

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Tuesday 22 February 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors M Saunders (Chair), D Davison, A Hellaoui, C Hobson, D McCabe, J Platt, J Thompson, S Walker and B Hubbard (Substitute for A Bell)

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: S Hill (Executive Member for Culture and Communities)

OFFICERS: C Breheny, S Butcher, T Parkinson, G Cooper, J Dixon, K Smith, I Wright, A Humble and C Nicol

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Mawston, A Bell and M Storey

20/67 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

20/68 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 18 JANUARY 2022**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18 January were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/69 **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

20/70 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE**

The Executive Member for Culture and Communities and previous Executive Member for Education, Cllr Stephen Hill, 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 Children's Services and Head of Achievement were also in attendance.

The Executive Member for Culture and Communities explained that he had previously held the post of Executive Member for Education, prior to the recently introduced changes to the Executive portfolios, requested by the Mayor. The first part of this update to the Board would therefore focus on some of the major achievements and events he had undertaken whilst he held the post of Executive Member for Education.

The Executive Member advised that as Members were aware SEND provision (Special Educational Needs & Development) was a major statutory duty undertaken by the Council, and Middlesbrough had a particularly high SEND need (especially in children under 5) compared with other Local Authorities. This need had been exacerbated by COVID, with children being away from school and from each other for long periods of time, thereby stalling educational progress and the development of social skills, which had lead to a significant increase in referrals and requests for assessments, thereby adding significant pressures on

the service area. However, despite these pressures during 2021, completion of EHCPs (Educational, Health and Care Plans) remained high, with the 20 week statutory timescale being met in 99 per cent of cases, making Middlesbrough the 9th best Local Authority in the country in this regard.

The Board was advised that as part of the education department's ongoing commitment to SEND provision, the Cleveland Unit, which was formerly housed in James Cook University Hospital, had moved to the Hemlington Initiative Centre on Cass House Road. Initially this was meant to be a temporary move but it had now been confirmed that this would be a permanent move, which was fantastic, as it was a brilliant facility in Hemlington, with lots of space and specially designed rooms and gardens for the children who attended, all of whom have varying degrees of learning difficulties and disabilities.

In terms of school exclusions it was explained that unfortunately, as another result of COVID there had been a significant rise in the number of children permanently excluded from school in Middlesbrough. The current figure was 32, however this figure was expected to rise further. The department was currently working with two schools, the police and the social care department to develop an enhanced support programme for the excluded pupil, their parents and school to combat this increase. The Executive Member advised that he had been assured that any findings from this work would be shared with all schools, and members would also be made aware of how this work was progressing, either through the Executive Member for Children's Services or the relevant scrutiny panel.

The Executive Member explained that those pupils who were looked after were served by our virtual school, which had recently undergone a voluntary review conducted by heads of various other virtual schools from around the country. Middlesbrough's virtual school had received some fantastic feedback, which had been endorsed at the most recent meeting of the Executive, and a copy of the report would be disseminated to Members after the meeting.

Reference was made to another important part of the education portfolio, which was working with partner agencies, including the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership and the South Tees Youth Offending Service. As Executive Member for Education it was advised that he had been a member of the boards of both partnerships, and as such attended meetings representing the council and, as a corporate parent, any of Middlesbrough's children who were involved in either system, as we were, of course, responsible for the welfare and education of any children in our care until they reached adulthood. Both partnerships had held open-day type events in September of last year, which allowed a wider variety of professionals, academics and politicians to gain a greater understanding of their workings. Both events were very well attended and had received positive feedback from participants.

The Executive Member stated that the most important partners we worked with were, of course, our schools, and in the last term the local authority had undertaken more visits to schools than ever before, around 60. Most of the visits had been undertaken by officers, as the overall majority were to aid schools with Covid recovery, for example sharing of best practice, staff support and oversight of vulnerable pupils, though as Executive Member he had visited around a dozen educational facilities, including schools, nurseries, the Cleveland Unit and various Community Learning facilities. More visits had been planned for this term, as, with the lifting of COVID restrictions, schools were more open to outside visitors, and the new Executive Member for Children's Services had taken up those invitations and was in the process of visiting those schools, along with some others.

