

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 9 April 2025.

**PRESENT:** Councillors I Blades (Chair), J Kabuye (Vice-Chair), D Branson, D Coupe, J Ewan, B Hubbard, L Lewis, I Morrish, D Jones (Substitute for M Saunders), Z Uddin and G Wilson

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Mayor Cooke and Councillor J Ryles

**OFFICERS:** M Adams, S Bonner, J Dixon, B Carr, L Grabham, A Humble, E Scollay and A Wilson

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors J Banks, E Clynych, M McClintock and M Saunders

24/82 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

24/83 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 19 MARCH 2025**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 19 March 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/84 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health to deliver her presentation. The presentation outlined the service structure in Adult Social Care which included Head of Prevention; Provider and Support Services; Access and Safeguarding and Specialist and Lifelong Services.

In terms of Access and Safeguarding; the presentation listed a range of services that were operated within the service which acted as a front-door for service users. Some of those services included:

- East and West locality teams which between them had received more than 9000 service users.
- The service also included a hospital team that assisted patients when they were being discharged.
- The Deprivation of Liberty team undertook best interests' assessments and offered advice and guidance regarding the Mental Capacity Act.

In terms of Prevention, Provider and Support Services this service provided support to help people stay at home, safely and independently. Services within this area included:

- The staying put agency
- Sensory loss
- Community Reablement
- Community inclusion services
- Levick Court.

In terms of Specialist and Lifelong Services, this area included services such as:

- Older person's mental health team
- Forensics Social Care Team
- Learning disability and Transitions team

Members were advised that other dedicated teams from commissioning and finance also worked across the portfolio area.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for her presentation and invited questions from Members.

A Member queried if the Sensory Loss team was restricted to sight and hearing loss. Members were advised that the team was small but growing and provided a very important service. The team worked with people who had lost one of their senses, and an example was provided of a lady who, through the help of the team had reduced the number of support carers from four to zero. It was also noted that Redcar and Cleveland Council had also referred people to the service. It was also asked if the team could be grown. It was clarified that it hoped the service could be commercialised so the service was available to a wider cohort of people. This would be one of the main priorities of the new Director of Adult Social Services.

In regard to the Community Inclusion Service, a Member queried if there was a waiting list for this service and it was available to those with autism. It was clarified that the Community Inclusion Service did not cover such assessments. However, it was possible that support could be provided to those people on waiting lists. It was also clarified that waiting list length was not in the remit of the Council but was determined by central government.

It was also asked if the Sensory Loss team would teach people who had lost their hearing how to use sign language. It was confirmed that this was the case and that there were a range of options available to provide support for those that had lost one of their senses.

Regarding the promotion of the handy person's service, it was clarified that while some publicity was available on the Council website, there was also an element of word-of-mouth publicity from social care professionals. It was important to maintain this balance due to potential over subscription of the service. It was also commented that the charges for the service were very reasonable.

A Member queried if Social Care related accommodation was being considered as part of new housing developments. It was clarified that available housing included sheltered housing, housing with extra care as well as residential and nursing housing. Social Services spoke with the Planning Service and developers where appropriate, but the Council would look at the issue of housing on a strategic level.

A discussion took place about the mechanisms in place for communities to provide feedback about community need. It was clarified that while Social Care was primarily focussed on the needs of individuals, there were links with neighbourhood working and a view to move to locality working. Doing this would allow the service to better understand the needs of communities which, in turn, would benefit care to individuals. The situation for Social Care was more reactive in nature at the moment.

A Member queried the remit of the Staying Put Agency which was clarified as being assessments of minor adaptations to people's houses, such as the installation of grab rails, that helped individuals live independently at home.

A conversation took place about the cost implications of community working during which it was noted that moving to a community based model of working could result in a more efficient way of service delivery. This approach also provided a much better level of service for users.

A conversation took place about new homes requiring relevant adaptations and how, in any circumstance, adaptation was always the best approach. It was also commented there should be a more joined up approach to housing needs.

A Member asked if any training was available for staff and Members regarding sign language. It was clarified there was a training programme for staff, but Members suggested there may be a need for Members to undertake a similar course.

It was commented that approximately 10 years ago the sensory support team was larger and was shared with Redcar and Cleveland Council. However, while the service had been diminished there were several innovative approaches that helped keep the service effective. There was also a need to invest further in this service which would complement sign language courses.

The Chair stated Adult Social Care was one of the largest spenders in the Council, and that the Transformation programme was proactive rather than reactive and wondered what Transformation looked like for Adult Social Care. It was highlighted that while the budget for Adult Social Care was large, this was supplemented by contributions from service users. Some of the initiatives, as part of the Adult Social Care Transformation programme included working more closely with the ICB who were also facing budget cuts. It was also important that a different style of conversation namely, about providing advice and guidance rather than based on want which led to dependency. Doing this could lead to reduction in demand. Other initiatives included a more community-based approach as well using technology such as Artificial Intelligence. Ultimately, there was a move to help people to help themselves.

