

## ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

**A meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel was held on 10 July 2023.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Ryles (Chair); Councillors: Ewan, Grainge, Morrish and S Platt.

**OFFICERS:** J Dixon and G Field.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Banks and Nugent.

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

### **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL – 22 MARCH 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 22 March 2023 were submitted for information and noted.

### **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL – 23 MARCH 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 23 March 2023 were submitted for information and noted.

### **OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

G Field, Director of Environment and Community Services, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an overview of the services within the Directorate, which fell within the Panel's remit, and to highlight the key priorities for the year ahead which the Panel may wish to consider when planning its work programme at the next meeting.

Environment and Community Services covered the following areas:-

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

The Panel was provided with information in relation to each of the above areas, as follows:-

#### Environment Services

- Waste Services and Recycling – This service provided collection of domestic household waste, recycling and green waste as well as the collection of bulky household items (by arrangement), pest control and the Waste Disposal Contract.

The Panel was informed that Middlesbrough Council was part of a procurement exercise being undertaken alongside the Tees Valley local authorities (Stockton, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool Councils), as well as Newcastle and Durham Councils to procure an operator for a new Energy from Waste facility. Middlesbrough Council's current waste disposal contract with the Energy from Waste plant located at Haverton Hill was due to expire in 2025 and succeeded by the joint waste management contract, with the other north east councils. It was anticipated that the new facility would be built on land at Teesworks near Redcar and be operational from 2026. The contract to run the facility on behalf of the Councils would be for a

period of 24 years, with an option to extend. It was hoped that further details regarding a successful bidder would be available by early 2024.

- Area Care – Responsible for the Green Strategy; cleaning and maintenance of play areas, alleyways, grounds maintenance, streets, trees and arboriculture, parks maintenance and burials. Also included safe and appropriate disposal of dead animals and needles.
- School Catering – The majority of schools now had contracts with external catering providers.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member queried the current position regarding the standards of grass cutting and weeding across the town and whether Councillors could provide this information to residents who had raised it as an issue. The Director explained that the frequency of grass cutting and weed spraying had been reduced due to available resources. Weed spraying had decreased from three to four times per year to once or twice per year and that the strength of weedkiller permitted for use had reduced which meant that it was not as effective.
- A Panel Member stated that he had received complaints regarding grass cuttings not being blown away/collected and the Director confirmed that staffing levels no longer allowed for blowers to be used and that the grass was only cut.
- Reference was made to alley cleansing and it was explained that this was undertaken with mechanical brushes. It was acknowledged that complete alley cleansing was no longer undertaken due to limited resources and discussion took place amongst the Panel as to how residents could be encouraged to collectively keep their own space clean and tidy, perhaps following a one-off clean. The Director added that there were some excellent examples of alleys that residents looked after themselves and that various initiatives had been tried over the years to improve the condition and appearance of alleys.
- Reference was made to some business using residential communal bins in alleys which led to overflowing bins. The Director stated that this should be reported to environment services so that checks could be made on business waste certificates.

#### Highways and Infrastructure

- Highways Engineers – The strategic element of highways (such as infrastructure) was the responsibility of the Regeneration Directorate and the Environment Directorate maintained highways as well as bridges, structures and vehicle crossings. The service undertook highway inspections and intervention, dealt with flooding issues, beck maintenance, highway emergency response, winter maintenance (including gritting and snow clearance) and street lighting.
- Fleet Services – Responsible for servicing and maintenance of 200+ Council vehicles.
- In terms of maintenance of bridges and structures, it was highlighted that Middlesbrough Council took responsibility for maintaining the Transporter Bridge and that Stockton Council took responsibility for maintaining Newport Bridge, as both were jointly owned by both authorities.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- It was queried how it was defined which highways Middlesbrough Council was responsible for, with particular reference to the A66. The Director explained that in terms of the A66, Middlesbrough Council was responsible for the part that fell within Middlesbrough's boundary, however, the part within Stockton's boundary was maintained by the Highway Agency as it was deemed to be part of the strategic network as it included the part leading from the A19.
- In response to a question regarding potholes, the Panel was advised that a pothole was defined as being a hole in the ground that could cause damage to vehicles or the road network. It was acknowledged that despite additional investment, the condition of Middlesbrough's roads had deteriorated. The Council was unable to undertake major resurfacing works as it did not have the necessary equipment and contractors had to be brought in for such projects. The Council

carried out patching up works.

