

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 31 July 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors: Blades (Chair), Kabuye (Vice Chair), Branson, Coupe, Ewan, Hubbard, McClintock, Morrish, Saunders and Wilson.

OFFICERS: S Bonner, J Dixon, E Scollay and A Wilson.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: S Lightwing – Democratic Services
M Davies – MVDA
S Sullivan – Member of the public

PRESENT BY INVITATION: C Cooke – Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough and Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Banks, Clynch, Lewis, Smiles and J Walker.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair welcomed those present and advised that as there were no scheduled tests, should the fire alarm sound, attendees should evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 26 JUNE 2024

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 26 June 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the item for the Board's consideration. A copy of the Work Programme was attached at Appendix A and Members were asked to raise any issues they had in relation to any of the items listed.

Reference was made to the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board when a discussion had taken place around how it could best have input into issues prior to a decision being made by the Executive and it was queried whether this had been fed back to the Executive and whether any comments had been received. It was confirmed that this would be followed up as soon as possible.

A discussion took place in relation to the items contained on the Executive Forward Work Programme and further information was requested, as follows:-

- Page 8 – "Management and Maintenance of Development Land/Nutrient Neutrality Mitigation. The report seeks Executive approval of the resources required to maintain land held prior to disposal/development and the management of land held fallow as part of the Nutrient Neutrality mitigation measures. Report seeks management resources to be capitalised as an abnormal cost to disposal receipts".

Update requested in relation to the above together with further details around what the report to Executive in November would entail. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to contact the

relevant Service Area to request further information around: what the decision concerned; why the decision was being sought and whether the decision was driven by government policy.

- Page 5 “Community Safety Enforcement Powers for the Executive Member to approve proposals to withdraw Neighbourhood Warden Police Accreditation Powers”.

Members were keen to understand more about the decision being sought and the reasons why. The Mayor was able to provide a brief summary regarding the issue, in that the current accreditation scheme had been outsourced which was having a detrimental impact on recruitment. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to seek further information from the Service Area.

AGREED that further information be obtained from the relevant service areas in relation to the two items identified above from the Executive Forward Work Programme and circulated to Members of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

The Mayor was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Board with an update regarding his portfolio in relation to Adult Social Care and Public Health.

The Mayor provided a detailed presentation covering the following areas of responsibility within his current portfolio, which he anticipated to be of most interest to the Board due to their scope and capacity:-

- Connect Service
- Sensory Drop In
- Levick Court
- Homelessness
- Health on the High Street
- Relationship between health and wealth in Middlesbrough
- Three conversations approach

The Mayor advised the Board that a new Executive Member would be appointed in the near future to take over this particular portfolio due to the Mayor’s extensive range of commitments.

Connect Service

The Board was advised that the Connect Service in Middlesbrough currently supported 3,600 people to live independently by providing on-call emergency assistance twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, via a personal alarm.

The Service was available to anyone in Middlesbrough over the age of 18 who might feel vulnerable or unsafe at home; have a disability or medical condition.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Service had answered 98,148 calls and had responded to 2,432 emergency calls (1,505 of which were falls).

The Connect Service used a range of technology to support individuals, including fall sensors, GPS trackers and property exit sensors, epilepsy sensors and activity monitoring systems. This technology was a key factor in enabling people to remain living independently in their own homes. The Mayor hoped that in the future technology would evolve further to a point where the Service would be commercially viable to offer support to others within the Tees Valley.

Members were provided with an example case study outlining how an Assistive Technology Assessor, Social Worker and Occupational Therapist had worked collaboratively to assess a service user for their support needs. Technology, including a voice-activated alarm, had resulted in

the number of overnight calls from the service user being reduced – restoring their dignity. The Occupational Therapist had supported the service user with single-handed care, reducing the need for carers for a significant amount of the day and this had resulted in a £100,000 a year saving.

Sensory Drop-In

The Sensory Support Service provided advice and support to Middlesbrough residents with hearing or sight loss or dual sensory loss. The Mayor stated that many areas no longer offered such support and considered it to be a vital service in Middlesbrough.

The Service would move from the Livewell Centre located in Dundas Arcade to the new facility in the Cleveland Centre once it was completed.

A monthly drop-in service was launched in 2021, with 30 drop-ins held so far. Around 289 individuals attended each month which provided a sense of community and social outlet whilst supporting individuals to access sensory assessments, equipment, health and wellbeing activities and digital inclusion. Again, the services provided helped to promote independent living.

