

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 10 April 2024.

**PRESENT:** Councillors M Storey (Chair), J Kabuye (Vice-Chair), J Banks, I Blades, E Clynch, S Dean, J Ewan, M McClintock, J Platt, M Smiles and J Young

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors N Walker and C Cooke - Elected Mayor

**OFFICERS:** S Bonner and D Middleton

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors J Ryles and J Walker

23/77 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

23/78 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 28 FEBRUARY 2024**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 28 February 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

23/79 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 MARCH 2024**

Cllr McClintock clarified he was not present at the meeting of 6 March 2024.

With the amendment above the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6 March 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

**\*\* SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES - ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**ORDERED:** that in accordance with section 4.57 of the Council Procedure Rules, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business to consider agenda item 6, Budget Consultation, as the next item of business.

23/80 **BUDGET CONSULTATION FEEDBACK 2024**

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Finance and Governance and the Director of Finance to the meeting and invited the Executive Member to deliver her presentation.

The budget consultation process had been short due to several factors including the amount of work required to close the budget gap and the timing of the local government settlement from government.

Following agreement by Executive to go out to consultation there was extensive online consultation with the public. The Communications Team approached this well by explaining complicated issues in plain English. There was also a Let's Talk email address the public could use to send views or ask questions.

There were four in-person consultation events held in the North, South, East and West of the town that were attended by approximately 90 residents. The sessions were led by the Mayor and Executive Member for Finance and Governance. Senior Officers also attended to offer detailed technical information where required. The largest event was Acklam library at which local TV news attended.

There was a need to review how to deliver the in-person consultation sessions as there was some disruption from members of the public who asked questions not related to the budget. There were also instances of Members posing unrelated questions at the sessions despite their attendance being observational. Overall, however, there were lots of challenging questions posed and good suggestions which included different ways of operating the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum. There was a lot more understanding about the budget proposals when the Council's financial position was put into context.

The consultation was also promoted on social media. There were 10 social media posts that had an estimated reach of 36,525 people. All Members were provided with details of the budget consultation so this could then be shared with their residents. The consultation was also included on the Council newsletter that was sent to over 44,390 people with some 12,792 opening it.

The Mayor and Executive Member both participated in media appearances with the Mayor appearing on local TV and the Exec Member appearing on BBC Radio Tees. These were accompanied by formal press releases.

The consultation also included targeted consultation with groups affected by the proposals, including Social Care proposals as well with the Northeast Chamber of Commerce.

Members were actively engaged with the budget consultation process, with several briefing sessions being held. Member training was held specifically around the budget setting process and Executive Members and the Mayor had attended OSB and individual scrutiny panels.

In terms of responses to the consultation, there had been 1,171 responses to the online questionnaire which was the highest response rate in the previous five years. Notes had been taken at the public consultation events, with one proposal about community grants being made by a member of OSB. There was also a suggestion made by a back bench member about refuse collection.

Several budget proposals were opposed by 40% or more of residents. These included car park charges at Stewart Park which was withdrawn from consideration and the closure of Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, which was deferred for further work to be undertaken.

Scrutiny also suggested about community grants and the provision for small grants to individuals and community groups to review the grants process.

The Executive Member invited questions from the Board.

A Member queried if anything could be done different for the next consultation. It was commented that the public facing sessions may have benefited from a central location. However, it was also commented that, despite some disruption, previous consultation sessions had taken place without incident, and it would be a shame if the consultation sessions were not taken to the community. It was also stated the sessions needed to greater degree of formality as some questions were not relevant to the budget. It was suggested that a statement could be made at future sessions.

The Chair commented that having the consultation take place in the community was important and that security in all Council settings was important. It was also clarified that the public consultation sessions were not for Members as there were separate arrangements for them.

A Member commented that Acklam Library was a small venue for one of the sessions.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Finance and Governance for the presentation.

**NOTED**

23/81

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - THE MAYOR**

The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting and invited him to deliver his presentation. The topics covered in the presentation included responses from previous OSB meetings, the Budget and Council Strategy.

In terms of the Council's new strategy and its approach to transformation the approach was Recover, Reset, Deliver. The recover element included issues faced to date, the Best Value Notice, and the corporate governance improvement journey. There was a need to redress the balance between what was spent on Social Care versus other services. Reset included acknowledging what the Council did well and Deliver included how to deliver services differently.

Regarding the Improvement and Governance journey, there remained political challenges including the letter inviting government intervention and the lack of unanimity on the budget vote.

The Crown Nightclub had also featured in the press because of the Audit report into its purchase. There was a need not to repeat this and subsequent agreements had overage agreements applied to them.

In terms of the Mayor's priorities, the Council Plan was separated into three general priorities; for Middlesbrough to be Healthier, More Ambitious and Safer. While it was difficult to visualise how the Mayor's priorities translated into operational actions, as such a workplan had been created for this purpose which was shown to members as part of the presentation.

In terms of levelling up, the services in the Live Well Centre were to be relocated to the Cleveland Centre which offered the opportunity to expand those services and introduce new ones which was explained as part of the presentation.

