

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 12 February 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors I Blades (Chair), J Kabuye (Vice-Chair), J Banks, D Branson, E Clynch, D Coupe, J Ewan, L Lewis, I Morrish, M Saunders, Z Uddin and G Wilson

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillors P Gavigan

OFFICERS: S Bonner, J Dixon and G Field

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors B Hubbard and M McClintock

24/63 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

24/64 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed those present and advised that as there were no scheduled tests, should the fire alarm sound, attendees should evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

24/65 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 22 JANUARY 2025**

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22 January 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record, subject to the word 'million' being added after the figure £3.485 on page four.

24/66 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Councillor Gavigan, Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability, was in attendance at the meeting, accompanied by G Field, Director of Environment and Community Services, to provide the Board with an overview of his portfolio in relation to Environment and Sustainability.

The Executive Member stated that Environment and Community Services strived to deliver services that met the Council's Strategic Vision 'For Middlesbrough to be a thriving, healthier, safer and more ambitious place where people want to live, work, invest, and visit. We will support our residents to live fulfilling lives, to ensure that our communities thrive'.

The two key areas within the portfolio of the Executive Member were:-

- Environment Services
- Highways and Infrastructure

Matters of significance for each of the two key areas were highlighted as follows:-

Environment Services

Waste and Recycling

A new green waste subscription service was launched last year and the Board heard that registration for the service for 2025/26 had now opened. In just over two days, 3,018 households had renewed their subscriptions and there had been 191 new subscribers to the service. In addition, 76 households had taken up payment plans which meant they could stagger the payment of the £40 annual charge.

Members were informed that forthcoming changes to waste and recycling services included:-

- Separate collection of paper and cardboard recycling. From April 2026, all Councils would

be required to comply with Government Legislation (Simpler Recycling) to make separate collections of paper and cardboard from other recycling streams at the kerbside. Middlesbrough currently operated a co-mingled kerbside collection which meant that all recycling streams (paper, cardboard, plastic, tin and glass) were collected together from a single bin, without the need for pre-separation by residents. The new legislation would mean that paper and cardboard would need to be collected from a separate receptacle to other recyclable materials. As a consequence, households would need to be supplied with a new collection receptacle. The potential options included a large canvass sack or small wheeled bin. The preferred option would be to provide an additional small, wheeled bin, however, appropriate consultation would take place in due course.

- Food waste collections. Also from April 2026, Councils in England would be required to undertake weekly collections of household food waste. Households would be provided with a small collection 'caddie' to be kept inside, together with a larger outside bin, into which the contents of the caddie would be placed for weekly collection.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Members expressed reservations regarding the collection of food waste particularly in relation to keeping the food caddie indoors and whether this would cause odours and also whether the outside containers would attract vermin. It was explained that the caddies were small, sealed containers and that some Council departments had been trialling them and had found no issues. Compostable liners for the caddies would be provided. In terms of attracting vermin, Members were reassured that the outdoor containers were sealed units and that it would be no different to people currently disposing of food waste in their residual waste bins except that it would be collected weekly.
- In response to a query regarding the cost to the Council, it was confirmed that the Government would provide funding to implement food waste collections so there should be no additional cost to the Council.
- A Board Member wished to place on record, thanks to Environment Services for their efforts in cleaning up the town and queried what the cost difference would be in providing an additional small bin versus a large canvass bag for the paper and card recycling. The Director responded that he would obtain the figures for the Board. In terms of preference, he highlighted that a bin would be the preferred option as no manual handling was required with a bin and other benefits included keeping the contents contained.
- A Member expressed concern that residents could potentially need to store five bins and this could cause difficulties in terms of space to store them and lead to unsightliness. The Director advised that the Council had no choice in relation to implementing the separate collection of paper and card and food waste and that the containerised bins should help to keep areas tidy. The outdoor food waste container was a relatively small, sealed unit and would be collected weekly by a specialist vehicle.
- The Executive Member stated that he understood the concerns expressed by Members but felt that the advantage of separate food waste collections was that it would be collected weekly. As well as being a legal necessity, it would also support the Council's green agenda and this would contribute towards increasing recycling across the town and improve sustainability. From a cost perspective, it was significantly cheaper to dispose of recyclable waste than residual waste.
- A Member queried whether the food waste collections would include disposal of pet food waste. The Director advised that he would investigate and respond on this issue.
- In response to a query regarding the disposal method of food waste, it was confirmed that this would be done at a bio-digestion facility which created energy from the waste.
- A query was raised regarding how residents might differentiate between food waste and garden waste, for example, home grown vegetables that were no longer needed. The Director advised that there would be a programme of education and advice provided to residents when the food waste collection scheme was rolled out.

