

**EXECUTIVE**

A meeting of the Executive was held on Wednesday 5 March 2025.

**PRESENT:** Mayor C Cooke (Chair) and Councillors T Furness, P Gavigan, L Henman, J Ryles, J Thompson and N Walker

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor I Blades

**OFFICERS:** C Benjamin, S Bonner, M Brown, B Carr, A Davis, K Dargue, G Field, R Horniman, A Humble, E Scollay and C Walker

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillor P Storey

24/81 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

24/82 **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 5 FEBRUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 5 February 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/83 **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE SUB COMMITTEE FOR PROPERTY - 5 FEBRUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Executive Sub Committee for Property held on 5 February 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/84 **SHIFT PROGRESS REPORT**

The Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education and Culture submitted a report for Executive consideration. The report was presented by the Executive Member for Children's Services in the Deputy Mayor's absence.

The purpose of the report was to update Executive on the three-year partnership with SHiFT, a national systems change charity working alongside Children's Services within the Council. SHiFT Middlesbrough had started work across the first of two, 18-month Programmes with children and young people caught up in, or at risk of, cycles of crime and exploitation.

The report detailed that the costs of the partnership were supported by the sum of £600,000 which SHiFT secured from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, alongside match funding of £600,000 from the Council, invested over three financial years.

SHiFT had a strong and growing track record of exceptional practice that was breaking cycles of crime with and for the most vulnerable children. Headlines from SHiFT's national evidence of impact to date, for children with a SHiFT Guide 12-18 months included:

- 41% reduction in proven offences.
- 58% reduction in reported missing episodes.
- 51% reduction in arrests

Economic analysis of SHiFT's work conducted in 2022 that for each child considered, costs avoided in the next five years by breaking cycles of crime now ranged from £1.8m to £164k. For every £1 spent on SHiFT £8 is saved over five years.

The SHiFT programme was aligned to the council plan under Safe and Resilient communities. The programme spanned both the promotion of new ideas and community initiatives as well as reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

SHiFT Middlesbrough had been working with children and young people since July 2024. The

Practice was already making evidenced positive impacts with and alongside children and young people. Including September 2024 and for the three months prior:

- 17 (out of 27) children had no arrests, 22 children had not committed any proven offences and 21 children had not been missing.
- Children's Social Care involvement had reduced for four children and four children had now moved back to Middlesbrough, two of whom were previously in custody and two were living in placements out of area.
- Guide's ratings of mental health had improved for six (out of 27) children and Guides assessed that the negative consequences of substance use had reduced for eight (out of 27) children.
- Guides had supported children to access education, training and employment by arranging for children to attend open days, assisting with their applications, and taking them to interviews.

There would be an annual partnership review presented to the Local SHiFT Board in June 2025.

It was commented that investment in the initiative would be returned and so was value for money.

The Mayor commented that the SHiFT initiative was strong step on a journey that would allow the Council to move a more preventative way of working.

## **OPTIONS**

**There were no other options put forward as part of the report.**

**AGREED that Executive notes:**

- 1. A SHiFT Programme had been established in Middlesbrough, with a new staff team successfully recruited, trained and working with children and families.**
- 2. SHiFT Middlesbrough launched in line with Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government grant funding deadlines. A formal launch event was held in September 2024 and Middlesbrough's Elected Mayor attended as a key speaker alongside Keith Fraser, Chair of the Youth Justice Board.**
- 3. 27 children and young people were identified and invited for SHiFT support. Children and young people had been building trusting relationships with their SHiFT Guide and there was good evidence of emerging positive impacts on their safety and wellbeing as a result of this work.**
- 4. A Local SHiFT Board had been created and was meeting regularly to provide effective partnership governance with Joe Tynan, Executive Director for Children's Services, as its Chair.**

## **REASONS**

**While the report was for information only, it was important that Executive were kept updated on the work of SHiFT. SHiFT was an innovative organisation, founded in 2019, with a track record for delivering exceptional outcomes that broke the destructive cycle of children and young people caught up in, or at risk of, crime.**

**SHiFT Middlesbrough provided 1-1 intensive support for 27 of the most vulnerable children and young people in Middlesbrough. Children and young people identified for SHiFT were those for whom, despite the efforts of other professionals, 'business as usual' responses had not been able to make the difference needed and where concern about their wellbeing was high and escalating. For over a quarter of the children SHiFT Middlesbrough was working with, their vulnerabilities and professional responses to their management to date, mean that they were, at the start of SHiFT's work, accommodated in high-cost placements, often a long way from home and not making the difference desired to improve the child's situation. For all children there are concerns about increasing risk, vulnerability, and the negative impacts this can have on their living arrangements.**

