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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 15 June 2022.

**PRESENT:** Councillors J McTigue (Chair), D Branson, T Furness, B Hubbard, L Lewis and J Thompson

**OFFICERS:** S Lightwing, G Field and R Horniman

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Arundale, T Mawston and M Saunders

### 22/1 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

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

### 22/2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### 22/3 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 6 APRIL 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 6 April 2022 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

### 22/4 **OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND REGENERATION AND CULTURE SERVICE AREAS**

The Directors of Environment and Community Services and Regeneration and Culture were in attendance to provide an overview of their service areas.

The Regeneration Directorate covered the following areas of work that were under the remit of the Panel:

- Supported the business community to thrive.
- Supported key sectors to grow such as Digital and Advanced Manufacturing.
- Provided the network infrastructure for the town to grow.
- Built new commercial space so businesses could locate or expand.
- Provided opportunities for new housebuilding to retain population.
- Controlled development to protect the town's future.

In addition, the following work was undertaken by the Culture Directorate.

- Provided opportunities for people to experience/enjoy cultural activities.
- Oversaw the sport and leisure offer in the town.
- Promoted the town and the work of the Council.
- Supported people to improve their skill levels and find work.

Some of the work previously undertaken with the Business Community was now done by the Tees Valley Combined Authority, and the Council now had a focus on the Digital sector with TeesAmp and Boho.

The Council had a strategic overview of the road network and this had expanded to cover broadband and bus networks.

New commercial spaces in Middlesbrough included Centre Square, Boho and TeesAmp.

Whilst there was an aspiration to grow and retain the population, the Council also exercised some control over developments to ensure it happened in a coherent way.

The direct and positive impacts on the Council included increased income from Council Tax, business rates and commercial lettings. The commercial lettings were a key component of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as the generated income was in excess of the expenditure on the original developments.

However, the Regeneration Directorate also received complaints in relation to planning and parking and there was sometimes controversy around new cycle lanes and housing.

Transforming the centre of town was a current focus for the Directorate. The decline of high streets was a national issue and the Captain Cook Square was therefore being repurposed as a leisure destination. The Council was also working with developers on Church House which was a large building that had been empty for some time. Investment had been put into improving the heritage area near to the Rail Station.

Key business sectors such as hospitality had been supported by the Council with investment in Bedford and Baker Streets. The high quality business space available at TeesAmp had all been filled at the rental predicted. Approval for TeesAmp 2 was underway and there was a waiting list for rentals on completion. The Council also liaised with and supported the growing and successful Digital Sector in Middlesbrough.

Middlehaven continued to be re-developed with the Boho X building and a new school, college and housing developments underway.

The Middlesbrough Cultural Capital Investment Prospectus had been developed for economic purposes, setting out the Council's aims for the cultural sector which included transforming the Central Library.

In terms of the learning the 50 Futures initiative supported people to take up opportunities with the Council and other partners with the aim of getting them into employment.

Housing was often a controversial issue for the Council as it tried to get the best quality developments for the town through master planning. The Council also worked to bring Council sites to the market.

The big issues for Regeneration were highlighted as follows:

- Mayoral Development Corporation
- Construction costs rising
- Economic slump
- Planning Service capacity
- Nutrient neutrality
- Local Plan

The Mayoral Development Corporation would hopefully accelerate development in the town although the details of how this would work were not yet available.

Construction costs continued to rise and this affected every scheme planned by the Council. Some costs had risen 40% in a year and some schemes needed to be redesigned so that they could be funded. It was likely that the UK would be hit by an economic slump which would hit harder in Middlesbrough than the south east.

There had been a huge increase in planning applications through new developments and also home improvements and some changes were needed to the current Planning Service capacity.

Natural England had recently added Middlesbrough to the list of catchment areas for nutrient neutrality. Development that was not nutrient neutral in these areas would not be supported. All new planning applications for developments where an overnight stay was required were covered by this directive. Approval of planning applications would only be permitted when appropriate mitigation was in place.

Whilst there was some breathing space there could be issues for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan in future if new developments were not permitted. It was likely that Developers

would be forced into the expensive mitigation measures which could curtail development.

In relation to questions on the Local Plan, the Director clarified that the Council had a Local Plan in place which was fit for purpose and Middlesbrough was not running out of allocated land yet. A review of the previously drafted new Local Plan was underway.

It was suggested that there should be more promotion by the Council in relation to the developments taking place in Middlesbrough to enable members of the public to see the big picture and understand the Council's ambitions for the whole area. The Director confirmed that a draft plan had already been presented to Executive and was now being refined before being made public.

The Environment and Community Services Directorate covered a whole range of front line services in five areas:

- Environment Services.
- Highways and Infrastructure.
- Property and Commercial Services.
- Community Services.
- North East Migration Partnership.

The Director was the lead Chief Executive for the North East Migration Partnership which worked through the Home Office to coordinate, consult and work with other Councils about migration issues.

