

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Thursday 11 March 2021.

**PRESENT:** Councillors J Thompson (Chair), M Storey (Vice-Chair), C Cooke, D Coupe, L Garvey, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, S Hill, B Hubbard (as Substitute for M Saunders), T Mawston, J McTigue, J Platt and Z Uddin.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** A Preston (Mayor).

**OFFICERS:** S Bonner, C Breheny, G Cooper, A Glover, C Lunn and T Parkinson.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors C McIntyre and M Saunders.

20/89 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

20/90 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD (EXTRAORDINARY MEETING: BUDGET CONSULTATION) - 27 JANUARY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 27 January 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/91 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD (CALL-IN: NUNTHORPE GRANGE FARM DISPOSAL) - 29 JANUARY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 29 January 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/92 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 FEBRUARY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11 February 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/93 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive, as outlined in Appendix A to the report. The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board, or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

**NOTED**

20/94 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE: THE MAYOR**

The Mayor, Andy Preston, was in attendance at the meeting to update the Board on his aims and aspirations, progress made to date and to highlight any emerging issues relating to his portfolio.

As part of his update to the Board, the Mayor focused upon the Marketing and Communications aspect of his portfolio; the following points were made:

- Marketing and Communications had progressed significantly well over the last twelve months, with reference being made to the work undertaken in respect of COVID-19; the work of the staff and team involved in this activity was highly commended. The role of the marketing department would shift in light of the changes that COVID-19 had introduced, and the associated messages that needed to be conveyed.
- The challenge that all Council teams had faced revolved around cultural change. In terms of Marketing and Communications, changes within local media readership and the increased use of social media over the last number of years required cultural change. It was felt that improvement within Local Government nationally was needed in order to maintain pace, however, the Council had made significant progress with this over the last twelve months. Through social media, the Council had had the opportunity to engage with a wider audience, to share goals and obtain feedback, which was taken on board.
- Through the introduction of remote meeting meetings in response to the pandemic, Council meetings were broadcast on YouTube and Facebook Live, which was felt aided transparency and encouraged participation from the public.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member praised the work of the staff, and sought clarification regarding the points raised around jobs. In response, the Mayor clarified that he was referring to the use of social media to broadcast life-changing opportunities in respect of careers, new jobs and training. It was indicated that many businesses within the town had raised issues around skills shortages and filling vacancies, which was felt to be a large problem for the town. The Mayor wanted to see increased promotion of businesses and opportunities. Reference was made to impending job opportunities to be created in the Grangetown area, which was excellent. It was highlighted, however, that whilst there was positivity, challenge also needed to be borne in mind; the Council's role in this would be to provide links between opportunities and potential employees.

In response to a query regarding 12-week wait times for the free collection of bulky waste, the Mayor advised that a 12-week wait was not the case. It was explained that, like other Councils, if residents had a bulky item to be collected quickly, this would be undertaken for payment. However, if payment could not be made, it would be collected free of charge, but there would be a longer wait time.

A member referred to the Marketing and Communications team and reiterated the praise given to the staff. It was commented that Councillors should advise the team of any news stories to enable them to be shared; the Mayor reiterated this view and urged all councillors that, where they had good news stories or something important to share, to contact the team. The Member requested that, should any other facilities be introduced to support Councillors in sharing information/news stories with residents, to please advise of these.

A Member made reference to fly tipping hotspots and the impact that any reduction in Street Wardens would have on the support provided to local residents. The Mayor indicated that he would be happy to speak to political groups and/or the public on the topic of fly tipping/environmental issues outside of this meeting.

A Member commented that communication with residents on a Ward or area-specific basis could be achieved via the Love Middlesbrough magazine; this view was supported by the Mayor.

In response to a comment regarding the correction of inaccurate news stories, the Mayor indicated that more positive stories needed to be shared, and inaccurate

information challenged. However, the challenge in terms of the latter was identifying the appropriateness of this, which was context dependent. The Head of Marketing and Communications explained that action should be taken to correct matters when untrue, but there were different levels of stories.

A Member referred to Love Middlesbrough magazine and commented that, since its introduction, it had been really positive. It was felt that it would be beneficial to utilise the publication to promote the work that the Council does undertake, in order to demonstrate to residents what services their Council Tax payments provide. In response, the Mayor agreed with this, commenting that the Council did need to highlight the positive work carried out.