**The total cost of the partnership to Middlesbrough Council was approximately £11k per**

child for an 18-month Programme of intensive individual support, which included working with everyone important to a child's world. This represented good value for money given the highly complex needs of this vulnerable group and the intensity and expertise of the work SHiFT was delivering. Within the SHiFT cohort there were eight looked after young people whose weekly placement cost ranged between £3k to £23k as of the end of period nine (December 2024). SHiFT Guides worked alongside existing professionals, including Social Workers, providing a level of intensity that Social Workers are not resourced to be able to deliver. SHiFT had an evidenced track record for delivering exceptional outcomes and in year cost savings and cost avoidance through, for example, reducing reliance on high-cost placements, avoiding children being remanded in custody, and supporting children to return to mainstream education from alternative provision.

24/85

## **AUTO-ENROLMENT OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND MAXIMISING PUPIL PREMIUM FUNDING PILOT ACROSS MIDDLESBROUGH**

The Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health submitted a report for Executive consideration, the purpose of which was to seek approval for the Council to undertake the Free School Meal and Pupil Premium initiative on a longer-term basis.

The Council had engaged with Middlesbrough schools in a meeting held on 13 December 2024, seeking thoughts/appetite on whether schools would wish for this work to continue on a longer-term basis. The schools were advised that the Council would write to schools ahead of extending the Free School Meal and Pupil Premium initiative to inform them that the schools who already had their Free School Meals administered by the Local Authority would receive the auto enrolment service as part of the existing administration fee.

For Schools who were not in receipt of the Free School Meal service administered by Middlesbrough Council the opinion of the Schools was sought along with their preference. An administration fee of 10% would be applied to any new pupil premium identified. In advance, the Council would write to all schools seeking approval to progress with the auto enrolment approach, at this time the School would confirm if it would wish to 'opt in/opt out'. The administration fee would apply to any new Pupil Premium funding secured through the auto enrolment initiative and this would be a one-off fee to cover the cost of the administrative effort by the Local Authority.

The purpose of the initiative was to ensure that schools were receiving the maximum benefit of Pupil Premium funding as well as contributing towards the Council's Plan to reduce poverty and create a healthy place by enabling children who were entitled to Free School Meals to access them.

An initial report was presented to Executive on 26 June seeking approval to progress with a pilot initiative to implement the auto enrolment of Free School Meals, with the aim of increasing the number of children registered for Free School Meals and Pupil Premium funding, subject to the agreement of Middlesbrough Schools.

The Mayor proposed an amendment to the report which proposed any money generated above baseline costs would be reinvested into holiday activity and food programmes or into pupil premium services.

### **OPTIONS**

**Do nothing and continue with the current application process whereby the responsibility rests with households to apply for Free School Meals. Whilst this was still an option for parents, the proposed approach by the Council would ensure applications were maximised as was the Pupil Premium for Schools. The results from the pilot would suggest 'doing nothing' should be avoided.**

**ORDERED that Executive:**

- 1. Approve the proposed amendment to the report.**
- 2. Approve the continuation of the Free School Meals auto enrolment programme for Schools who 'opt in'. A 10% fee will be applied for any new pupil premium identified. The fee was intended to cover the Councils costs in administering**

**the auto enrolment business process. The Council would write to Schools each year seeking approval from the School to participate in the auto enrolment initiative.**

## **REASONS**

**The continuation with the auto enrolment on to Free School Meals (including agreement from the Schools) meant those children who were eligible, did not miss out on a healthy nutritious meal at school.**

**In addition to ensuring children were not missing out, the continuation of this initiative would also result in Schools receiving the maximum amount of funding from Central Government through the Pupil Premium grant which would allow a number of initiatives, defined by the individual School to be funded.**

**Some children automatically received Free School Meals through the Universal Infant Free School Meals (if they were in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2), and as such may not have been registered formerly for Free School Meals, which meant the School would be missing out on Pupil Premium. The auto enrolment take up would ensure that the Schools were maximising Pupil Premium and not missing out.**

**The data captured from the pilot was included at Appendix 1 of the report.**

**The pilot initiative had supported families across Middlesbrough and would contribute towards reducing poverty, as children would have access to a Free School Meal, which may have been funded by the parent/carer at a cost of c£400 per pupil. The outcome would likely save Middlesbrough Households a combined saving of approximately £218,400 per year.**

