

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 20 November 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors I Blades (Chair), J Kabuye (Vice-Chair), J Banks, D Branson, E Clynch, J Ewan, L Lewis, M McClintock and I Morrish

PRESENT BY INVITATION: M Davis – Chief Executive Officer, Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA)

OFFICERS: S Bonner and J Dixon

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: Councillor Romaine
D Hodgson – Local Democracy Reporter

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors D Coupe, B Hubbard, M Saunders and G Wilson

24/37 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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.

24/38 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 23 OCTOBER 2024**

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 23 October 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:-

- Page 4 – Captain ‘Cook’ not ‘Book’.
- Page 6 – Make reference to Teesside University in the discussion around eligibility from VAT exemptions.

24/39 **MVDA OVERVIEW**

The Chair introduced Mark Davis, Chief Executive of the Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA), who had been invited to the meeting to provide the Board with an overview of the organisation’s work.

The Chief Executive of MVDA advised that he had worked in his current role for approximately eight years and had previously worked for Middlesbrough Council in various roles. He provided the Board with background information in relation to the MVDA and stated that he had previously enjoyed a close working relationship with the Council and had attended many scrutiny panels with colleagues from the voluntary sector and hoped to rebuild that connection to support the work being undertaken by the Council to promote improvement across the town.

The Board heard that MVDA was a local infrastructure organisation for Middlesbrough, but also worked across the South Tees. It was established in 2002 by the local authority and voluntary sector organisations.

Its four broad functions were:-

- Leadership and advocacy
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Capacity building
- Volunteering

The MVDA helped to ensure local communities were active, strong and engaged and helped VCOs make a difference for local people and where they lived.

The local voluntary sector was diverse and was made up of general charities and community groups, charitable incorporated organisations (CIOs), community interest companies (CICs), sports and social clubs, campaign groups, co-operatives and housing associations and registered social landlords (RSLs).

The defining qualities of the sector were that groups and organisations were independent, for the benefit of the public, not for individual gain and accountable to its members and governed by a constitution or rules.

The voluntary sector was flexible and responsive to activities and services, for example, there had been a great response following the riots in August where organisations and the community had supported those directly affected and undertaken a town clean up operation. It had been similar during Covid with the sector supporting people during times of need such as providing meals and delivery services. Organisations were best placed to obtain local intelligence on need and demand and what worked, providing practical solutions to local issues. The sector also provided a safety net to try and catch people who would otherwise fall through the gaps in provision, for example, due to increased thresholds for services. The sector also benefitted from having experts by experience – people who could lead on issues as they lived in a particular area or community or first-hand experience of the issues.

Locally, there were around 800 VCOs registered with MVDA, with approximately 600 of those being particularly active in Middlesbrough (the other 200, for example, might be national charities with a helpline that, whilst accessible at a local level were national based. There were around 1,000 VCOs registered with MVDA across the South Tees.

New groups were constantly emerging, generally in response to specific issues, such as Covid, or establishing activity groups for children, or supporting climate change activities etc.

97% of those VCOs had volunteers with 18% having 50 or more volunteers. Around half of the VCOs that employed staff, employed between 1 and 10 part-time staff.

In addition, VCOs reported an increased focus on mental health support with more than 50% stating that mental health support was their core purpose or part of their wider work.

A survey of all VCOs registered with MVDA across the South Tees was undertaken and the findings, specific to those operating in Middlesbrough, were reported to the Board as follows:-

- 92% expected demand on their service to increase.
- 85% expected the level of need of service users to rise.
- 20% believed their ability to attract funding would decrease.
- 68% saw public sector changes as a major challenge for their organisation.
- 87% agreed that it was very important to work together.
- 58% recognised the need for support and development, with fundraising and income generation being very important.
- 54% would benefit from support to influence funders and attract investment.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- The Chair asked the Chief Executive whether he could provide an example of activity that the Council previously carried out with MVDA that no longer happened. The Chief Executive responded that he had been heavily involved with the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel's work during 2017 and 2018 when scrutinising the Care Act and the Council's duties and how to provide a joint response to people's needs. It had examined how to identify people to prevent them falling through the gaps and how they could be linked up with appropriate charities. The Panel's recommendations had included establishing a new service with a co-ordinated offer linked with the Council and MVDA, however, this service had since been cut in terms of funding. 92% of people that had used that service had not returned to Adult Social Care.
- The Chief Executive was asked how the Council might be able to assist with the MVDA's work. He responded that he was involved in stakeholder meetings and recruitment of the new Chief Executive and would like to build relationships to work more collaboratively with