Environment Services included:

- Waste services and recycling: Domestic refuse, recycling and green waste collections, collection of household bulky waste, Waste Disposal Contract. Pest control.
- Area care: Green Strategy, Play areas, and alley cleansing, grounds maintenance and animals and needles, street, trees and arboriculture, burials, parks maintenance.

The Area Care team had been voted best team in the country by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE).

- School Catering. It was not compulsory for schools to use the Council's service.

Highways and Infrastructure included:

- 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

The Council maintained its own fleet and equipment which was multi skilled work from repairing grass strimmers to refuse wagons.

Property and Commercial Services included:

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

The Integrated Transport Unit organised transport of children to school either because of the distance they lived from school or special needs. The service transported some children with

complex needs and some who required oxygen bottles. Current issues included a significant increase in demand for the service, recruitment of staff and the availability of contractors.

Communities – although covered by another scrutiny panel there were also implications for the EDEI Scrutiny Panel - included:

- Enforcement.
- Flying Squad.
- Pest Control.
- Volunteers.

The Council had taken more action than previously and had had some success with this approach to enforcement. Middlesbrough now had 48 Street Wardens and 6 Environmental Wardens. Fly tipping was down 30% due to the more proactive approach which had included crushing vehicles. Regular active intelligence meetings were held with the Police and CCTV had been introduced at fly tipping hotspots. An Environment Flying Squad had been established to visit hotspots and react to fly tipping incidents.

A new Pest Control service for residents was being established and staff were currently being recruited.

The Director outlined the priorities for the Directorate as follows:

- Increase Cleanliness of the town and its physical Environment.
- Develop and Implement Green Strategy.
- Tender for Main waste Disposal for post 2025/26.
- Increase recycling.
- Transporter Bridge.
- Improve Highways Assets.
- Light up the Town.
- Provide efficient and effective front line services post pandemic.
- Implement Towns fund.
- Reduce Environmental Crime.

The Council was currently in the tender process to develop a Waste disposal site for post 2025/26 to replace Haverton Hill which would become redundant. This was a significant piece of work with other Tees Valley authorities to build a facility to last 25 years.

In relation to increasing recycling rates it was suggested that school children could be invited to take part in litter picking with the reward of a monthly prize for those who picked up the most litter.

In order to address the priorities, initiatives for this year included:

- Explore outcomes of Environment Bill and its implications for Middlesbrough.
- Implement the Green Strategy.
- Improve A66 through Middlesbrough.
- Highways investment to improve roads.
- Plant another 10,000 trees. (Tree planting days).
- Increase wildflower coverage across Middlesbrough.
- Expand wild spaces across the town and introduce more growing spaces.
- Transporter Bridge investment.
- Light up key buildings across the town.
- Front Garden Competition.
- Community Growing Areas.
- Play areas in conjunction with the Towns Fund.

The Environment Bill would introduce a requirement for food waste collection as well as year round green waste collection. Deposit return schemes would also be reintroduced which should have a positive effect on recycling rates.

Members discussed the current use of allotments within the town and also the introduction of community growing areas and some of the issues associated with both. It was suggested that

this could be a topic for the Panel to consider within its work programme.

**AGREED** that the information provided was received and noted.

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### **SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023**

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 2022-2023 Municipal Year.

A list of topical issues and the 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 one or two topics for full review along with several short topics and updates.

It was highlighted that two updates from last year's Work Programme: Waste Management/Waste Disposal Facility and City Fibre's broadband installation in Middlesbrough, had had to be postponed and could be re-scheduled for this year if the Panel required.

Members discussed the information provided by Officers at the meeting, the topics suggested in the report and suggestions received from members of the public and the service areas.

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

#### **Main Topic:**

1. Improving and Enhancing the Physical Environment Town-Wide.

This scrutiny review will focus on the following areas:

- Environmental Enforcement/Fly Tipping.
- Damage to grass verges.
- Tree Replacement Programme.
- Enforcement of Planning Conditions.
- Pest Control Service.
- Allotments.
- Empty Properties.

#### **Short Reviews/Updates:**

2. Teesside Crematorium.
3. Flood Risk Management.
4. Local Plan.
5. Town Centre Strategy - Update on Future High Streets/Towns Fund.
6. Mayoral Development Corporation.
7. Income to the Council from Housing/Potential impact of increased development costs.
8. Housing – impact on health and wellbeing.

**AGREED** as follows that:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The topics listed at 1 to 8 above, would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

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### **PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2022/2023**

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel for the 2022-2023 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

**AGREED** that the proposed meeting dates for 2022-2023 were approved.

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

Final Report on the Green Strategy

The Panel's Final Report on the Green Strategy had been presented to the Executive at a meeting held on 14 June 2022 and deferred at the Chair's request so that some further suggestions could be considered by the Panel.

Additional Meetings

The Chair asked Panel Members for their views on holding additional meetings of the Scrutiny Panel to assist with completing the work programme. It was noted that these did not need to be formal meetings.