**The initiative had also directly benefitted from The Holiday and Activities Food Programme (HAF). The increased number of children in receipt of Free School Meals meant more children had access to this programme. Following more recent announcements it would suggest that the Holiday and Activities Food Fund (HAF) would continue for a further 12 months.**

**In December 2024, Middlesbrough Council united with 100 other organisations in an open letter to Government calling for pupils who met the eligibility criteria but were not yet signed up to Free School Meals, to be automatically enrolled. Middlesbrough Council was one of 24 local authorities to add their signature to the letter, which implored Government to use the upcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill to enable all children who were entitled to a Free School Meal to be automatically enrolled.**

24/86

## **REVIEW OF THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

The Executive Member for Development submitted an item for Executive consideration. The purpose of the report was to seek Executive approval for a revised Statement of Community Involvement.

Under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council was required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement. (SCI), to explain how it would involve the community in the preparation of local development documents (such as the Local Plan), the preparation of neighbourhood plans, and on planning applications.

They should set out how the Council would meet the legislative requirements in undertaking its planning activities, as well as any additional engagement it may do beyond what is legally required. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 also required the Council to review the SCI at least every five years.

The Council's current SCI was adopted in March 2020. Since then, there had been a number of changes to national planning policy and legislation, and the way the Council delivered its planning service, meaning that there were some aspects of the SCI that were out-of-date. It was important that the SCI remained current as it helped to ensure compliance with statutory duties. This would be particularly important as the new Local Plan was finalised this year.

Officers had completed a review of the SCI and were recommending a small number of changes that were detailed in the table at paragraph 4.3 of the report.

There was no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation on the SCI and following approval of the revised SCI, the Council's website would be updated to replace the previous SCI with the new version. The SCI would be used as appropriate by the Council's Planning Service.

The Mayor commented that community involvement for the local plan had been excellent.

## **OPTIONS**

**Not to update the SCI. This would mean the Council would not comply with the legislation regarding reviewing the SCI every five years. There would be potential compliance issues, particularly with preparing the Local Plan.**

### **ORDERED that Executive**

- 1. Approves the revised Statement of Community Involvement.**
- 2. Delegates authority to the Director of Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Member for Development, to make changes to the Statement of Community Involvement as a result of future reviews.**

## **REASONS**

**The Council had a statutory duty to prepare an SCI, to explain how it would involve the community in the preparation of its Local Plan, the preparation of neighbourhood plans, and on planning applications. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 required that SCIs were reviewed every five years.**

**The Council's current SCI was adopted in March 2020. In order to comply with the legislation a review needed to be completed by 17th March 2025.**

24/87

## **WELFARE SUPPORT POLICY**

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report for Executive consideration the purpose of which was to conduct a review of the Welfare Support Policy for Residents in Financial Crisis as part of the three-year review cycle, and to ensure that the current support provided to residents was keeping pace, reflected any changes in legislation, and included any necessary amendments or alterations. It was also noted that it was anticipated that further changes would be necessary to this Policy as the Council developed its approach to resolving poverty across the Town.

The Council recognised there were circumstances that fell outside a resident's control that could impact upon their financial situation and may place them into crisis. This could present as an immediate financial risk to the resident or a member of their household where short-term support could prevent longer term issues from occurring.

Crisis could occur at any time and situations could be very different. Each case was independently assessed by experienced Officers. Although the list cited in the report was not exhaustive, some of the more frequent reasons Crisis Support was were:-

- Reduction in working hours resulting in loss of earnings.
- Awaiting benefit entitlement/Change in circumstances
- Potential Homelessness
- Theft or loss of essential goods.
- Burglaries

The Council provided crisis support via the Community Support Team through a number of different options to alleviate resident's immediate need. This offer had been significantly enhanced over the last three years through the introduction of the Corporate Welfare Strategy. Whilst short term support was provided through the Welfare Support for residents in financial crisis, longer term resolve/prevention formed part of the Welfare Support Strategy and underpinned the Council's approach to responding to Poverty. With the introduction of the

Welfare Support Team, and the introduction of a single front door for Residents would ensure support was easily accessible to those in genuine need.

