

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Tuesday 9 November 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors M Saunders (Chair), A Bell, D Coupe, D Davison, A Hellaoui, C Hobson, C McIntyre, J Platt, M Storey, S Walker and Z Uddin (Substitute) (Substitute for J Thompson)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Cooper (Executive Member for Environment, Finance and Governance) and G Field

OFFICERS: C Breheny, T Parkinson, G Cooper, C Benjamin, S Blood and S Bonner

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Mawston and J Thompson

20/44 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

20/45 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 20 OCTOBER 2021**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 20 October were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/46 **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

20/47 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

The Executive Member for Environment and Finance and Governance, Cllr Barrie Cooper, was in attendance to update the Board on his aims and aspirations, progress made to date and to highlight any emerging issues relating to his portfolio. The Director of Environment and Community Services was also in attendance. It was advised that given the depth of the Portfolio the update to the Board would focus on the Environmental aspects of the Portfolio. A further update would be given in respect of the Finance and Governance aspects at a future meeting of the Board.

As part of his update to the Board, the Executive Member for Environment and Finance and Governance explained that the main areas of the portfolio were as follows:-

Environment Services
Highways and Infrastructure
Property and Commercial Services

In terms of Environment Services it was advised that this was the area that was most visible to the public and included:-

- Waste services and recycling – Domestic refuse, recycling and green waste collections, collection of household bulky waste, Waste Disposal Contract, Pest Control.

- The Area Care Team was another important aspect of Environment Services and the Team was focused on the Green Strategy, play areas and alley cleansing, grounds maintenance and animals and needles, street, trees and arboriculture, burials, parks maintenance.
- School Catering was a further area of responsibility within Environment Services.

In terms of Highways and Infrastructure the main areas of focus were as follows:-

- Highway Engineers – Bridges and Structures, Highway Maintenance, vehicle crossings, highway inspections and interventions, flooding issues, beck maintenance, highway emergency response, winter maintenance (includes gritting and snow clearance), Street Lighting.
- Fleet services – Vehicle and machinery repairs, MOTs, car hire, servicing of Middlesbrough Council vehicles, fuel

In terms of Property and Commercial Services the main areas of focus were as follows:-

- Transporter Bridge
- Metz Bridge Travellers Site
- Building Maintenance and Project Management
- Building Cleaning, Caretaking and Security Services
- Operational Management for Bereavement Services
- Integrated Transport Unit
- Lead on Emergency Planning

It was emphasised that in terms of the Transporter Bridge works had been undertaken to ensure the safety of the Bridge and all options for the future use of the Bridge remained.

With regard to priorities the Board was advised that the following were regarded as priorities within the Portfolio:-

- Increased cleanliness of the town and its physical environment
- Development and Implementation of the Green Strategy
- Tender for main Waste Disposal contract for post 2025/26
- Increased recycling
- Transporter Bridge
- Improved Highway Assets
- Light up the Town
- Provision of efficient and effective front line services post pandemic

Reference was made to the priorities for next year and the following issues were highlighted:-

- Explore outcomes of Environment Bill and its implications for Middlesbrough
- Improve A66 through Middlesbrough
- Secure further highways investment to improve roads and footpaths
- Plant another 10,000 trees
- Increase wildflower coverage across Middlesbrough
- Expand wild spaces across the town to introduce more growing spaces
- Transported Bridge Investment
- Light up key Buildings across the town

Following the update in respect of the Environment Portfolio, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member of the Board queried the possibility of, in the future, being able to increase the number of Green Waste collections towards the end of the year. It was advised that some further thought needed to be given in respect of this issue owing to the increased cost and additional staff demand, however, the option would be explored.

Reference was made to the availability of sandbags to assist in cases of flooding and it was

queried whether the provision of these could be reintroduced. It was advised that in a flooding event the Council would support the public with sandbags wherever possible.

In respect of Green Waste collections the view was expressed that there was a real need for a minimum of two collections in October and November, owing to the amount of garden waste generated at that time of year. It was suggested that in order to provide that service at no extra cost the number of Green Waste collections in June and July could be reduced to one per month and the views of the Executive Member on this suggestion were sought. It was advised that generally seasonal workers were employed during the summer months so it was really a question as to whether the Council wished to extend Green Waste collections into the latter part of the year. It was advised that it could be looked at for the future but that there would be a financial cost to extending the provision.

Reference was made to the issue of trees and the concerns expressed by residents throughout the south of Middlesbrough that trees have been allowed to overgrow significantly and did impact on people's quality of life. Given that it was anticipated there would be wetter and windier winters in future years and there was the potential for this to be a safety issue. It was acknowledged that there were a significant number of trees across the town and further work would be undertaken in respect of this issue.

In response to a query as to whether Councillors could be updated when the Council's gritting machines would be out the Executive Member advised that he was happy to forward on communications to all Members on this issue.

Reference was made to the wild flowers and how they had been such a success across the town. It was queried whether the planting of the flowers would be extended in future years. The Executive Member for Environment advised that he wished to put on record his gratitude to Thirteen Housing for assisting with this initiative, the results had been fantastic and was anticipated that the scheme would be expanded.