The Chair invited the Executive Member to present the Public Health element of her portfolio. The presentation included the following information:

- The challenges across the South Tees including that despite improvements, Middlesbrough had a lower average life expectancy than the rest of England. There were also significant differences across different areas of the town.
- The different roles within the Public Health service that was spread across the South Tees.
- The programme approach to Public Health, which included five programmes, four core approaches and three levels of intervention.
- In terms of Healthy Environments, the intention was to implement a system led approach to creating places that promoted healthy eating and moving more. The healthy weight declaration has been agreed to assist with this.
- There was also an initiative to protect health which involved a number of priorities to protect the population of South Tees from the spread of communicable disease. It was noted there had been an increase in the cases of syphilis in the South Tees and an action plan had been created to tackle this.
- There was a need to reduce the inequalities in population health through early detection of disease. Significant work had been undertaken at James Cook Hospital to try and reduce Did Not Attend rates with the example of maternity DNAs reducing from 15% to 3.4% due to focussed work.
- There was a drive to reduce vulnerabilities at a population level, and this would be possible when there were sufficient facilities in place to do this.

A Member queried the issue of preventing ill health. In other countries health checks were undertaken with certain individuals. It was clarified this was available in the UK via the NHS health check for individuals between the ages of 40 and 74 and could be accessed via GPs. It was also clarified this was available to all people in that age range but that take up rates were dependent on demographic profile.

It was also clarified that GPs differed in their approach of inviting individuals for their health check. Going forward Public Health would try to understand why there was such variability.

A Member queried about Mental Health provision. It was clarified that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) was available online and contained much of the information relating to this. It was further queried how success was measured in relation to such things as substance misuse. It was clarified this type of performance was managed through a national framework. It was commented that, in terms of Public Health support to different cultural groups, the service had an officer that managed the relationship between Public Health and BAME communities.

In relation to the School Activity programme, a Member suggested that improvements could be made by encouraging parents to walk their children to school rather than drive them. It was confirmed that this, along with several other initiatives, would contribute to the Active Schools programme.

In relation to improving health environments, it was highlighted certain areas of the town had more elderly people and that infrastructure was not suitable, such as footpaths. It was clarified that when footpath infrastructure improvements were made it made more sense to target those areas where there was a higher risk of falls.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, as well as the Directors of Adult Social Care and Public Health for their attendance.

**AGREED** that

1. Statistics relating to NHS Health Check take up be provided to the Board and where possible these be on a ward basis.
2. That the information presented to noted

24/85

**TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting and invited him to deliver his presentation.

The Mayor's presentation included the following information:

- Intervention in Children's Services had come to an end as well as the Best Value Notice intervention. Linked to this the Middlesbrough Voluntary Independent Improvement Board had issued its final report.
- From a financial perspective the Council was previously overspending between £10 and 15 million per year.
- There had been cuts to frontline staff with the example of Environmental staff being cut from 220 to 70 over a period of 14 years.
- There was no longer an events team or events budget.
- All hard decisions that were viable had been taken in the first year of the administration.
- There had been a shift in funding to more preventative measures with the SHiFT programme being used as an example.
- The Council had received an additional £4million in the Local Government Settlement for 2025-26. This additional money was directed into the Priorities Fund which would be used for transformation projects.
- For some transformation projects investment may not yield financial return but it was deemed the right thing to do.
- It was important that processes across the Council were fit for purpose, as this would improve services for residents.
- One of the first improvements to be made concerned the ACT service and reviewing the Council's approach to Homelessness.
- Another example of process improvements concerned demolitions which was antiquated and had no on-line component.
- Initiatives that should be celebrated included the SHiFT programme which was jointly funded by the government and the Council. 26 Children were part of the programme with each placement costing £30,000. Aside from the moral and ethical reasons for the programme, SHiFT was also financially sound as the average saving, per child, was £1.27 million.
- In terms of upcoming initiatives, Neighbourhood working would be part of a report submitted to Executive in the near future. This would require more staff on the ground to solve problems for residents such as Link Workers at James Cook University Hospital. There would likely be initial significant costs, but these would contribute to significant savings going forward.
- Another initiative was the Middlesbrough Priorities Fund which had the aim of investing initially to realise savings later. This would not be part of the base budget. The Priorities Fund was going to contribute to several projects such as the Child Enrichment Team and Ward Funding.
- The Mayor was also keen to launch the Middlesbrough Childhood Guarantee, which would see children achieving 10 opportunities by the time they reached 10 years of age. Those activities would be offered to children who may not ordinarily be able to access them and included swimming lessons and visiting a farm. Two key elements of this initiative were education and workplaces.
- In terms of Ward Funding, £5,000 would be made available per Councillor, per Ward for projects of their choice if it aligned with a council vision. Applications for funding also needed to be signed off by all other relevant ward councillors. Funding would likely be made available for this in May or June of 2025.
- In terms of Grass Verges, budgets would be increased by 50% and would be targeted in areas of the town that needed it. Housing providers would be approached where relevant to seek match funding.
- Shopfront schemes would focus on district shopping centres rather than town centre shop fronts.
- Other projects the Mayor would be launching included Public Sector capital. This

project focussed on working with other public sector bodies to enhance mutual assistance. An example of the Council working with Middlesbrough College to enhance their building programme was given. Working in this way may have had an impact on other issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour.

