

## EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** Executive Member for Finance

**DATE OF MEETING:** 27 November 2024

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

### 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES

We will ensure that we place communities at the heart of what we do, continue to deliver value for money and enhance the reputation of Middlesbrough.

**Update:**

I continue to have weekly briefings with the Director relevant to my portfolio as well as frequent additional meetings and contact with them and other officers as appropriate.

### 2. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Members may recall that at the last council meeting, although some voted against the motion, the majority of councillors supported a motion which resolved to “as far as government guidance permits, prioritise the use of Central Government funding under the Household Support Fund to assist those pensioners on low incomes, or liable to higher heating bills due to disability”.

On 28 October 2024 I presented a report to the Executive which agreed the following support for pensioners who will no longer be entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment:

- Pensioners aged 80 and over in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, but not eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment, will be entitled to receive £200.
- Pensioners aged between 66 and 79 and meeting the same criteria will be entitled to receive £150.
- Pensioners in receipt of Attendance Allowance will be entitled to £100 upon application.
- Pensioners not on benefits with incomes of less than £20,000 for a single person, or £26,000 for a couple will also be able to apply for a payment of £100.

This means that we have been able to prioritise our efforts to help pensioners of Middlesbrough on low incomes who will just miss out on getting the Winter Fuel Payment this winter. This includes those on low incomes may have worked hard all their lives but just miss out on benefits due to for example, having a small works pension.

We however will still be providing support for vulnerable families and people under pension age and will include:

- Households with children who meet the free school meals eligibility criteria will get a voucher for £60 per child, these will be sent automatically, based on schools' records.
- Families not eligible for free school meals, but who are receiving Council Tax Reduction, Universal Credit or Housing Benefit can apply for £60 per child.
- Households on benefits without children can apply for £35 for single people, £45 for couples.
- Residents not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or benefits can apply based on their income with £35 for single people, £45 for couples or instead £60 per child for households with children.

**Further detail is available on the council website by following this link - [Household Support Fund | Middlesbrough Council](#).**

Due to the timescales involved, this has all been pulled together in a very short period of time and I would like to thank officers concerned for all their work on this.

### **3. PENSION CREDIT DROP-IN ADVICE SESSIONS**

As well as officers writing to over 700 people across Middlesbrough who, based on council records, it is thought may be eligible for Pension Credit and as a result of that to also receive the Winter Fuel Payment, drop-in sessions were held this month in the following venues in Middlesbrough:

- Hemlington Community Hub and Library.
- Thorntree Community Hub and Library.
- Live Well Centre, Dundas Arcade
- North Ormesby Community Hub and Library
- Grove Hill Community Hub and Library

As mentioned in my last report to Council, councillors may also wish to provide pensioners, or their relatives, in their ward with the number for the Pension Credit Claim Line - 0800 99 1234. Applications can be made by phone, instead of through the online form, and the call can be made by a friend or family member if the pensioner applying is unable to use the phone.

For those unsure as to eligibility, there is also an online Pension Credit Calculator Pension Credit calculator accessible via this link - [Pension Credit calculator - GOV.UK](#).

### **4. 2025/26 COUNCIL BUDGET**

Much of my time has been involved with intensive work with the Mayor, the Executive and council officers on the 2025/26 Draft Revenue Budget and 2025/26-2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan.

At the time of writing this report the report due to go to the Executive on 04 December has not been published so it would be inappropriate for me to provide further detail at this stage.

However, I have requested an all-member briefing on the budget be arranged and this will take place on Thursday 21 November at 5.30pm. Councillors are welcome to attend

either in person at the Collaboration Event Space, Ground Floor, Fountain Court or via Teams. The briefing will provide an update to members on the budget position and an outline of budget proposals. The Chief Executive will also give an update on the progress of transformation and other key developments.

## **5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

The Budget Report laid before the House of Commons by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 30 October 2024 expressed the government's commitment to returning local government to sustainability through a comprehensive set of measures to support local authorities in England.

This includes for 2025/26, £1.3 billion of new grant funding nationally, including at least £600 million new grant funding for social care. There will be a targeted approach to allocating additional funding in 2025-26, in advance of reforms to the distribution of funding in 2026-27. It is hoped that this will mean additional funding is targeted towards councils such as Middlesbrough with higher levels of deprivation and low Council Tax raising powers.

There will be a one-year financial settlement for 2025/26. This will allow time for a Spending Review to be concluded in the Spring of 2025 followed by a three-year settlement for local government implemented in 2026/27.

Although a local government finance policy statement is expected to be issued by the end of November on local government funding for 2025-26, councils will need to await further detail on levels of allocations for individual authorities which will not be received until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) is published on 19 December 2024.

Therefore, the full implications of the budget announcements cannot be included in the budget report that will be presented to the Executive on 04 December or all member briefing of 21 November 2024, but will be factored into the final budget report to be agreed by the Executive and presented to Council for consideration and approval in February 2025.

## **6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET – FORECAST YEAR-END OUTTURN POSITION AT QUARTER TWO 2024/25**

Following the budget challenge sessions which took place in October 2024, a revised forecast for the year end position will be in a report that I will present to the Executive on 04 December 2024.

Whilst this report has not yet been published, I can say at this stage that it represents an improvement on the position reported at the end of Quarter One, although there is a need to take further action over the remaining two quarters in order to control expenditure within the approved budget.

## **7. CAPITAL PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE**

On 13 November 2024 I presented a report to the Executive which outlined arrangements for improving the effectiveness of capital programme governance, monitoring, and reporting including the terms of reference for the Strategic Capital Board made up of executive members and Corporate Capital Board comprising of officers. The key areas of improvement will be in the council's ability to:

- Develop a prioritised and affordable medium to long term capital investment plan that is clearly linked to the delivery of the Council's objectives –
- Deliver projects to agreed timescales and approved budgets and funding streams.
- Produce more informative financial reports and forecasts.

The role of the Strategic Capital Board is to provide strategic oversight of the Governance and Control Framework established to manage the Capital Programme and is made up of myself as chair and two other executive members. It will report into the Executive and Executive Sub Committee for Property where appropriate.

The Board will also oversee the delivery of the actions and recommendations set out in plans relating to capital. The Board represents the interests of the residents of Middlesbrough and for ensuring that the Capital Programme delivers the outcomes of the Council Plan.

Sitting below this, and reporting into the Strategic Board, there will be the Corporate Capital Board which is the Officer Board, chaired by the Section 151 Officer.