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392, because of difficulties in live-streaming the meeting, had been held on 7 January 2021.

20/66 **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no Urgent items submitted for this meeting

20/67 **MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME**

The Chair announced that there were two questions from Members of the Council. The details of the specific questions were included at Agenda Item 11.

Question 11/20 - Councillor Wright to Councillor Smiles regarding addressing the digital divide in education, in particular with regard to the number of laptops distributed to Middlesbrough children.

Councillor Wright thanked the Executive Member for the work that she had carried out so far in relation to addressing the digital divide in education. He queried with regard to how many laptops had been distributed to children in Middlesbrough, in particular how many Looked After Children had been provided with laptops.

Councillor Smiles advised the digital divide was a huge issue. The schools in Middlesbrough had really stepped up to the challenge of digital learning. Some schools had initiated virtual learning the day after school closures had been announced. In order to access virtual learning every child needed access to a laptop. Over the last year, some schools and academies that were financially able to had invested in digital technology and some had purchased ipads for their students. The Department for Education had promised that each school would receive their 100% allocation of laptops however the Executive Member advised that she would be closely monitoring the situation and she had asked Head Teachers to advise when the laptops had been delivered or if there was any shortfall.

Prior to Christmas, the Council had devised a loan scheme had been devised with schools prior to the lockdown and the Council was looking to expand the scheme and the Executive Member advised that she would update in the near future. 946 laptops had been delivered to Looked After Children, Children in need and those with Child Protection Plans.

Question 12/20 – Councillor Wright to Councillor Smiles regarding the average attendance of primary and secondary school children in Middlesbrough by December 2020?

Councillor Smiles endorsed Councillor Wright's comments about the hard work of teachers and school staff.

Councillor Smiles advised that the average attendance for the period of September to December of primary school children in Middlesbrough was 95.6% and secondary children 92.3%.

The national average attendance was 90% for primary school children and 82% for secondary school children over the same period.

20/68 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

There were no Motions submitted within the specified deadlines for this meeting.

20/69

NOTICE OF URGENT MOTIONS (IF ANY)

There were no Urgent Motions submitted within the specified deadlines for this meeting