The Board was informed that another of important service area was community learning, which supported residents of Middlesbrough to engage with learning, whether through apprenticeships or through first-touch engagement to support residents who were furthest from the labour market. This was achieved through a wide variety of methods, including the youth employment initiative, the Lingfield Choosing Pathways Program and job-fair type events, including the Middlesbrough Unlocked event, which had been held in the Town Hall crypt in June of last year and had been very well attended by both employers, apprenticeship providers and job-seekers. The amount of people in attendance who had just walked in off the street had been fantastic.

The Executive Member advised that the second part of his update to the Board would be focussed on his new role as Executive Member for Culture and Communities and that there were many positive cultural developments taking place in Middlesbrough.

The Board was advised that during the Covid recovery period, the Council had been successful in securing over £800,000 worth of fundraised income, primarily from the Arts Council, which had helped the Council to engage with its more vulnerable and disengaged communities. This engagement had taken many forms, including outdoor events at Middlesbrough's two museums, one of which drew over 1000 people to the Captain Cook Museum in Stewart Park, a joint commission by the artist Joanne Coates and Middlesbrough Mela named Covid Heroes which was covered by local and national press, and several other bespoke commissions designed to draw more people into Middlesbrough's cultural buildings.

Several learning workshops had also been hosted in the town's cultural locations, including digital treasure hunts, book banners and book printing, stage and tech skills workshops in Middlesbrough Theatre and the Town Hall, and a new community led exhibition for the Captain Cook Museum entitled "Bottled Ocean", which focussed on environmentalism and the impact of plastic waste on our oceans.

In terms of the work that had been undertaken in Middlesbrough parks, the Executive Member explained that there were plans in place for investments in play areas in both Pallister Park and Thorntree Park, and improvements to the Albert Park visitor centre would also soon be complete. Council Officers had also been working with the Lawn Tennis Association to lever in additional funding for the tennis courts in Albert Park. In addition efforts were being made to increase activities in the parks, including bowling and croquet which were delivered by partner organisations working in conjunction with the Council, alongside the Council's longer-standing events, including park runs throughout the year, the Middlesbrough Mela in August and other community-led activities.

It was advised that once again the Council was hoping to be able to deliver the Holiday Activity Fund to young people this year, building on the six weeks of free activities provided in Middlesbrough parks last year. Those activities had been brilliant and it had been fantastic to see how engaged children were with them, so it was really pleasing that this initiative was able to be repeated this year.

The Executive Member stated that obviously the biggest event happening in the next six months was Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and Middlesbrough had a whole host of events planned to celebrate this, culminating in street parties throughout the town on the weekend of the Jubilee bank holiday in June (many of which have received funding from the Council's Jubilee Events grant panel). Some of the events included a host of Jubilee themed talks throughout Local History Month in May, a two day celebration event in centre square that would be run in conjunction with Orange Pip market, which will celebrate everything weird and wonderful about the UK, including vintage fairground rides, street theatre, punk rock themed art workshops and a cheese-rolling competition, as well as a competition for children to design a card for Her Majesty, the winner of which would be professionally produced and sent to the Queen as part of Middlesbrough's official congratulations. A full run-down of all of the events planned for the Jubilee could be provided to all Members following the meeting.

Some of the other events taking place outside of the Jubilee celebrations included a mini Mela pop-up in May, which would be a sneak peak of all things Mela, including henna fashion and food stalls, which was obviously in addition to the main Mela celebration which would take place in August in Albert Park. A family pride event would be held in May; the We Are Giants interactive installation, which would provide people with the opportunity to be part of the silhouettes of iconic Middlesbrough landmarks; Mindfulness Middlesbrough Month which would employ screens across the town to spread positive and mindful messages in both outdoor and indoor settings; and the Armed Forces Day celebrations in June which would feature an outdoor tea dance, street theatre and performances from vintage themed acts.

