

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member for Finance and Governance

DATE OF MEETING: 18 January 2023

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members on areas of activity within my portfolio including performance against strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Strategic Priority: *We will ensure the recovery of local communities, businesses and the Council's operations from COVID-19, taking opportunities to build back better.*

Update:

- 1.1. Since our last meeting held on 30th November 2022, we have progressed with the public consultation of the 2023/24 budget saving proposals and public feedback is being collated.
- 1.2. In conjunction with the public consultation, I have met with group leaders of almost all political groups at this stage to obtain whatever feedback might exist on the saving proposals presented and in particular to facilitate a dialogue between executive and group structures on what level of council tax rise would be politically acceptable as well as pragmatically acceptable when considering the intertwined issues of council resource requirements and residents whom may already be struggling financially. Feedback and discussions have been useful, and I intend to continue this dialogue.
- 1.3. As I mentioned in my previous report, on the 17th November the Chancellor announced in his autumn budget statement that councils were allowed to raise the overall council tax collection from 2.99% (including the adult social care precept) to 4.99%. Since this time the government have also announced provisional settlement for local councils. Whilst overall the settlement figures represent a 9% increase from the previous year for all councils, the specific impact on Middlesbrough Council is being analysed by council officers to incorporate within our MTFP. Some of the challenge of additional income as I understand it is that some grants (and any increase within those grants) are essentially ringfenced and any increase cannot necessarily be utilised to reduce budget savings, although the full impact of the provisional settlement is yet to be determined.
- 1.4. Regardless of the increase, my view is that the funding of social care in general is still a fundamental challenge for Middlesbrough Council for a variety of

factors, including the lack of adequate funding from central government which ultimately appears to have little relationship with demand and cost drivers.

- 1.5. During the time from our last meeting some progress has been made on the governance improvement plan however due to the Christmas break and the shorter meeting date of this meeting there are no material updates to provide at this stage other than to confirm that we are progressing with the journey, and this is detailed further in the governance plan improvement report contained within this agenda pack.
- 1.6. I am keen in my role to be as front footed as possible to understand and where possible plan for fundamental issues before they arise. With this in mind I have had a pay briefing from council officers regarding national pay negotiations which are occurring for 2023/24. As members may be aware, for the year 2022/23 the final pay settlement was a flat pro-rata increase of £1,925 which was backdated to April 2022. For the next year, national negotiations on potential pay increases have commenced with inflation in particular being a foundation upon which unions are making their representations for pay increases. Depending upon the outcome, the result could have a significant impact on our MTFP and as such this is a subject I am closely monitoring providing feedback on via the official channels which remain open to us.
- 1.7. On the 14th December I held a single member executive decision on 3 items – approving the annual equality and exclusion report, approving the surveillance policy and finally approving the corporate food poverty policy. The new policy provides an holistic approach in line with our welfare strategy to residents seeking support and significantly improves the councils links with voluntary groups who are vital partners in ensuring not only that our strategic goals are delivered but in ensuring that residents in need have the best possible support when they ask for assistance.

HIGHLIGHTS

On Friday 6th January I met with an assessor from CSE to discuss an application submitted by the Revenues and Benefits services within Resident and Business Support successfully for Customer Service Excellence accreditation.

It is with great delight that I can announce that following our assessment day on Friday we have received confirmation from Hugh Keachie that we have maintained our CSE accreditation, and that he is recommending that we receive approval for 11 separate Compliance-Plus elements.

This is a testament to the brilliant work performed by this team over a challenging few years. Even when the resources of this team are being utilised by the various central government supports which have been made available to residents they have been continuously learning and using their experience to help inform policy on forward thinking items such as the welfare strategy.

NAME Councillor Stefan Walker

DATE 9 January 2023