In response to a query regarding Bridges across the town it was advised that there were over 100 Bridges and structures that the Council looked after and maintained.

In response to a query regarding progress in relation to the new incinerator it was advised that the Council was currently out to tender for the new energy from waste facility, which was due to come online in 2025/26. It was anticipated that the tender process would be completed in the next few months and a further update to the Board could be provided at that time.

Reference was made to the number of vehicles that were currently owned and maintained by the Council and it was advised that detailed information in respect of this request would be provided in writing to the Board.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Environment and Finance and Governance and the Director of Environment and Communities for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted, and the agreed action be undertaken.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive was in attendance and provided an update to the Board in respect of the following:-

- COVID-19 update
- Executive update
- Performance Summary
- Staff Survey: engagement

In terms of the latest local COVID-19 data, as at 8 November 2021 the rolling seven-day rate of cases per 100k of the Middlesbrough population was as follows:

- 103 new cases had been added to the system on 8 November 2021;
- 464 new cases had been diagnosed in the last seven days;
- 329.1 rate per 100k of population (last seven days); and

- 305.00 COVID-19 deaths per 100k population.

Reference was made to the COVID case rate by age group and it was advised that the highest number of cases were amongst young people aged 0-19. In terms of vaccination rates it was advised that 62.7 per cent of the population had been vaccinated. In terms of booster uptake amongst the eligible population to date 64.4 per cent had received their booster vaccination.

In relation to the Executive decisions taken recently it was noted that a number of reports had been considered. These included; a report on the Medium Term Financial Plan; Strategic Town Centre Acquisition; Middlehaven Outwood Riverside development; Ambition for Children; Peer Review of Virtual School and Highways Infrastructure.

Reference was made to the feedback received from the recent staff survey and it was noted that close to 800 responses had been received. Feedback was broken down by department and in respect of being well informed approximately 70 per cent of staff had agreed with this statement. In terms of having the opportunity to influence how the Council works over 65 per cent of staff had expressed this view. In terms of feeling valued over 80 per cent of staff felt valued by their Manager, however less than 40 per cent of staff felt valued by their Director. It was advised that a new corporate tool box was being developed for use by Managers, Heads of Service and Directors to improve how senior Managers within the organisation engaged and communicated with staff.

In terms of corporate performance by discipline it was noted that at the end of October 73 per cent of Executive Actions had been achieved against an expected standard of 90 per cent; 45 per cent of Strategic Plan outcomes had been achieved against an expected standard of 90 per cent. It was of concern that despite 99 per cent of Strategic Workplan actions having been achieved at the end of October the expected level of desired outcomes had not been delivered.

In respect of corporate performance by Directorate, Regeneration and Culture and Adult Social Care / Health, were the two directorates that had failed to achieve the expected standard by end of October 2021. Reference was made to the three strategic plan outcomes that were furthest away from target and these were focused on crime and antisocial behaviour, town centre vacancies and household waste recycling.

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

A Member of the Board queried whether the staff survey had been undertaken anonymously and the Chief Executive confirmed that had been the case.

Reference was made to Middlehaven Outwood Riverside Development and it was queried whether progress was being made, as it had been so long in development. The Chief Executive acknowledged that work with the Department for Education (DfE) in respect of the Development had been protracted. However, the report presented to Executive provided certainty, the details of the land, remediation of the land, all of the finance elements have been finalised. It was a seminal moment in the project.

In terms of the Town Hall it was queried whether any work could be undertaken with the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable refurbishment work to take place in the Town Hall. It was acknowledged that some fairly substantial works were required in the Town Hall, particularly in relation to the roof, which currently leaked and created damage to individual rooms. Efforts were being made to draw down Heritage Funding and options would continue to be explored.

With regard to the appreciation of staff the point was made that it was often people such as the cleaners that were forgotten about, people who went about their work day-to-day and there was a need to show our appreciation to all staff throughout the organisation. The Chief Executive acknowledged that staff including cleaners were often the first point of contact when people arrived at the Town Hall or the Civic Centre and they regularly helped people to get where they needed to be. Efforts had been made recently at LMT to emphasise the importance of appreciating all staff and the important role they played in helping the Council achieve its goals.

Reference was made to the percentages of the strategic plan being red and whether more

information could be provided in respect of the areas of concern. The Chief Executive advised that it was not the delivery of the actions that were off target it was the impact of those actions. It was emphasised that these were not simply Council issues but town wide issues. For example, with respect to crime and anti-social behaviour although the Council had a part to play equally the Police, Thirteen, the Fire Brigade and other organisations across the town had key responsibilities in respect of these issues. It was advised that in the refresh of the strategic plan consideration would be given to what else the Council could do to impact on these issues. As referenced in the presentation to the two main issues remained crime and anti-social behaviour and town centre vacancies.