In terms of the community side of the portfolio it was advised that Middlesbrough currently had 12 community facilities spread across the town, most of which also incorporated a library service. In addition to the traditional libraries Middlesbrough also had a mobile service which delivered books to housebound residents and this service currently catered for 50 residents town-wide. The Executive Member stated that he would like to increase this as, being a passionate and vociferous reader himself, he wanted to make sure that every resident had access to books, whatever their personal circumstances.

Reference was made to the Central Library and it was noted that the Council had recently

received confirmation that a bid it had submitted for a £250,000 grant to upgrade our digital services has been approved, and the Council was currently awaiting the outcome of a £5 million grant from the Arts Council, which, if successful, would be spent on cultural transformations in Middlesbrough. This would include around £2.5 million for the library, which would be spent on major refurbishments including a new customer lift and public toilets. In the meantime, minor refurbishments had been undertaken in the junior section of the library, with a focus on sustainability and the environment, with wigwams, wooden toys, a bespoke storytelling chair, a real tree and a beautiful reading arch having been installed. The Executive Member advised that it was worth a visit to the library just to see the arch and he would encourage everyone to go.

It was advised that the town's libraries had several activities coming up, though Covid has meant that the service had had to be much more creative in the approach to planning events, so most- though not all- of our activities required people to pre-book, so as to manage numbers. Demand for school visits had already soared this year, with 10 school groups already visiting the library since January, and a further 21 booked in for the coming weeks. Some of our primary schools were also wishing to carry out whole school visits so that every child became a member. The Executive Member expressed the view that this was absolutely fantastic and he would love to see rolled out in all Middlesbrough schools.

For World Book Day, Central Library had 7 classes booked in for visits, with creative activities, staff dressed as Peter Rabbit and the Tiger Who Came to Tea, and interactive storytelling provided by "ImagineMe", a drama group who specialised in imaginative story-telling for primary aged children.

Acklam Library was also planning an Environmental awareness day to coincide with the launch of a series of leaflets that the service had created, covering recycling and litter-picking, and starring the Library's resident social media stars, Tammy and Monty the Dog. In terms of the community activities taking place in the town's hubs and libraries, meeting spaces were provided for a large variety of groups, including knit and natter social groups, walking groups, dementia support, citizens advice, reading groups, book clubs, family history groups, Lego clubs, a model railway club, age UK coffee mornings and so many more, not to mention all of the incredible things that were held in MyPlace, Middlesbrough's state of the art venue and activity centre for young people.

In terms of his ambition for the service, the Executive Member advised that his main focus currently was in respect of community engagement with our cultural and historic buildings. The Executive Member expressed the view that he wanted people in the town's buildings and wanted people from Middlesbrough to have a pride and a love for the town's history, which he felt came from getting them into the heart of our town's cultural offering. For example, the Town Hall, with its Gothic architecture, the old cells, the crypt, the hall itself, the council chamber and the old court room, with their breath-taking stained glass ceilings, which the general public rarely had the opportunity to see. It was noted that he had been working with the Council's Civics Officer to bring back tours of both sides of the Town Hall for both school parties and the wider community. The Executive Member stated that he was also hoping to bring people in to see not just the buildings, but also meetings, so they could see what we as councillors did, and hopefully instil what he hoped everyone wanted - a sense of political engagement in our residents.

Plans were also in place to hold "town hall" type meetings with staff from the culture department, where anyone could pitch ideas for events to himself and the Council's Head of Culture, so there was a much wider pool of backgrounds and interests to draw from, which would hopefully mean we could attract even more people to our events and spaces.

