

PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 29 July 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors D Branson (Chair), J Cooke, J Ewan, D Jackson, J Kabuye, T Livingstone, A Romaine and L Young

OFFICERS: R Horniman, S Lightwing and M Walker

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillor J Banks, C Cooper, N Hussain, L Mason and D McCabe

1/24 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

2/24 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

3/24 **MINUTES - ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL - 4 MARCH AND 20 MAY 2024**

The minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 4 March and 20 May 2024 were submitted and noted.

4/24 **MINUTES - REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL - 20 MARCH 2024**

The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 20 March 2024 were submitted and noted.

A typographical error on was corrected on the second page of the minutes, ninth paragraph, seventh word –“grand” to be replaced with “grant”.

5/24 **OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREAS**

The Director of Regeneration and the Head of Neighbourhoods, Environment and Community Services, were in attendance at the meeting and provided the Panel with an overview of the services provided across their respective Directorates, highlighting priorities and challenges for the next year.

The Regeneration Directorate consisted of five elements:

- Growth – economic development, capital projects, housing and design services.
- Planning – development control, planning policy, building control.
- Community Learning – apprenticeships, English for Speakers of other Languages ESOL, and planning.
- Property – corporate property, commercial property, sales and purchases.
- Culture – town hall, theatre, museums, events, sector development.

The Marketing and Communications Team was also included within the Directorate but the Head of Service reported directly to the Chief Executive.

The Regeneration Directorate’s role included:

- Supporting the business community to thrive.
- Supporting key sectors to grow such as digital and advanced manufacturing.
- Facilitating new commercial space so businesses could locate or expand.
- Providing opportunities for new housebuilding in order to retain and grow the population. Preparing and selling housing sites and master planning.
- Controlling development to protect the town’s future.
- Providing opportunities for people to experience and enjoy cultural activities

The

Council owned both the Captain Cook Shopping Centre and the Cleveland Centre.

- including events at the Town Hall, Centre Square and other venues.
- Promoting the town and the work of the Council.
- Supporting people to improve their skill levels and find work.
- Providing and managing the spaces for services to operate from and managing the Council's large portfolio of commercial assets including the shopping centres.

The direct impacts on the Council of the Directorate's work included increased Council Tax and Business Rates, reduced demand on public services, income from commercial lettings and sales and good publicity. However there was also sometimes controversy in relation to housing development or building new community centres, as well as complaints which were generally planning-related.

The presentation included some photographs showing examples of work ongoing to transform the centre of the town.

Level X had been open in the Captain Cook Square for some time and Inflatable Space and Fun Shack had opened more recently. A new restaurant – Bazaar – would also start trading in the next couple of weeks.

Improvements were being made around the Railway Station and Heritage Lottery funding and Council investment were being used to develop Exchange Square. Church House was being converted into 86 apartments.

Capital projects included Boho 11. A bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the redevelopment of the Old Town Hall had reached the final round and the outcome should be known by October 2024. The proposal was to turn it into a digital business centre.

Support to the business sector included TeesAmp which had been built and let by the Council and was now in the process of being sold. Support had also been provided to the Middlesbrough Digital Initiative to help companies grow and prosper within the Boho Zone.

The Cultural Partnership had its own investment prospectus and Central Library was currently being renovated.

In respect of Community Learning, the 50 Futures Project was in place for young people who needed work experience to come into the Council and get that experience they needed to help them get employment. The Community Learning Team were due to move into the developing Employment Hub in the Cleveland Centre.

A large portion of the Regeneration Directorate's work was in relation to housing development. Preparatory work had been completed on the Nunthorpe Grange site, which was owned by the Council, so that it could be brought to market. Bohouse 2 was another project that the Council had assisted with to ensuring that the town's housing needs were met.

The key issues currently for the Regeneration Directorate were as follows:

- Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC).
- Anti Social Behaviour (ASB).
- Construction costs versus Property values.
- Nutrient neutrality.
- Local Plan.
- Dwindling resources – capital and revenue.
- Adult learning contracts.
- Building control.
- Culture spend = venues only.
- Aging property portfolio with increasing risks.

In respect of the MDC, very little had happened since its inception due to an independent enquiry that had taken place into the Teesworks Joint Venture. The Council had been due to transfer land and property to the MDC but that had not yet happened. MDC were responsible for town centre regeneration and held the funding but there had been no progress.

The biggest issue for Middlesbrough in terms of regeneration currently was anti-social behaviour (ASB). Tenants in corporate and commercial buildings were raising this as a

barrier to investment, with companies saying they would leave Middlesbrough as a result of ASB.