In terms of Police presence it was queried whether there was any indication that in the future more resources, which were badly needed, would be deployed. The Chief Executive advised that the commitment from Cleveland Police was certainly there but Police resources had been hit by COVID in the same way as many others. As officers returned and the number of people required to isolate reduced there would be more resources to respond to the increased demand for Police support that had been seen the emergence from lock down.

A member of the Board expressed the view that he was delighted to see that the COVID figures were reducing and the 100k figure had reduced. Concern was expressed in respect of those people who had not taken the risks posed by COVID seriously and the 4,500 eligible residents in Middlesbrough who had yet to be vaccinated. The Chief Executive advised that all efforts were being made to encourage as many people as possible to have their vaccines and these efforts would continue. In respect of reoccupation of the Town Hall plans were in place and the Director of Legal and Governance would send out communication to all Members in respect of any proposals to resume in person meetings at an appropriate time.

The point was made that there had been a 24 per cent uptake on the survey and there was need to return to grassroots and better engage the workforce. The Chief Executive confirmed that there had been approximately 800 respondents to the staff survey, which equated to approximately 24 per cent of staff. Statistically that meant it was a valid survey but ideally it would have been better had the response rate been higher. It was emphasised that of those 800 people 70 per cent of people had advised that there were well informed. However, it was concerning that many respondents had advised that they had more engagement with the Chief Executive than they did with their Director or Head of Service. In order to address this issue it was advised that work was currently being undertaken with LMT to develop a toolbox for Managers, Heads of Service and Directors, setting out minimum standards in terms of what was required with regard to communication and staff engagement. For example; weekly meetings, monthly briefings, use of the Facebook employee group and Director video briefings.

A Member of the Board queried about the current staff working from home arrangements and whether there would flexibility for when staff returned to the office. The Chief Executive advised that a blended working offer had been provided to approximately 1700 staff, who would have the choice to sign up to a change in their contract so that their time would be split between working at home and working in the office. The vast majority of those staff had taken up that offer. It was advised that in Foundations Court, where the Council would be moving to next year, collaboration zones were being established to enable staff to come together to engage and interact with others around their workload.

Reference was made to the Street Wardens and their current shift patterns and it was advised that Street Wardens were on duty, over different shifts, from 8.30am to 10.00pm daily.

The Chair made reference to the Budget proposals and emphasised that it was extremely good news that there would be no Budget reductions for 2022/2023. Although it was acknowledged that everyone wanted the Council Tax increase to be zero (the proposal was 2.99 per cent) it was felt that this was appropriate given the challenges presented over the last year. The Chair thanked everyone involved for pulling together the Budget proposals.

Finally the Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his excellent briefing and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

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

The Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was absent from the meeting and the Board requested that given the importance of the work of the panel it was imperative that a written update be circulated following the meeting.

AGREED that a written update in respect of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel be circulated to all Members of the Board following the meeting.

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THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - FINAL REPORT - MIDDLESBROUGH REGENERATION POST COVID-19

The recommendations to be submitted to the Executive were:

- A) Whenever opportunities arose, and in line with the hierarchy of need identified in the Local Implementation Plan (LIP), the Council should seek to ensure that it was easier, safer and more convenient to walk, cycle or use public transport, rather than travelling by car by:
 - Providing additional cycle routes.
 - Implementing traffic free zones.
 - Working with public transport operators to increase local provision.
 - Reviewing existing road networks to identify particular instances of traffic congestion at peak times and address these through the LIP to encourage further economic growth.
- B) Whilst it was acknowledged that there had been a number of impacts on the approval and publication of Middlesbrough's revised Housing Local Plan due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scrutiny Panel asked the Executive to ensure that the revised Local Plan was adopted as soon as practicable and by no later than March 2022.
- C) In line with the Middlesbrough Council's ambition for the town to be net carbon neutral by 2039, the Middlehaven developments be used as an opportunity to explore, promote and encourage the use of green renewable energy both with Developers and as a selling point for potential investors.
- D) Consideration should be given to extending the Urban Pioneers Scheme, or encouraging similar developments, to provide more live/work accommodation in Middlesbrough, given the shift to increased home working during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- E) The Council should ensure that green spaces around the Middlehaven developments were regularly maintained and attractive to prospective new residents and businesses. One suggestion was that hard-standing surfaces or laybys were built into development masterplans rather than having grassed verges. This could also save the Council expenditure on maintenance of and/or repair of more traditional grassed surfaces next to roadways.
- F) The Council could consider collaborating with the local community to encourage ownership and maintenance of public spaces (if appropriate) in Middlehaven to promote pride in the area.
- G) By working closely with Broadband Providers, the Council should seek to ensure that all areas of Middlesbrough could have access to

superfast broadband by 2025 at the latest, and that residents and businesses were not disadvantaged by lack of provision given the increased reliance on digital technologies post-pandemic.

- H) The Council should consider developing a multi-purpose venue in the town, which could accommodate entertainment. A venue which attracts the best entertainers in the world would encourage people from across the UK to visit the area, stay and spend, boosting the local economy. The Captain Cook Shopping Centre would be an ideal location for an eSports gaming venue as evidenced by the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel in a recent Final Report on Cultural Events.

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