A Member referred to large, localised projects and queried whether these would be publicised to residents in appropriate ways – the example of a leaflet drop in a Ward where this was felt more effective than social media communication was provided. In response, the Mayor felt that the Council did do this already, but acknowledged there was room for improvement. Reference was made to COVID-19 and the use of leaflet drops during this time; consideration was given to the costs versus the benefits to this approach. The Mayor advised that Councillors contact the Marketing and Communications team for further advice in respect of leaflet-based marketing strategy.

In response to a query regarding the promotion of the Council's plans for the future of the town, and provision of details regarding planned development/regeneration work, the Mayor indicated that this was undertaken; it was about achieving a balancing between too much and not enough. However, due to the issue being raised, it was possible that further promotional activity was needed.

A Member referred to Centre Square, commenting on its size yet limited use. Reference was made to previous events, such as 'Last Night in the Proms', which was great success. It was felt that the space could be utilised for multi-cultural events to bring the town together. In response, the Mayor agreed that it was a large open space that was central. However, it was cut-off from retail and the west side of the town, and there was a lack of natural footfall. Reference was made to previous use of the space for Christmas events, however, attendance had been low due to its locality. Events had been planned for 2020, though due to the pandemic could not be held. It was acknowledged that more could be done to utilise the space, but until retail and residential development happened around it, this would be difficult. A Member made reference to previous use of Centre Square for the Mela event, however, following a survey, this was transferred to Albert Park, which was preferred by attendees for the availability of parking, etc. The Mayor felt that Centre Square was an asset to the town, but there were some flaws with it that could potentially be remedied in the coming years, such as further access from the Cleveland Centre, together with retail and residential development, which would create a natural footfall.

In response to a query regarding prioritisation of the COVID-19 vaccination for teachers and teaching assistants, the Mayor commented that teaching staff should be prioritised, but the challenge that needed to be considered was around the vaccination of younger, healthy individuals when others under the age of 50 with health conditions were not receiving vaccinations. However, it was felt that, on balance, some occupations should be prioritised, which included teachers and school staff.

The Mayor advised Members that he would be happy to meet with groups to discuss issues, but felt it prudent for initial contact to be made to determine whether officers focusing on specific areas, such as refuse collection or Adult Services, would be better placed to assist in the first instance with detailed questions.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

**NOTED**

20/95

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation to update the Board in respect of the Council's response to COVID-19.

The following information was provided:

- In terms of responses to previous queries raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Board:
  1. What was the number of positive cases of COVID-19 amongst teachers and teaching assistants across Middlesbrough? The figure from September 2020 up to 11 February 2021 was 310. Currently, 51 pupils and 15 staff across all schools were isolating as a result of positive COVID-19 tests.
  2. Were those drivers, contracted by the Council to transport (vulnerable) children and adults, receiving vaccines? Whilst conversations had taken place with taxi drivers in regards to vaccinations, most were in relation to regular school transport, as opposed to vulnerable children and adults. As taxi drivers were not listed within priority vaccination groups 1-4, and provision had been made previously (e.g. PPE, screens and face coverings), it was deemed that sufficient mitigation was already in place. With the anticipated arrival of the mass vaccination centre in Middlesbrough on 22 March 2021, the Council would be looking to push people in particular occupations to attend for vaccination.
- The latest local COVID-19 position, as at 9 March 2021, was 105.0 rate per 100,000 of the population (last 7 days); this had since reduced and currently stood at 90.
- South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust COVID-19 data: hospital admission figures tended to follow a couple of weeks behind the infection figures; as at 10 March 2021, there were 65 people in hospital (14 in critical care). Hospital planning was based on a maximum of 300 COVID-19 patients.
- Vaccination update: in total, 46,099 people in Middlesbrough had received their first dose, which represented 32.7% of the population. 100% of those aged 70-74 had been vaccinated; 99% of those aged 75-79 had been vaccinated; and 95.4% of those aged 80+ had been vaccinated. Chase-up work was currently being undertaken, with home visits being carried-out where required.
- Details of the decisions taken by the Gold Command Group in January, February and March 2021 were outlined to the Board.
- Lockdown exit planning: several work streams had been established to determine what work needed to be undertaken throughout this period up to June 2021, with Lead Officers assigned to each. These work streams were:
  - Communications – aligning with national phased exit strategy;
  - Outbreak control (statutory responsibility to update plan) – maintaining testing/vaccinations and refreshing the Outbreak Control Plan;
  - Schools – assistance with testing, summer catch-up activity support, holiday hunger approach, etc.;
  - Business – support in town centre reopening arrangements, Tees Valley

vs. Middlesbrough approach to exit arrangements;

- Communities – support for residents and associated services; and
- Council – reoccupation and re-induction of staff.