Levick Court

The Mayor advised that Levick Court was a 16-bed facility, currently operating at half capacity, which was a valuable provision to the Adult Social Care assessment service.

Due to operating at low capacity and the financial pressures that the Council was under, work had been ongoing with relevant partners to explore the re-provisioning of Levick Court in order to fully utilise the building.

Staff consultation was ongoing regarding two potential options to re-purpose the unit via working with the NHS and a viable operating model was close to being identified.

Homelessness

Sadly, there had been a rise in homelessness in Middlesbrough and the Mayor provided information regarding several initiatives within the Homelessness Service that provided support.

- Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

This was a Government-led scheme providing capital and revenue funding aiming to supply good quality accommodation to address gaps in homelessness pathway provision. SHAP targeted two groups – those with long histories of rough sleeping or complex needs, to help them recover from rough sleeping; and vulnerable young people (aged 18-24) at risk of, or experiencing, rough sleeping. The focus was to provide longer-term accommodation.

In Middlesbrough, joint bids with three local housing providers and Middlesbrough Council had been made to secure funding to purchase and renovate a number of properties for this purpose.

- New Temporary Accommodation

It was recognised that more family homes/family-focussed units were needed to avoid reliance on hotels and hostels, particularly as Newport and Penrith Road hostels tended to continually be at full capacity. There would be a focus on bringing as many empty properties as possible back into use.

- Front Door, Community Interventions and Housing Solutions Teams

The Housing Solutions Team provided help and support to those who were homeless. Amongst the range of support available, the service would help to find accommodation

through the Tees Valley Home Finder, (shortly to be joined by Thirteen Housing bringing all providers together in one place) and drop-in sessions were available.

- Open Door

This was a twice-weekly drop-in session undertaking preventative work with those that had 'leave to remain' status.

- Pathways

This service offered support to care experienced young people leaving care. It provided, amongst other things, support in long term planning for independent living.

- Tees Valley Home Finder Common Allocation Policy

This Policy was to be reviewed with a briefing for Members and consultation due to commence in late summer. Changes to the policy would aim to address unfairness in housing allocation as there was currently no priority for rough sleepers over housed individuals.

- Rough Sleepers Action

Attendance from multiple agencies had grown in strength to address rough sleeping.

Health on the High Street

The Mayor updated the Board in relation to the Health on the High Street Initiative.

There had been a decline in traditional retail in Middlesbrough town centre and a decision was taken to relocate the Live Well Centre from the Dundas Arcade into empty units within the Cleveland Centre. Existing services would be moved across once refurbishment was complete as well as other services including NHS Services, pop-up hubs by Teesside University and dedicated youth and family space. It was anticipated that the health offering would include dentistry which would relocate from the currently under-utilised service at the University.

The benefits of relocating the existing and new services to the Cleveland Centre included:-

- Revitalising the High Street – through increased footfall, diversification and a community hub. There would also be a significant cost saving to the Council as it owned the Cleveland Centre.
- Improving public health and addressing social detriments of health– increased accessibility, greater prevention and early intervention, promoting healthy lifestyles.

In terms of the relationship between health and wealth in Middlesbrough, the Board heard that breaking the cycle of health inequalities in Middlesbrough to reduce the impact of poor health was crucial.

Three Conversation Approach

As part of Middlesbrough Council's Transformation Programme – Recover, Reset and Deliver - Adult Social Care would adopt the Three Conversations model which was a 'strengths based' person-centred approach.

The model had been used in other local authorities including Blackpool who, after a thirteen-week period, reported staff feeling less frustrated with the inflexibility of previous processes and more empowered to make decisions as well as service users responding well to being listened to differently.

This approach worked by:-

- 1) Listening to the individual and understanding what really mattered to them then connecting them to resources and supports that would help them to get on with their chosen daily lives independently.
- 2) Working intensively with people in crisis, putting together an emergency plan with colleagues to help individuals regain control of their lives by making urgent changes.
- 3) Building a good life – finding out what a ‘good life’ looked like for the individual and identifying what resources, connections and support would enable them to live their chosen life.

In order to deliver the Three Conversations model, two teams would work as they wished, using the approach, from innovation sites created for a 13-week period. One team would work with existing cases and the other would work with new cases.