Since 1 April 2024 the Council had provided support to over 1000 households through either Crisis or Housing Support with payments of around £370,000, this would likely increase to around £410,000 by 31 March 2025. In addition, through close working with partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions, Officers liaised directly to ensure benefit claims, queries were resolved quickly, and benefit was paid which eliminated the immediate Crisis. In conjunction with this the Council's Welfare Rights Team had supported over 1,191 residents with claims for benefit and had secured benefit in excess of £2m. A more recent example included an internal referral into the team £88,000.00 of unclaimed State Pension was identified by the Welfare Rights Team for one resident. This was an example of the great work that the Council's Welfare Support Team were doing to maximise unclaimed benefits.

Members discussed how residents could apply for support and if they could apply for different payments. It was clarified the main intention of the report was not to top regular income, but more than one criterion could be considered for applications.

It was also commented the policy would be publicised via the Council's usual communication channels and would also be communicated to other partners and agencies, such as the Financial Inclusion Group.

## **OPTIONS**

**Do nothing. The current policy did not refer to the enhanced support options available to residents, such as OpenPay or E-Vouchers. In addition, the policy was due to be reviewed as the previous three-year period has expired therefore a refresh of the current offering is required.**

**ORDERED that the Executive approve**

- 1. The refreshed Welfare Support for Residents in Financial Crisis Policy which included the following minor changes:**
  - a) Additional payment methods, making it easier and faster for payment to be made.**
    - Allowing payment via text message to send funds direct to a resident's bank account. In addition, e-vouchers can be provided through text messages or emails to a resident with a voucher code which can be redeemed at a supermarket of their choice.**
  - b) A refresh of the language and some minor amendments to the policy.**
  - c) Alignment to the Corporate Welfare Strategy**
- 2. Provided delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Transformation and the Executive Member of Finance to make any future minor revisions/modifications to reflect the financial / economic climate as necessary.**

## **REASONS**

**The policy was a key decision that impacted on two or more wards and as such required Executive approval.**

**The updated policy upheld good practice within democratic processes and enabled the refreshed policy to maintain visibility with the Executive.**

**The delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Transformation and Executive Member of Finance to approve future minor modifications to the policy helped maintain service operation levels. As a working policy, failure to keep pace with new legislation or working practices left the Council at risk and could result in inconsistent practices.**

**The proposals provided clarification and ensured vulnerable residents had a clear understanding of the Council's approach to crisis situations and the support available.**

**TENDER PIPELINE APPROVAL 2025/2026**

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report for Executive's consideration. The purpose of the report sought Executive approval of the Council's tender pipeline for 2025/26 and to agree delegation of the contract award to the relevant Director who would update their Executive Member.

It was clarified the report was not the Corporate Procurement Strategy and that issues such as social value was included in that Strategy.

A tender pipeline was used to provide the market with an understanding of the potential future procurement activity the Council may undertake 12-18 months hence.

The new Procurement Act 2023 went live on 24th February 2025 required the Council to formally publish a tender pipeline notice.

The Council's Corporate Procurement Strategy 2024 - 2026 set out the strategic direction for the implementation of the Contract Procedure Rules, which are the regulatory framework for all staff to follow in respect of purchasing goods, services and works regardless of value. The Strategy supported the aims and priorities of the Council.

It set out how the Council would:

- Strive to make procurement easier for suppliers and the Council alike.
- Challenge and drive value for money from all procurement activity.
- Maximise innovation, sustainability, and collaboration in our procurement activities to support the Council's strategic objectives.
- Ensure social value and local return was at the heart of the Council's procurement opportunities.
- Continue to increase the visibility of the Council's tender opportunities to local and SME suppliers.
- Make the best use of local, sub-regional, regional and national collaborative arrangements where significant benefits for Middlesbrough can be evidenced.

Within the Corporate Procurement Strategy, a tender pipeline was used to provide the market with an understanding of the potential future procurement activity the Council may undertake in the proceeding 12-18 months and so increased the visibility of our tender opportunities.

**OPTIONS**

**Do nothing. This was not preferred as it would not support strong governance or allow us to be compliant with the upcoming new Procurement Act requirements to publish a tender pipeline.**

**ORDERED that the Executive approves**

1. **The Middlesbrough Council tender pipeline for 2025/26.**
2. **Delegation of the contract award to the relevant Director who will update their Executive Member.**

**REASONS**

**To continue to have strong governance arrangements in place for procurement activity carried out by the Council and to be compliant with the new Procurement Act 2023 which was enacted on 24 February 2025 and required the Council to formally publish a tender pipeline notice.**

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

None.

**All decisions will come into force after five working days following the day the decision(s) was published unless the decision becomes subject to the call in procedures.**