- the Council and believed the Council and MVDA complimented each other.
- It was queried how volunteers were thanked and recognised for the work that they did. The Chief Executive stated he was not aware of any recognition programmes provided by the Council, however, the MVDA made annual nominations for the Kings Award for Volunteering. Recognition and reward was something that could potentially be explored.
 - In response to a query, the Chief Executive advised that he would be happy to attend local Parish or Community Councils to provide further information about MVDA and to provide advice on connecting groups and volunteers.
 - In response to a query in relation to MVDA having more than 800 groups registered to them, it was clarified that there was no legal requirement to register, however, doing so ensured that MVDA was able to provide groups with information on, and opportunities to, recruit volunteers. It was highlighted that MVDA was the Council's strategic partner and worked constantly to add more organisations to its database.
 - When asked what the benefits of registering with MVDA were, the Board heard that MVDA provided expertise and the Chief Executive advised that he sat on the Council's grants panel as an adviser so the Council's Grants Officer would encourage any new groups to register with MVDA.
 - A Board Member asked how locality working might work to provide support to those who needed it more quickly. The Chief Executive advised that he had good links with the Council's Neighbourhood Managers and that a small grants programme was set to be launched in conjunction with MVDA and the locality managers. MVDA needed to engage with the Council on its current operating model in neighbourhoods as it was more difficult for those operating on a town-wide basis to engage in four conversations across each of the neighbourhood teams.
 - In response to a question as to how to ensure people were provided with the support they needed, the Board heard that MVDA brought together charities and community groups that sometimes worked with the Council or other statutory bodies. By working together, collective groups could examine whether new pathways needed to be in place, if appropriate, or to signpost individuals to relevant Council departments or other bodies. In general, joint working was good but there was room for improvement and charities were always looking to improve ways of working.
 - Reference was made to MVDA being the Council's 'strategic partner' and it was queried whether the Council could do more to improve collaborative working. The Board heard that MVDA fully appreciated the Council's current financial situation but that this had impacted on some collaborative working arrangements. The Chief Executive hoped that the working relationships could be rebuilt and strengthened with the Council's senior leaders.
 - In response to a query regarding funding, the Board was advised that the MVDA was initially established by the Council and received a small core grant from the Council. MVDA applied for grants to host projects and worked to a three-year funding profile.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive of the MVDA for his attendance and the information provided. He added that the Mayor was keen for the Council to work more closely with the voluntary sector and hoped that the Chief Executive would attend future scrutiny meetings, where appropriate.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That contact details for the MVDA be circulated to Members of OSB.
3. That the presentation slides be circulated to Members of OSB.

24/40

TASK AND FINISH GROUP - COMMUNITY COHESION - UPDATE

Councillor Branson provided the Board with an update in relation to the Task and Finish Group established to look at Community Cohesion. A briefing note was circulated to the Board prior to the meeting setting out the aims of the group's investigation, terms of reference, key lines of enquiry and desired outcomes.

It was highlighted that the Group had identified the following Terms of Reference:-

1. To identify what measures had been taken so far to promote community cohesion and integration.
2. To identify where there were significant gaps in the provision of such measures.

3. To assess the extent to which the measures implemented had been effective or otherwise.
4. To identify what statistical information existed to inform us of the nature of the issues involved.

The Task and Finish Group had met with the Head of Neighbourhoods and the Strategic Cohesion and Migration Manager and found that a Community Cohesion Strategy had yet to be developed. The Group found that work to help asylum seekers obtain access to basic services in the area was largely reactive and, at present, only four staff worked directly in this area. The majority of this work was now delegated to the local Neighbourhood Action Partnership groups which dealt with a wider remit of crime and social issues.