In light of the above, it was explained that consideration was also being given as to how those plans would link with the existing Recovery Strategy.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member referred to statistics in respect of COVID-19 deaths in comparison to other Local Authorities and queried why Middlesbrough's regularly appeared to be the highest. In response, the Chief Executive indicated that there were several reasons why a) there had been more instances of COVID-19 per head of population than many other places, and b) why there had been a higher rate of deaths. The first revolved around Middlesbrough's 'ill population', i.e. life expectancy in Middlesbrough was approximately five or six years less than the national average. Life expectancy within the town varied by 14-15 years, and healthy life expectancy varied by up to 20 years. Reference was made to the high prevalence of respiratory issues, such as COPD, which made individuals more vulnerable to COVID-19. In terms of individuals contracting the virus, it was also linked to deprivation; unfortunately, Middlesbrough had many of the most deprived wards in the UK. Middlesbrough also had a significant BAME population – as at the last Census, this was 13.8%. Finally, Middlesbrough was highly urbanised and had the same population as Redcar, which was four or five times the size of Middlesbrough geographically, and therefore more people were living closer together. All those factors had come together to produce the statistics that had been seen.

A Member referred to 'The White Feather Project' and indicated that this currently operated seven days per week, sometimes for 24 hours per day. The Member wished to convey a message of thanks and to congratulate those involved; the project had recently celebrated its one year anniversary.

In response to an enquiry regarding Council meetings and a return to the Town Hall, the Chief Executive explained that the legislation permitting remote meetings would expire in May 2021. It was possible that a hybrid format for meetings would be followed in order to facilitate attendance, but this was currently being explored.

A Member queried the action being undertaken by Middlesbrough Council to encourage people to get vaccinated. In response, the Chief Executive highlighted that Middlesbrough Council was not responsible for vaccinations – this was the responsibility of the NHS. However, through the Council's Public Health function and its normal business, the Council did wish to promote the vaccination programme and get as many people vaccinated as possible. A communications strategy had been established in respect of this, part of which involved the appointment of a network of COVID-19 champions within local communities, which had worked work during the initial outbreak stages and the communication of key hygiene messages. Work was currently being undertaken to examine the possibility of linking in with Middlesbrough Football Club to promote uptake, and officers were also looking at placing localised vaccination sites in communities across Middlesbrough, particularly where take-up was low.

A Member referred to the decisions taken by the Gold Command Group and the reference to Tees Valley vs. Middlesbrough in respect of the business work stream; clarification was sought regarding this. In response, the Chief Executive explained that this was not concerned with competition; the TVCA was providing support to

businesses at this time, looking at the impact of COVID-19 on the economy across the Tees Valley. TVCA had a business support line in place; the funds to support those businesses were allocated directly to the Local Authorities to determine expenditure. This reference was about ensuring that the two did not link.

A Member referred to the vaccination centre that would be opened in Middlesbrough and queried the coordination of appointments, as some residents were currently required to attend other areas, such as Darlington and York, which meant that some may miss out if not able to travel. It was also queried whether the vaccination statistics for Middlesbrough included those residents that had attended other areas. In response, the Chief Executive explained that in terms of the figures for vaccinations, that was based on residency and not where they were vaccinated. Appointments were arranged via a national system for vaccinations - it was envisaged that the system would look up where slots were available and offer one that was closest to the individual's home. Unfortunately, Middlesbrough's mass vaccination centre had arrived later than other areas; however, this would be available and operational within the next two weeks. The centre would operate for 12 hours per day.

A Member referred to asymptomatic test sites and queried whether records would be kept for the number of people attending. In response, the Chief Executive advised that figures were recorded for the six asymptomatic test sites in Middlesbrough; the example of 1000 people being tested at Middlesbrough Sports Village, with 10 testing positive, was provided.

In response to a request for clarification regarding the vaccination update, the Chief Executive indicated that 16,000 of the 46,099 doses issued had been to over 70s; reference was made to the percentage of doses that had been issued to each age group. Consideration was given to the national performance of the vaccination roll-out in comparison to other countries and territories.

A Member referred to Children Looked After and welcomed the additional funding that had been made available to this group. Regarding use of the terminology 'holiday hunger', which was felt to be particularly negative, it was queried whether more positive terminology could be utilised in future. In response, the Chief Executive acknowledged this point, and made reference to an impending Executive report in which a holiday activity fund would be discussed. Dealing with hunger was just one aspect – other areas such as anxiety, confidence building and wraparound support provided to children also needed to be considered.