Going forward, in terms of practice improvement to ensure better outcomes and savings, prediction into prevention would be developed using AI. For example prediction of frailty and knowing at what point intervention was required to prevent detrimental impacts on individuals. Prediction work was used by GPs and this could be integrated with Adult Social Care to prevent escalation. The software used would match against care plans and health records.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to how to access the dentistry service at Teesside University, it was explained that patients generally needed to be registered with an NHS dentist and referred, however, there was scope to take some allocation without a referral.
- A Panel Member raised the issue of housing allocations and the current banding system which appeared to be unfair. The Mayor stated that the banding system was being reviewed and that currently not a high enough priority was given to those who were sleeping on the streets.
- A Member asked what impact Government proposals to abolish Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions might have. Section 21, or ‘no fault’ evictions, allowed a landlord to evict a tenant by giving them two months’ notice without a reason. The Mayor responded that Section 21 notices were difficult for local authorities to deal with and blanket bans were not the way to deal with problem tenants. Even if Section 21 was abolished immediately it would not solve the housing waiting list problems.
- Reference was made to the Connect Service and it was queried whether there was a direct charge to the resident. It was confirmed that this was the case and that the cost started from £6.40 per week for the alarm and 24/7 response package. Packages could be tailored to suit each individual’s needs and those in receipt of certain benefits may be eligible for help towards the cost.
- A Board Member asked whether there was any update in relation to Adult Social Care spending. Members had previously been advised that approximately 83% of the Council’s total budget was spent on Adult and Children’s Social Care. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration responded that last year’s Adult Social Care revenue budget was £50,000 but the figure for the current year was not yet available. The Service’s total gross spend (including salaries, communications etc) was £109,000. Last year, there had been a slight underspend on one of the budgets. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Care had stated that in 2023/24, 72% of Councils had overspent. Part of the spring survey on Adult Social Care showed that the national figure for Adult Social Care spending was 37.2% of a Council’s total spend. This had risen from 36% the previous year. Middlesbrough had spent up to 2.8% more on adult social care than the national average, however, Middlesbrough’s health profile and demographics needed to be taken into account.
- In relation to the Three Conversations model, the Director explained that this particular model

was being used by 50 local authorities and would transform the way in which adult social care services were delivered. It would introduce a framework to ensure Social Workers had a consistent approach and could build up good relationships with individuals by finding out what their priorities were and what help they needed, rather than referring them to providers for services and care that they did not want. It would also enable Social Workers to work with more people, all of which would result in cost reductions. It was hoped that this approach would encourage better working within communities and with community organisations, such as MVDA. The Chair highlighted that the Chief Executive of MVDA was in attendance to observe the meeting and would attend a future meeting of OSB to provide an overview of the organisation.

- A Member referred to comments made by the new Government Health Secretary that the CQC was not fit for purpose and it was queried whether the Director accepted those comments. The Director responded that there were several things happening at the moment with the CQC. One, it continued to provide a framework to carry out assessments of care providers which was a 'well-oiled' process with regulatory visits. The Council had worked to improve its relationship with the CQC. Two, it had undertaken a rapid review of NHS mental health services but had struggled to deliver this. Considerable pressure had been put on the CQC to accelerate this. The Director stated he had no opinion as yet regarding the Health Secretary's comments.
- In response to a query regarding the Reablement Team, it was confirmed that they were employed by the Council with some funding provided by the NHS.
- Reference was made to elderly care and the increased use of technology which led to less face-to-face contact and it was queried how loneliness was being approached. The Mayor responded that part of the Cleveland Centre remodel provided social spaces for people to meet. In addition, some technology could positively help with social isolation and this was part of a menu of options available.

The Chair thanked the Mayor and the Director for their attendance and the information provided.

AGREED that the presentation provided be noted.

ELECTORAL REVIEW

A Wilson, Head of Legal Services (People), was in attendance to provide Members with an update in relation to the current Electoral Review.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was currently carrying out a review of electoral arrangements in Middlesbrough. This considered:-

- Phase One – Number of Councillors
- Phase Two – Warding Patterns
- Phase Three – Consultation on Draft Recommendations

The Review was now in Phase Three, with draft recommendations published on 9 July 2024. The draft recommendations included a proposal that 46 Councillors should be elected to Middlesbrough and also proposed new ward boundaries.

The LGBCE confirmed it had considered all representations it had received from local people and organisations, including the joint response submitted by Middlesbrough Council during the initial consultation.

Comments on the draft recommendations were now invited by the LGBCE prior to finalising the new electoral arrangements for Middlesbrough. Each response received during the consultation period would be weighted against the statutory criteria.

Draft recommendations could be viewed at: [Middlesbrough | LGBCE](#). The link also provided

access to detailed ward maps and provided the opportunity to make comments.