- It was highlighted that further information, if appropriate, could be provided to a future Panel meeting in relation to potholes in terms of how works are prioritised and costings.

#### Property and Commercial Services

- Transporter Bridge – Further information regarding making the bridge operational again was anticipated by the end of the year.
- Metz Bridge Travellers Site.
- Building Maintenance and Project Management.
- Building Cleaning, Caretaking and Security Services – this included Town Hall, Bus station and schools.
- Operational management of Bereavement Services.
- Lead on Emergency Planning.

#### Stronger Communities

- Libraries and hubs.
- Community Safety Partnership.
- Neighbourhood Safety (including Street Wardens).
- Locality Working – currently operating in Newport, North Ormesby and Hemlington, bringing together a range of Council and partner services operating at neighbourhood level.
- Migration – Middlesbrough Council hosted the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) which provided strategic leadership and support in relation to migration issues across the North East, reporting directly to the North East Councils' Chief Executives, Leaders and Elected Mayors.
- Enforcement – Part of the environmental enforcement was undertaken by the Flying Squad.
- Flying Squad – This was established following covid restrictions to tackle fly tipping and was working well. Significant numbers of fines had been issued and successful prosecutions of fly tippers.
- Pest Control – In May 2022, the Executive agreed to the re-introduction of a subsidised domestic pest control service, however, this decision was later reversed as part of the Council's raft of budget savings.

#### Priorities

The Panel was advised that the following areas were priorities for the Directorate:-

- To increase the cleanliness of the town and its physical environment.
- Tender for main waste disposal post 2025/26.
- Provide efficient and effective frontline services.
- Reduce environment crime.
- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour – whilst levels of anti-social behaviour had decreased, further reductions needed to be achieved.
- Explore outcome of the Environment Bill and its implications for Middlesbrough – this included a

new directive for compulsory food waste collections and consideration would need to be given as to how this would be collected and recycled. Further details were awaited on the Bill.

- Implement the Green Strategy – The Council had pledged to become carbon neutral, as an organisation, by 2029 and for the whole town to become carbon neutral by 2039.
- Improve A66 through Middlesbrough – considerable work was required.
- Highways investment to improve roads.
- Library development - £2.5 million grant funding had been obtained to transform the Central Library into a children's hub to create a rounded family offering including craft area and furnishings.
- Bridge investment.
- Community growing areas.
- Update Community Safety Plan and Partnership.
- Expand locality working.

In response to a query as to whether the Council had explored options around hydrogen power, the Director advised that the Tees Valley Combined Authority was leading on this and a hydrogen transport hub was being developed in the Tees Valley. In terms of the Council's vehicle fleet, current thinking was that large vehicles were best suited to hydrogen power, with small vehicles using electricity. Exploration around levels and locations of electric vehicle charging points was also ongoing.

The Director was thanked for attending and for the information provided.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted and that the Panel consider the priorities highlighted in the context of potential review topics for its Work Programme which would be considered at the Panel's next meeting.

#### **PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES FOR THE 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Environment Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

**AGREED** that future meetings of the Environment Scrutiny Panel would take place on the following dates, all at 10.00am:-

- Tuesday, 12 September 2023
- Monday, 9 October 2023
- Monday, 13 November 2023
- Monday, 11 December 2023
- Monday, 15 January 2024
- Monday, 5 February 2024
- Monday, 4 March 2024
- Tuesday, 2 April 2024