In order to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour there was an intention to move the CCTV control room to another location due to the potential sale of the Bus Station. In order to tackle motorbike related ASB crime there was an aim to install kick rails in as many open spaces as possible to mitigate this. In addition, there was an intention to increase the amount of CCTV as there were several places across the town that were not covered by current provision as well as the installation of 200 additional street light columns.

There was also a need to focus on temporary accommodation and bringing back properties where possible.

The Mayor invited questions from the Board.

A Member queried which projects were the Mayor's priority. While there were general areas including Health Inequalities and ASB, the SHiFT programme in Children's Services was a key priority project.

It was queried if the deliverables of the Council Plan Workplan had the details about how they would be delivered. The Mayor commented that when considering the budget there had been a lot of attention paid to cuts. However, there was also a need to focus on how to grow services.

A Member asked what was being done about empty properties in the town. It was clarified that an empty property strategy was being created, especially as one social landlord was in possession of approximately 500 empty properties.

It was asked if services moving into the Cleveland Centre would take over all the Cleveland Centre or would they be spaced out. It was clarified that services in the Cleveland Centre would be centralised where possible. A discussion took place regarding how improving areas around schools could be inspirational for children.

When asked about the Council's strategy for migration it was commented that this formed part of the community cohesion element of the Council Plan.

In terms of tackling Anti-Social Behaviour, it was asked if any other councils used drones for this purpose and if it successful. It was confirmed that other councils had used drones to tackle Anti-Social behaviour as well as the police. If the Council wanted to deploy drones, they currently relied on the police for this. By having this facility in-house would provide a greater level of flexibility.

Members also queried what reputational damage the letter inviting government intervention and opposition votes to the budget had caused. It was clarified that the letter had little impact with the Government, however the opposition to the budget was difficult to ascertain as there was a desire for unanimity from the government.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for his presentation.

**NOTED.**

23/82

#### **FINAL REPORT OF THE REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL - PLANNING CAPACITY**

The Chair of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel presented the Panel's Final Report and draft recommendations in relation to its review of Planning Capacity.

The Board was asked to consider the following recommendations:

- a) The Council should ensure that the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service's Development Management Review are implemented in full to ensure that the Planning Service continues to be able to meet government performance targets in relation to decision-making.
- b) Implementation of the PAS recommendations in relation to the following should be prioritised and enhanced:
  - i. The Development Control Team should work together from the office in Fountains Court for a minimum of one day each week. Practical barriers to team working, for example, "block booking" space in the shared office should be addressed without delay.
  - ii. Continue to embed the Agile Planning system and recently acquired Power BI system into the DM process, make time to provide (and maintain) a practical guide to the system for case officers.
- c) Dedicated training is provided for staff to enable them to use the relevant specialist IT systems to their full potential.
- d) Consideration be given to inviting the Planning Advisory Service to undertake a full review of the Planning Service to include Planning and Development Committee, Planning Enforcement or the Appeals Process.

- e) Create a new Highways Officer post within the Planning Services Structure to provide a dedicated resource and as far as possible, eliminate delay in the planning application process.
- f) Investigate with the other Tees Valley Local Authorities whether there is potential to create a shared pool of statutory consultees who have expertise in the relevant disciplines such as highways, drainage, design, ecology and arboriculture.
- g) Explore with the Council's Human Resources Service whether, in addition to current recruitment practice, there are any further opportunities to more widely promote vacant posts, such as the enforcement posts, in the Planning Service.
- h) Give consideration to establishing a pooled enforcement team of specialist officers to work together to address all areas of enforcement that fall within the Council's remit. This could be particularly helpful where multiple issues of non-compliance related to the same individual or property.
- i) In conjunction with the Council's Digital Team review whether the information provided on the Council's website in relation to the town's conservation areas can be given a higher profile and/or made more user-friendly, to better inform residents who might be considering alterations to their properties and potentially reduce the numbers of enforcement cases.

Members agreed the report was interesting and brought issues to their attention they were previously unaware of. The Board expressed its thanks to all involved in its creation.

**ORDERED** that the findings and recommendations of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

23/83

#### **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive, as outlined in Appendix A to the report. The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board or referred to a scrutiny panel.

#### **NOTED**

23/84

#### **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board invited Scrutiny Panel Chairs to provide their updates.

##### Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel

The next meeting of the Panel was scheduled for Monday 15 April where Members would receive information relating the Panel's review into school attendance. Given the position of Middlesbrough's schools in attendance league tables it was worth exploring the topic as much as possible.

##### Health Scrutiny

The Panel last met on March 19 where the panel received information from representatives from NHS North of England relating to preventable deaths. Data was presented that showed there was no improvement to this situation. The Panel also received information about future of the ICB with presentations show concerning healthier living with a focus on alcohol and drug use.

##### Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

The Panel met on 20 March at which the Panel received information from Mr. Martin Peagam representing the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum Trust. At the meeting the panel discussed the future of the museum.

**NOTED**

23/85

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

A Member raised an issue regarding the helpline for the new waste collection regime. It was clarified there was an ongoing issue with the phone systems whereby if phone queues exceeded 60 minutes callers were cut off automatically. A Member stated they had information relating to this situation and would circulate this to the Board.

**AGREED** that information relating to the helpline relating to refuse collection be circulated to Members.