In response to a comment regarding the current age range for vaccinations and the potential that school teachers be may required to leave schools during peak times (suggesting that weekend appointments be more appropriate), the Chief Executive explained that officers had been pushing for a number of roles and occupations that did not appear to be in priority groupings, such as school staff and refuse collectors, to be moved up the list. In addition, efforts had also been made for weekend vaccination appointments to be made available for such roles as teaching and non-teaching school support staff. Unfortunately, it was a national priority list that needed to be followed and there was not a lot of local discretion.

A Member referred to vaccination appointments and commented that, in order to make an appointment at a local vaccination centre, booking via a GP could potentially assist.

A Member queried the definition of PPE in educational settings. In response, the

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Chief Executive advised that schools were responsible for undertaking their own health and safety risk assessments, which meant that there would be a wide range of PPE, including hand sanitiser, visors, gloves and face masks. It was explained that whatever PPE was needed, legally it was the responsibility of the employer to undertake a COVID-19 risk assessment, identify the mitigation that was required to make it COVID-19 secure, and then provide that mitigation. There was a definitive list of standard PPE and the Council did have a central depository. The Member commented upon the face coverings being worn in some areas that may not be of clinical grade.

With regards to the reopening roadmap, a Member queried how matters could potentially proceed for wedding venues and similar after 21 June 2021. In response, the Chief Executive advised that he did not know anything further than the Members, but felt that this would depend on the success of the vaccination programme (and the percentage of the population vaccinated); the test that the Government was going to apply before each phase of the easing of lockdown commenced; and also on infection and hospital rates. In terms of the reoccupation of office space, it was envisaged that a return to pre-COVID-19 levels would not be realised because the virus would not simply disappear. A return to the Civic Centre was not anticipated to take place until at least September 2021, as Government guidance would first need to be released, reviewed and then initiated. It was possible that weddings would take place and nightclubs reopened, but restrictions against attendance would be put in place.

A Member queried the percentage of BME individuals who had refused a vaccine. In response, the Chief Executive explained that, to date, the only statistics available in terms of refusal related to care home workers; no figures had been provided in respect of ethnicity.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

#### **NOTED**

#### **\*\*SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 - ORDER OF BUSINESS\*\***

**AGREED** that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Board agreed to vary the order of business to consider the remaining agenda items in the following order: 10, 9, 11, 12 and 13.

20/96

#### **FINAL REPORT - HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL - OPIOID DEPENDENCY: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Prior to consideration of the report, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board sought Members' approval in respect of some submitted amendments that had been circulated; this was agreed.

The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel presented the Panel's Final Report in relation to Opioid Dependency: What Happens Next?

The recommendations to be submitted to the Executive were:

- a) That the public health approach to drug dependence be continued and the benefits of introducing safe spaces in Middlesbrough for people to consume substances (drug consumption rooms) be further explored. Drug consumption rooms have been successfully used elsewhere in the world (including in

Europe and in Canada) for approximately 16 years and no one has ever died of a drug overdose in any of these facilities. Middlesbrough could in the future be a pilot for the adoption of such an approach in the UK.

- b) That the local authority writes to the government to request that it reconsiders national policy in respect of Drug Consumption Rooms (DCRs). Given that DCRs are a provable harm reduction tool that reduces the risk of overdose, improves people health and lessens the damage and costs to society.
- c) That a new capital funding bid for a 16-18 bedded detox and drug rehabilitation facility at Letitia House be submitted. Public health benefits and financial savings could be achieved when compared to the current costs of funding individual 7-10 day detox programmes out of area.
- d) That funding for the Heroin Assisted Treatment (HAT) programme be prioritised by partners in South Tees and the current level of investment continued for the foreseeable future.
- e) That the local authority write to the relevant Minister highlighting the success of the Heroin Assisted Treatment Programme (HAT) in Middlesbrough and how it is a demonstrably effective way of treating drug addiction.
- f) That the high quality drug treatment facilities available in Middlesbrough are recognised and that the town develops as a Recovery Orientated System of Care (ROSC) further.
- g) That in an effort to reduce the stigma associated with drug dependency a proactive approach is undertaken to promote the town's vibrant recovery community. Middlesbrough is a town where recovery from drug dependency is possible, recognised and celebrated. The town has outstanding substance misuse treatment services and innovative harm reduction initiatives in place. Work needs to be undertaken to ensure Middlesbrough is recognised locally and nationally as a Recovery Town/City.
- h) That in respect of the areas for improvement put forward by Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust it is ensured that a number of measures are implemented including:-
  - That quick and reliable access to specialist Substance Misuse support is made available to the Community Crisis Team, Crisis Assessment Suite and Inpatient wards.
  - That Substance Misuse workers, Social Workers and other colleagues are included in the single point of access in Mental Health for joint triage/joint initial assessment.
  - That Substance Misuse workers attend joint meetings, as arranged by TEWV, including formulation and pre-discharge.
  - That Substance Misuse Services contribute to TEWV's co-produced Crisis management plans / Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP)
  - That a programme of joint clinics (Mental Health/Substance Misuse) to meet the needs of dual diagnosis patients be established.
  - That the role of peer support workers across all organisations be increased.
  - That prescribers in Substance Misuse services work with TEWV prescribers to ensure enhanced sharing of information.
  - That cross fertilisation in terms of training for Substance Misuse and Mental Health workers be established.
- i) That pathways for young people at risk of drug dependency be developed and a way for those already dependent to access timely treatment provided.
- j) That prescribing substitute treatment for those under 18 years be further explored and the preferred option piloted.
- k) That the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education delivered in Middlesbrough schools in respect of drugs and alcohol be reviewed by public health professionals to ensure our teachers and school leaders are equipped with the local knowledge they need to deliver an enhanced