- It was queried whether there would be any increased costs to the Council in terms of an increase in collections particularly weekly collections of food waste. Members were advised that there would be no additional costs to the Council in terms of food waste collections as EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) money had been allocated to the budget in the sum of £3.37 million this year, however, the Council would incur costs in relation to separate paper and cardboard collections. In response to a follow-up question, the Director informed that Middlesbrough sent very little waste to landfill and that residual waste was directed to the Energy from Waste Plant, however, this was a significantly higher cost in terms of disposal compared with disposing of recyclable waste. In addition, the Government planned to introduce a deposit return scheme for glass which was likely to result in a reduction in glass collected from the kerbside at some point in the future.
- It was queried whether residents with limited space who are currently on bagged collections would be provided with different coloured bags for paper and card collections. The Director advised that this was something that would need to be examined and decided upon.
- Members expressed concern regarding the expected increase in refuse vehicles to fulfil the additional collections and it was queried whether recycling collections could potentially be reduced. In response, Members were advised that a complex calculation needed to be undertaken which would take into account the carbon footprint of disposal and how this was offset by recycling the items.
- A Member expressed concern for residents living in areas with alleyways and limited space for additional containers. The Director advised that the Council would continue to provide front of house collections and would enable food waste collections to take place.
- Further concern was raised regarding contamination and bins being left outside in the street. The Director stated he was aware of the issue and that some areas had much higher levels of contamination than others largely as a result of some individuals choosing not to recycle or use the bins provided correctly. Some areas had contamination rates of more than 50% and this needed to be addressed through education and awareness. The main issue was general waste being placed in with recycling and if the bins were used correctly, contamination should not be a problem.
- It was queried whether consideration had been given to using a stacking bin system, similar to that used in Canada. The Director responded that weekly food waste collections would be mandatory and that there would be little benefit in using a stacking system.

Area Care

The Board was advised that there were plans to introduce real Christmas tree collections and bonfire removals for 2025/26, with details of how this would operate to be communicated nearer the time.

Subject to approval of the budget by Full Council, it was proposed to increase spending within Area Care to:-

- Increase pest control
- Increase grass cutting
- Eliminate backlog of tree maintenance
- Increase litter picking
- Increase wider care for infrastructure around areas

The above measures would include an increase in grass cutting from 10 to 13 cuts per year and weekly pest control measures in alleyways plus a quarterly regime in public areas.

During the course of discussion on the above, the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to the continuing discrepancies between Middlesbrough Council grass cutting and housing association grass cutting and it was queried whether the Council and housing association could work together to try to improve the situation. The Director confirmed that the Council would continue to work with them and try to negotiate

cutting at the same time wherever possible.

- A Member of the Board welcomed any increase in litter picking and wished to place on record his recognition to the Boro Champions for the excellent work they did within the community to collect litter. The Director also thanked the Boro Champions and wished to encourage communities to get involved by caring for their areas.
- A Member questioned whether increased provision of the above services would result in recruitment of additional staff and, if so, whether they would be seasonal. The Director confirmed that a combination of seasonal and year-round staff would be required.
- A Board Member referred to frequent requests from residents for additional litter bins, as many public litter bins filled up quickly, and asked whether it would be possible for additional bins to be sited and also whether separate dog waste bins were still used. The Director advised additional litter bins could be provided should the Council choose to make additional money available from the Council's budget. In relation to separate dog waste bins, these were no longer provided and all waste should be placed in the general waste bins.
- A Member expressed concern in relation to significant increases in the cost of commercial pest control and felt this might result in businesses desisting from using pest control companies due to the increased cost, in turn resulting in an increase in the rat population. In response, Members were advised that pest control was incumbent on businesses and that the Council carried out inspections.
- In response to a question as to whether pest control services would be provided free of charge, it was clarified that the Council would not be providing pest control to residents, and that the reference was in relation to the Council's own spaces.
- A Member stated that rats were prolific in the town centre, particularly due to high volumes of fly-tipping in the alleyways and felt that pest control in these areas should be prioritised over grass cutting. It was acknowledged that when weekly alley cleaning had to be cut, the problem had worsened, however, it was hoped that additional resources would see a return of fortnightly alleyway cleansing which should improve the situation.
- A Member welcomed the proposed increases to services and wished to acknowledge the hard work of the department in sustaining services whilst under significant financial pressures and reduced resources.
- In response to a question as to whether the Council had sufficient Environmental Street Wardens, it was stated that it would always be good to increase enforcement activity.