Comments to the proposals could be made via the website (through the above link), by email at reviews@lgbce.org.uk or by post at The Review Officer (Middlesbrough), LGBCE, PO Box 133, Blyth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE24 9EF.

Submissions needed to be balanced across the three statutory criteria: Electoral equality for voters; Community identities and interests; Effective and convenient local government.

Consultation on the draft proposals would run from 9 July to 16 September 2024 and the final recommendations would be published in February 2025. The Order would be made by Summer 2025 and elected upon in 2027.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board were asked whether they wished to make a joint submission in response to the proposals or whether they would prefer to respond at individual or group level.

A discussion took place and Members considered it would be difficult for OSB to agree a joint response due to differing views around ward boundaries and concerns expressed around proposed additional housing developments in some areas which did not appear to have been taken into account by the LGBCE when proposing changes to ward boundaries.

The Board felt that it should be up to the groups and individuals to submit their own responses as there were also independent Members who were not members of a group.

The Head of Legal Services confirmed that an email had been sent to all Members of the Council on 9 July in relation to the draft proposals and this contained the associated links for people to submit comments. The Head of Service confirmed that she would re-circulate the email again as a reminder and would also include the original joint submission from OSB.

A vote was taken and Members agreed unanimously that individual or group responses should be submitted to the LGBCE, as a collective response could not be agreed upon.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That individual and/or group responses to the LGBCE proposals be submitted by no later than 16 September 2024.
2. That the Head of Legal Services (People) re-circulate the LGBCE proposals to all Members, reminding them of the deadline for submissions, together with relevant links/contact details for the LGBCE, and the previous joint submission from OSB.
3. That the Communications Team be asked to add this to the Council's website.

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

Place Scrutiny Panel

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report seeking the Board's approval for the Place Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2024/25.

The Place Scrutiny Panel met on 29 July and agreed to include the following topics in its work programme (set out at paragraph 4 of the report):-

In-depth reviews

- Empty Properties.
- Barriers to Regeneration.

- Home to School Transport.

Potential Short Reviews/ Updates

- Bereavement Services (in relation to diminishing cemetery space)
- Provision for Migrants

Updates

- 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

The Place Scrutiny Panel also agreed that a Task and Finish Group would 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 an 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.

People Scrutiny Panel

The People Scrutiny Panel met on 16 July 2024 and agreed to defer finalising its Work Programme until its September meeting.

AGREED that the Work Programme 2024/25 for the Place Scrutiny Panel, as set out above, be approved.

SCRUTINY CHAIRS' UPDATES

Place Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of Place Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Branson, updated the Board that the Panel met on 29 July. The Director of Regeneration and Head of Neighbourhoods had provided a presentation to the Panel which had assisted in the Panel determining its Work Programme for the coming year. The Panel had also agreed a schedule of meeting dates.

The next meeting was scheduled for 2 September when it would commence work on its new scrutiny topic. Arrangements would also be made for the Draft Final Report in relation to Waste Management (undertaken by the Environment Scrutiny Panel) to be considered in the near future and Members of the previous Environment Scrutiny Panel would be invited to attend.

People Scrutiny Panel

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel were both unable to attend, therefore, an update would be provided to the next meeting of OSB.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Value for Money Interim Report

With the permission of the Chair, a Member of the Board wished to raise the issue of the Council's Value for Money Interim Report and requested that OSB examine the report.

Clarification was sought as to which elements of the report the Board would wish to examine as the report was examined by Audit Committee at each meeting and it was suggested that advice be sought as to whether it was within the remit of OSB to examine those issues once they had been identified.

The Board Member also queried whether there was a current legal claim against the Council by Sub Zero.

Following discussion, the Head of Legal Services (People) agreed to look at the Terms of Reference for OSB and Audit Committee and would circulate a response to Members of the Board. The Head of Service would also respond, via email, to the query regarding the current legal position regarding Sub Zero.

AGREED that the Head of Legal Services (People) would provide a response to the Board regarding whether it was within the Board's remit to examine specific areas of the Value for Money Interim Report and a response to the query regarding the current legal position in relation to Sub Zero.

Request for Internal Audit to investigate scrutiny

The Chair informed Members that he had requested that the Council's Internal Auditor investigate scrutiny in terms of whether there were sufficient resources available and whether two scrutiny panels were sufficient to undertake scrutiny in Middlesbrough. The Auditors had confirmed this would be added to their work programme.

NOTED