Another issue was the cost of construction was disproportionately higher than the value of buildings once they were completed. As a result, commercial and private developers would not invest without gap funding from the public sector.

Nutrient Neutrality was another issue which was slowing down house building.

A new Local Plan had been developed although there were still a number of outstanding issues in relation to a site for Travellers. There was likely to be a public enquiry in 2025.

In terms of capital and revenue spend, the Council had dwindling resources since the TVCA and MDC now had these funding streams.

In respect of adult learning contracts, the Council received the same funding per outcome as it had for the last five years, but the price for someone to do the work had increased. There was a net loss on that work but the Council continued to try and manage it.

In relation to Building Control, the main issue was the recruitment of staff. Qualified people tended to work in the private sector due to better pay. The Council had to fill the gaps by using agency staff and through a partial merger with Stockton Council.

There was no longer any budget for events and the only cultural spend was on venues.

Finally, the Council had a large property portfolio and no budget to spend on repairs or maintenance.

In order to transform and save money, the Council was working on the following areas:

- Property rationalisation.
- Asset sales.
- Museum closure.
- Staff reductions.
- Property management arrangements.

Commercial assets such as TeesAmp and Middlesbrough House would be sold. The staffing budget for the Regeneration Directorate had been reduced by £360,000 in the current financial year. A lot of work had to be funded from external grants. There was a gradual reduction in staff numbers through not filling any vacant posts.

The Council held long leases on the Centre Square Buildings One and Two and they were being managed through the private sector. For Council managed lettings the difference in the amount of income was significant. Tenants did not always pay their rent on the basis that the Council would not force them to leave.

A Member asked whether Middlesbrough was on track to deliver its housing supply of 450 new homes per annum. The Director confirmed that traditionally Middlesbrough had always over-achieved its target. Due to Nutrient Neutrality and previous Council decisions, the flow of sites on to the market had slowed down. In two to three years' time it would be more difficult to get 450 homes built, unless the market improved. Actions would be taken by the Executive later this year to try and mitigate the slow down in house building.

Housing that Thirteen Group were building in the Grove Hill area of the Town also impacted the numbers but the Council had no control over their developments.

In relation to ASB there were a number of businesses or organisations, particularly based around Centre Square who were suffering. They were working together to combine their security resources to make a more effective team.

At the Chair's request, the Director identified ASB, culture spend and the Council's ageing property portfolio as his top three priorities for scrutiny.

The Head of Neighbourhoods gave a presentation on the Environment and Community

Services Directorate on behalf of the Director.

The Directorate included the following areas:

Neighbourhoods, including Environment Services

- Waste services and recycling: Domestic refuse, recycling and garden waste collections, collection of household bulky waste, waste disposal contract. Pest control.
- Area care: Green strategy, play areas, alley cleansing, grounds maintenance and animals and needles, street, trees and arboriculture, burials, parks maintenance.
- School Catering: Supporting 25 primary schools to provide healthy, nutritious meals.
- Libraries and Hubs: 9 hubs/libraries and 2 self service locations.
- Community Safety Partnership: Statutory body looking at strategic oversight of multi-agency approach to reducing crime and ASB.
- Neighbourhood Safety: Wardens, partnership working, CCTV, enforcement, support and referrals.
- Flying Squad: dealing with fly tipping and education people of the consequences.
- Volunteering: Staff volunteering day, supporting community volunteers and people who want to volunteer to work for the LA, linking in with 50 futures.
- Partnership working and community development: Building resilience, doing 'with' and not 'to' communities.
- Cohesion and Migration: Supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Helping them to understand British values.
- Bereavement Services: Crematorium and cemeteries .
- Parks: Maintenance and support to events.
- Coulby Farm: supporting animals and providing an excellent facility to the community.

Highways and Infrastructure

- Strategic Highways planning: Sustainable transport, road safety, parking services, traffic management (signs, lines and traffic calming), Highways development control (New developments and traffic modelling)
- Integrated Transport Unit: Home to school transport service (SEND transport, and low-income transport,) Adult Social Care transport and Children's Social Care transport.
- Highway engineers: Bridges and Structures, Highway Maintenance, vehicle crossings, highway inspections and intervention, 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.

Public Protection

- Trading Standards: Selling unsafe or dangerous items, fakes, pressuring people into buying something, scamming, carrying out poor quality or dangerous work (i.e. builders), selling restricted items (alcohol or cigarettes) to people who look underage without asking for ID.
- Environmental Health: Inspecting food premises, noise nuisance, contaminated land.