Highway Services

The Executive Member advised that Board that an increase in funding would see an increase in reactive maintenance, footpath maintenance and a reduction in potholes.

Significant work would be undertaken on structures and bridges to ensure safety and work would begin on the removal of Linthorpe Road cycle lane.

Work was underway to determine the amount of additional funding that would be allocated for the above, however, it would be in excess of £900,000 provided from the Department of Transport, via the TVCA.

The following issues were raised during discussion:-

- In response to a question regarding the removal of Linthorpe Road cycle lane, it was confirmed that this would be funded by the TVCA but that the Council would remove it. There would need to be a formal tender process, taking around three months, followed by a removal scheme which would take around six months.
- In response to a query, the Director advised Members that a list of road resurfacing schemes was available to view on the Council website.

- In response to a query regarding requests for footpath repairs and the cost of grass verge removals in the TS3 area it was stated that the cost of verge replacements was in the millions and was accounted for in the budget. In terms of footpath repairs, any notifications needed to be fed into the Highways Section and an inspection would be carried out .
- Concerns were expressed in relation to parking issues in the older housing estates, such as TS3 area, where homes had been built before high car ownership and now posed issues such as emergency service vehicles not being able to gain access through various streets due to parked cars. It was acknowledged that this was an issue and that the Executive was keen to develop neighbourhood plans taking such issues into account. These types of issues needed to be fed into that work and would require a multi-agency response.
- A Member raised the issue of repairs/replacement of wooden structures that had deteriorated over time, including fencing, in areas such as Fairy Dell and whether it would be possible for them to be repaired also queried whether additional bus shelters could be looked at in out of town centre areas, where additional housing had been built. The Director advised that such requests could be fed into the Highways and Transport Team.
- A Member queried whether the Members' Small Scheme Allowance would be brought back into use. The Director confirmed that he no longer had responsibility for this and the Democratic Services Officer agreed to make enquiries.
- A Member queried whether there was any update on the new incinerator facility. The Board was advised that this was currently subject to a procurement process and it was hoped that, if successful, the facility would be built and start receiving waste in 2029.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Director of Environment and Community Services for their attendance and the information provided.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That a response be provided to the Board as to whether pet food waste could be included in the food waste collections.
3. That information be provided to the Board regarding the cost difference between providing an additional bin versus canvas bag for paper and card collections.
4. That confirmation be sought and provided in relation to the current position regarding the Members' Small Scheme Allocations.

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EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the item for the Board's consideration. A copy of the Work Programme was attached at Appendix A and Members were asked to raise any issues they had in relation to any of the items listed.

A Member made reference to the item named 'Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeper Prevention Strategy 2024 – 2029' and queried whether the terminology being used was appropriate. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to feed the comment back to the service area.

A Member queried whether the item 'Transfer of Land and Assets at Gresham to Middlesbrough Development Corporation' was on hold or proceeding. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to make enquiries.

AGREED that the report be noted and that the Democratic Services Officer follow up with regard to:-

1. The terminology used in the item 'Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeper

Prevention Strategy’.

2. Request an update regarding the current position on the item ‘Transfer of Land and Assets at Gresham to Middlesbrough Development Corporation’.

24/68 **FORWARD PLAN ACTIONS PROGRESS**

There were no outstanding actions.

NOTED

24/69 **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

Place Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of the Place Scrutiny Panel updated the Board that the Panel had met on 27 January 2025 and had received annual updates on Flood Risk Management and RIPA. The Task and Finish Group on Home to School Transport was in the process of drafting a Final Report on the topic. The Task and Finish Group on Empty Properties had circulated evidence to the wider Panel and was awaiting response and further guidance on next steps.

People Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of the People Scrutiny Panel advised that the Panel had not met since the last meeting of OSB but was due to meet on Monday, 17 February, when it would receive further evidence in relation to its scrutiny topic of ‘Children Missing from Education’. The Panel would also consider terms of reference for its new scrutiny topic of ‘Homelessness’.

Overview and Scrutiny Board – Task and Finish Group: Community Cohesion

Councillor Kabuye updated Members that the Group was due to meet with the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner next week and would then start putting together all of the evidence gathered.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

24/70 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

There were no other urgent items to be considered.