educational offer to our children and young people.

- l) That support for children experiencing parental opiate dependence be commissioned and the number of children being reached and supported reported.
- m) That the best practice approaches adopted elsewhere in the UK in respect of opioid deprescribing for persistent non-cancer pain (for example, those put forward by Nottinghamshire Area Prescribing Committee) be taken up by Tees Valley CCG and promoted amongst Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Middlesbrough.
- n) That in 2021/22 GP lists in Middlesbrough be screened using the I-WOTCH inclusion and exclusion criteria to establish the number of patients who could benefit from education on opioids and managing chronic pain. Following identification an appropriate initiative be developed to target those patients. In order to ensure that prior to the outcome of the 38 pharmacist led opioid and gabapentinoid reduction proposal early steps are taken to provide people with alternatives approaches to pain management.
- o) That if the opioid and gabapentinoid reduction programme currently being piloted proves successful TVCCG invests sufficient resources to ensure the programme is scaled-up and the number of patients prescribed strong opiates for chronic non-malignant (non-cancer) pain in Middlesbrough is reduced.

A Member made reference to the recommendations and commented on the ground-breaking approach that would be undertaken to support those affected by opioid dependency within Middlesbrough.

**AGREED** that the findings and recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

20/97

#### **FINAL REPORT - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - PEST CONTROL SERVICES**

The Vice Chair of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel presented the Panel's Final Report in relation to Pest Control Services.

The recommendations to be submitted to the Executive were:

- a) Consideration be given to Middlesbrough Council offering a low cost Pest Control Service to residential properties and whether this would provide an additional income stream to the service area.
- b) Investigate whether an amount could be included within the Council Tax charge to provide a pest control service to private residents without any additional fee.
- c) Promote educational messages about good house-keeping to prevent vermin infestations through the LoveMiddlesbrough magazine.

A Member queried whether it would be possible to marginally increase the cost of charging landlords through the Selective Landlord Licensing scheme, in order to provide a complimentary service to those areas with a high volume of landlords. In response, the Vice Chair explained that this could potentially be an uptake to one of the recommendations. It was explained that the Panel had observed that residential properties within Middlesbrough were being missed out at present. Reference was made to a recent local press article that focused on fees charged by contractors, and to current processes being undertaken by Thirteen Group, which included cost sharing via rental costs.

**AGREED** that the findings and recommendations of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the

Executive.

20/98 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD CALL-IN OUTCOME: NUNTHORPE GRANGE FARM DISPOSAL**

The Chair provided an overview of the outcome of the Nunthorpe Grange Farm Disposal Call-in.

**NOTED**

20/99 **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Chairs/Vice Chairs provided updates in respect of the work undertaken by their respective panels since the last meeting of the Board.

**NOTED**

20/100 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

A Member made reference to page eight of the minutes of the previous meeting (11 February 2021) and clarified comments made under agenda item 'Scrutiny Chairs Update'. Following brief discussion, the Chair advised that clarification had been obtained from the Head of Democratic Services, which was that if Scrutiny Panel Members were happy to meet when a meeting had been cancelled, this could be undertaken, but it would be on an informal basis and there would no minutes produced.

**NOTED**

Date of Next Meeting– 8 April 2021

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had been scheduled for Thursday, 8 April 2021.

**NOTED**