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

A Member of the Board queried the amount of future additional investment that was proposed for Teessaurus Park. In response it was advised that £250,000 had been approved and it was anticipated that the works would hopefully be completed by Easter and would include a zip wire, new play equipment, light installations and an augmented reality trail.

Reference was made to the 'Nightfall Event' and the fantastic response received from residents and it was queried whether the Council had funded the event. It was advised that in terms of hosting the event it had been a collaboration and the company organising the event

had received some funding from the Arts Council, the Council had contributed some funding and the ticket sales had also enabled the event to be held. It was hoped that the event would return in 2022/23, as it had been a sell out and the response had been fantastic.

Reference was made to Middlesbrough's archives and whether any progress had been made in respect of digitising records for bringing them up to date and help people in tracing their family history. In response it was advised that a digitisation was currently being undertaken and it was a huge task as the Council had responsibility for the whole of the Tees Valley.

A Member of the Board queried whether any decision had been taken in respect of a name for the new East Middlesbrough Community Hub, as reference had been made during the presentation to the Southlands Centre but the Centre was no longer in existence. In response it was advised that ultimately it should be a community decision and representation would be needed from local councillors and local residents. It was emphasised that it was very much the working title, as the Southlands Centre had been loved by so many people.

It was queried whether any progress had been made in respect of arranging racial awareness training for Members that had been agreed in 2020. In response it was advised that clarification would be sought on this issue and a response provided.

Reference was made to the different funding streams being used in respect of developing a new community hub on the former Southlands site and it was queried whether further information could be provided. In response it was advised that £1.2m was to be invested from the Council's capital budget and £500,000 would be invested from the Towns Fund.

In terms of the new community centres it was queried how these would be managed. It was advised that the Tees Valley Asset Preservation Trust would take on board the running of the Southlands Centre. Similarly a community organisation would be appointed to manage the Community Hub at Nunthorpe.

Reference was made to what work that was currently being undertaken by the Council to blend communities together, to create community cohesion and build a better Middlesbrough. In response it was advised that this was a really important point and a substantial amount of work was undertaken by the Council in respect of this agenda.

In response to the news that the Cleveland Show had now finished the Chair wished to extend his thanks to all of the volunteers who had successfully run the event for over 73 years.

Reference was made to the possibility of developing an arena in Middlesbrough and the Deputy Mayor expressed the view that this was definitely something that was on the wish list and there was a real need to maximise the events programme throughout the town.

The Chair thanked Executive Member for Culture and Communities and the Director of Children's Services and Head of Achievement, for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

20/71

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
- Quarter Three corporate performance update
- Governance issues in Local Government
- Executive update

In terms of the latest local COVID-19 data, as at 17 February 2022 the rolling seven-day rate of cases per 100k of the Middlesbrough population was as follows:

- 73 new cases had been added to the system on 17 February 2022;
- 519 new cases had been diagnosed in the last seven days;
- 368.10 rate per 100k of population (last seven days); and

- 319.20 COVID-19 deaths per 100k population.

Reference was made to the quarter three corporate performance update and it was advised that although the figures appeared to show a dip in performance, for example Executive Actions completed 72 per cent in quarter three against 97 per cent in quarter two, this had been due to a lag in performance reporting over the Christmas period rather than an actual dip in performance. This would be improved and an accurate position on performance would be presented as soon as possible.

It was noted that work was ongoing to develop a refreshed Strategic Plan workplan (activities and associated delivery plans), which would be presented to Executive for approval in April 2022.

For information purposes the Board was informed that nationally there had been a number of Councils recently which had recently been identified as having governance failings. This had led to direct Government intervention and a loss of local control. It was emphasised that there were no concerns in respect of governance issues at Middlesbrough Council. However, it was important that Members were aware of the risks and actions taken by Government in respect of governance failings in other areas. A brief synopsis of the recent findings associated with four Councils were provided and these included findings in respect of Liverpool, Sandwell, Wirral and Slough.