- Empty Properties: Open for access, contamination, cleanliness.
- Air and noise Quality: investigations into complaints.
- Selective Landlord Licencing: Schemes throughout Middlesbrough (North Ormesby, Newport).
- Licensing: Alcohol and entertainment, taxis, charitable collections, betting shops and amusement centres, street and market trading and scrap metal dealers.
- Gambling Policy.

Property and Commercial Services

- Transporter Bridge.
- Metz Bridge Travellers Site: Support to residents, rent collections.
- Council Buildings: Cleaning and security.

Priorities for the Directorate were:

- Support and enhance Council's transformation program.
- Introduce and develop neighbourhood working.
- Community safety plan and partnership implementation.
- Increase cleanliness of the town and its physical environment.
- Develop and implement green strategy.
- Tender for main waste disposal for post 2025/26.
- Reduce environmental crime.
- Reduce crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Maintain a robust approach with regard to trading standards.
- Improve A66 through Middlesbrough.
- Highways investment to improve roads.
- Library development.
- Bridge investment.
- Building cleaning, caretaking and security services.
- North East Migration Partnership.
- The Director was currently the regional lead on asylum and migration.
- The Director was also the lead on emergency planning.

A Member asked how successful the Selective Landlord Licensing scheme had been and whether it should be implemented in other areas of the town. The North Ormesby scheme had been running for over five years and people were wanting to stay living in the area now. In Newport there had been a positive impact and some reduction in crime and ASB which it was suggested was related to the scheme. Middlesbrough's Selective Landlord Licensing schemes did not just focus on the enforcement of those who did not get a licence. Properties had to be inspected and Council Officers took residents' welfare into consideration – checking that they were claiming all of their benefit entitlements, or whether they needed additional support in terms of adults or children's social care. A survey in North Ormesby at the beginning of the scheme had asked how likely residents were to stay in the area. In 2017 around 70% of young people who started in Year 1 at school did not stay in the area until Year 6. That figure had improved significantly by 2019 although there was still some transience of the population.

A Member asked whether the rota for alley cleaning could be shared with Councillors. It was agreed that this information could be shared but should not be made public. In response to a query about the success of the Council's Flying Squad, the Head of Neighbourhoods agreed to provide further information.

The Head of Neighbourhoods suggested that potential topics for scrutiny might include ASB and Crime, School Transport, Catering or Neighbourhoods.

The Chair thanked the Director and Head of Service for their presentations.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

6/24

SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

The Democratic Services Officer presented a report, the purpose of which was to assist Members of the Panel to consider and agree its work programme for the 2024-2025 Municipal Year.

A list of suggestions received in respect of the Scrutiny Panel's remit were contained in the submitted report. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel should select up to three topics to review.

Members discussed the suggestions received from Councillors, Council Officers, members of the public and the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Chair invited Panel Members to suggest topics at the meeting.

Following discussion, Panel Members agreed the following topics for review:

1. Empty Properties.
2. Barriers to Regeneration.
3. Home to School Transport.

Short Reviews:

4. Bereavement Services (in relation to diminishing cemetery space)
5. Provision for Migrants

The Panel also agreed to include the following updates in their work programme:

- Flood Risk Management.
- Toxic Chemicals in the River Tees/Crustacean Working Group.
- RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers) – annual update.
- Prevent and Channel – annual update.
- Community Safety Partnership – annual update.
- Medium Term Financial Plan Refresh for Regeneration and Environment and Community Services Directorates

A Task and Finish Group would be formed to review progress on actions from some previous investigations including: Green Strategy, Waste Recycling and Town Centre Regeneration post-Covid.

Throughout the last municipal year, the Environment Scrutiny Panel undertook a detailed investigation into Waste Management. It was agreed that a draft Final Report on Waste Management should be presented to the Place Scrutiny Panel for consideration at the earliest opportunity.

AGREED as follows that:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The topics listed at 1 to 5 above, would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

7/24

PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES FOR 2024-2025

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Place Scrutiny Panel for the 2024-2025 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

AGREED that the proposed meeting dates for 2023-2024 were approved.

8/24

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

29 July 2024

The Chair was not in attendance at the last Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting and therefore no update was provided.

The Chair did attend the Executive meeting on 24 July 2024 and presented the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel's Final Report on Planning Capacity, which was well received.

NOTED

9/24

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

None.