Efforts to improve community relations, including sponsoring intercommunal activities such as the Middlesbrough MELA and Diwali festivals, continued, however, there was little evidence of monitoring communities for information about community tensions or a system to challenge misinformation on social media.

The Task and Finish Group planned to meet with the MP for Middlesbrough and the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner and would formally update the Board at its January meeting. In the meantime, should any significant findings arise, a written update would be provided to Members of OSB via email.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

24/41

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 item on Nutrient Neutrality (Page 6) which showed it would be submitted to Executive on 8 January 2025, however, a Member of the Board commented that the Board had been advised that the item was no longer going to be considered by the Executive, following the submissions made by him. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to clarify this with the Director.

Reference was made to the item on Capex Municipal Buildings and Town Hall Roof (Page 7) and it was noted that this item had been ongoing for some time, with its submission to the Executive being pushed back several times. It was queried whether an update could be provided. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to seek clarification.

Reference was made to items which had a submission date to Executive of 4 September, which had now passed. Following discussion, it was confirmed that future reports to the Board would only include items scheduled for submission to the Executive in the future and it was highlighted that Members were able to view the Executive Forward Work Programme at any time on the Council's website.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That clarification be sought in relation to the status of the item on Nutrient Neutrality.
3. That clarification be sought in relation to the status of the item on Capex Municipal/Town Hall roofs.

24/42

SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE

People Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of the People Scrutiny Panel updated the Board that the Panel had met on 11 November 2024. The Panel had received the annual update from the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (STSCP) and received further evidence in relation to its current review, 'Children Missing from Education' from the EMAT Team.

The Panel's next meeting was scheduled for 16 December and would receive an annual

update from the Adult Safeguarding Board and information from schools and the virtual school.

Place Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of the Place Scrutiny Panel updated the Board that the Panel met on 4 November 2024 and had received a presentation from Ethical Housing in relation to its scrutiny topic of 'Empty Properties'. The Panel also received evidence from the Head of Service in relation to Home to School Transport and agreed the Terms of Reference for the review.

Two task and finish groups had been established by the Panel for each of the current scrutiny topics. The Task and Finish Group for Empty Properties had drafted terms of reference for the review to be considered at the Scrutiny Panel's next meeting.

The Task and Finish Group for Home to School Transport was tasked with obtaining evidence from relevant schools to find out how they felt the home to school transport system was operating and to speak to service users.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

24/43

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

Chief Officer Appointments Committee

The Chair wished to highlight that the Chief Officer Appointments Committee had agreed the appointments of a new Chief Executive and Director of Finance. The appointments were subject to approval at the forthcoming meeting of Full Council (27 November 2024).

The Chair proposed to invite both the successful candidates, individually, to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, to discuss their priorities for their new roles.

NOTED

Consideration of the Executive Forward Work Programme by OSB

A Board Member suggested that, where Members had requested further information in relation to an item on the Executive Forward Work Programme, an agenda item could be added to provide an update on progress/outcomes of previous information requests.

AGREED that the Democratic Services Officer would discuss further with the Chair to implement.

Review of Community Councils

A Board Member raised the issue of the Review of Community Councils. It was highlighted that this had originally been part of the Community Governance Review undertaken in 2021 but was deferred, at that time, to be reviewed separately by the relevant Service Area. The Member expressed concern that the review remained outstanding and the completion date had now been delayed from November 2024 to February 2025, and queried how it could be ensured that OSB had the opportunity to have input into the review and obtain information as to what the review would entail.

The Chair highlighted that the Board had been advised of the delay and the reasons for it and that all Councillors had been issued with a survey from Community Safety, who were undertaking the review, and had the opportunity to respond accordingly. This would provide Members with the opportunity to provide input into the review.

The Chair suggested that the Board Member make further enquiries, if he so wished, with the Head of Neighbourhoods and that he could provide feedback to the Board.

AGREED that further enquiries be made by Councillor McClintock, with the Head of Neighbourhoods, in relation to the review of Community Councils, and feedback be provided to the Board.