In relation to the Executive decisions taken recently it was noted that a number of reports had been considered. These included; the corporate performance update; the Revenue and Capital budget outturn position update; the Revenue Budget, Council Tax and Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy 2022/23; the Virtual School Peer Review and the appointment of External Auditors.

A number of reports were expected to be considered by Executive in March 2022 and these included; the Final Report of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel on the Recruitment and Retention of Staff within Adult Social Care; a progress update on the Children's improvement journey; approval for a tender pipeline 2022/2023; approval of the Transport and Infrastructure Capital Programme 2022/23 and an update on the refurbishment and fit out of Fountain Court.

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

NOTED

20/72 **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

20/73 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET - PROJECTED OUTTURN POSITION AS AT QUARTER THREE 2021/22**

The Director of Finance and the Head of Financial Planning and Support provided an update to the Board; the following points were highlighted:

- The information detailed in the report was separated into two elements: COVID-19 related and non-COVID-19 related;
- The 2021/22 Revenue budget for the Council was £116,492,035. The Council's outturn position for 2021/22 for non-Covid-19 elements was projected to be an overspend of £3.225m (2.8%). It was anticipated that there would be a potential financial pressure due to COVID-19 of £1.821m in 2021/22. The total projected outturn at the end of the year was £5.046m, an increase of £0.891m from the position reported at Quarter Two;
- The total projected overspend in 2021/22 would be covered by the full utilisation of the Social Care Demand Reserve of £0.5m and the Children's Services Demand Reserve of £0.732m, which were created at the end of 2020/21. The remaining £3.841m of the total projected outturn pressure would be funded from the £4.512m Covid Recovery

Reserve, which was created during 2020/21 to cover the potential costs arising from the Covid-19 recovery in 2021/22 and future years;

- Paragraphs 105-125 of the report detailed expenditure against the Investment Strategy, which had a revised budget of £64.814m. The current latest estimated outturn for 2021/2022 was £59.035m at year-end;
- Paragraph 126 of the report indicated that borrowing had reduced by £1.0m in Q3 to £205.2m;
- Total reserves were detailed in paragraph 133 and 134, which showed projections for 2021/22 to be £35.9m.
- Appendix 2 showed the revised Investment Strategy which would be used from this point onwards.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance for his attendance and contributions to the meeting.

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

20/74

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE UPDATE: QUARTER THREE 2021/22

The Strategy Delivery Manager provided an update to the Board, which included the following points:

- This Q3 update was in respect of the Strategic Plan, which covered the period June – September 2021, and which was presented to Executive on 14 February 2022;
- On 24 February 2021, full Council approved a Strategic Plan for 2021-24, setting out nine strategic priorities for this period. At its meeting of 11 May 2021, the Executive agreed an associated set of outcome measures linked to these priorities and a supporting workplan to deliver sustained improvement up to and beyond 2024.
- At the end of Q3, 11 of 24 (45.8%) Strategic Plan outcomes were either improving or static against the Q2 position, with three measures (12.5%) worsening. With many measures updated annually, there was no trend information for 10 outcome measures (41.7%) at the present time.
- At the end of Q3, Covid-19 had resulted in significant fluctuation in some measures and so targets for outcome measures (largely involving multi-agency working) were to be reviewed during Q4 and revised targets subsequently presented to the Executive for approval in the Year-End performance report. Crime and anti-social behaviour remained of concern at the end of Q3. Anti-social behaviour was at its lowest level in five years, with levels of crime continuing to be the issue. Work and discussions continued with Cleveland Police to bring crime down, which included the need to increase and reinforce police numbers across the town.
- Strategic risks – the total number of risks on the Strategic Risk Register reduced to 28 from 30 at Q3, comprising 18 high risks and 10 medium risks. No new risks were added or scores amended during the quarter.

The Chair thanked the Strategy Delivery Manager for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

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