- Tees Valley Social Care Renegotiations were also part of the Mayor's priorities which included setting a lower base rate for social care agency staff. This could result in lower costs for local Councils.

The Chair reminded Members that questions should not concern ward matters but should be strategic in nature.

A Member queried why small plots of Council owned land took a long time to sell and were seemingly overpriced. They suggested a system be put in place to speed such things up. The Mayor commented this was possible and recognised that property related matters was one of the Council's weaker areas. An example was improvements to sale agreements and this type of issue would be a priority for the Council's strategic housing officer.

In terms of Ward Funding, it was queried when the criteria would be available and if the new funding would replace the existing Small Scheme Allocation. It was confirmed the criteria for Ward Funding would be released on the 23 April with the relevant Executive papers and that Ward Funding would not replace the Small Scheme Allocation.

A Member stated he was supportive of initiatives to reintroduce some kind of Council owned Housing given the length of waiting lists for social housing. The Mayor stated new processes, such as an enforced sales process could potentially save significant amounts of time, especially compared to compulsory purchase orders. It was also stated that Council's moving back into Council Housing after selling its housing stock was rare and would require significant investment if Middlesbrough was to try this.

A discussion took place around selective landlord licensing and the possibility of the Council becoming a letting agent. Benefits of this included incentives that could be offered to prospective landlords.

A Member queried if the Council could influence unfinished structures. It was clarified that no processes were available for such properties given the Council's limited involvement in this area. It was also clarified that further rollouts of selective landlord licensing was a slow process.

A Member expressed his support of the Mayor's initiatives but stated Ward Funding may become political and wondered if Community Councils could be involved in the process. The Mayor stated that, as all Councillors were elected to do the best for their communities, politics in the process should be minimal. Involvement of Community Councils may complicate the process, however the Mayor was prepared to engage as many groups as possible to understand where funding was required. It was important to equip Councillors so they could help their communities. If the proposed scheme was successful discussion could take place about how the funding process could be improved going forward.

On the issue of Council IT, a Member suggested reviewing how Council compliments were received as they were currently submitted via a complaints form. It was also important for the Council to adopt a smart approach to how it advertises events and changes to schedules. The Mayor agreed with this and stated the complaints process was being examined for improvements. It was also stated that other processes had been improved as part of more effective service delivery. The Mayor stated an email would be set up to receive improvements to processes and circulated to Members.

In terms of child and youth issues, as outlined in the Mayor's presentation, it was queried which Executive Member such initiatives would fall under. It was clarified that until further notice this would fall under the Mayor.

A Member queried, in terms of Tees Valley Social Care Renegotiations, if this was mainly regarding recruitment. The Mayor clarified that it was focussed on the rates paid to agency staff and foster carers. The aim of the process was to introduce a level of fairness.

The Chair thanked the Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Finance for their attendance at the meeting.

**AGREED**

1. That an email for process improvements be circulated to Members.
2. That the information presented be noted.

24/86

**FINAL REPORT OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL - HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

Councillor Branson, Chair of the Place Scrutiny Panel, presented the Final Report on Home to School Transport.

The purpose of the review was to ensure that the Council was meeting its obligations to provide Home to School Transport whilst effectively controlling costs.

The Terms of Reference for the review were set out at paragraph three of the report together with the evidence gathered by the Panel during the review.

The Panel's conclusions, based on the evidence gathered during the review, were detailed at page 59 of the agenda pack, paragraph 74 of the final report. In summary, the Panel found that in recent years there had been a sharp increase in the cost of Home to School Transport provided by Local Authorities, by up to 50% in some cases. Middlesbrough Council's 2024-2025 budget for providing the Home to School Transport Service was £6.7m. Free school transport was provided for students at compulsory school age based on distance from a suitable school, ability to get there safely, or on low family income.

Middlesbrough Council had provided free transport for 1069 SEND students and 238 other students in the previous year. The key issue was SEND students under the age of 11 since they were provided with free transport in almost all cases. Middlesbrough also had higher numbers of SEND students than other LAs in the North East region and nationally according to the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT).

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

- It was a complex area with costs having doubled since 2019 and expected to grow significantly further.
- One of the main problems was that Local authorities were reluctant to challenge parents.
- The cost of transport had also increased.
- Some schools had contacted the Task and Finish Group associated with the review expressing their dissatisfaction at the lack of passenger assistance.
- In terms of self-diagnosis the service relied on doctors but there had, nevertheless, been an increase in SEND children nationally.

The Board was asked to consider the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations (page 38, paragraph 232, of the report), as follows:-

- a) Investigate whether it would be cost effective to devolve the provision of Home to School Transport to individual schools, as they may be able to provide a more localised service. Ideally the funding could be passed directly to the schools making them responsible for controlling costs, ensuring there was no additional cost to the Local Authority.
- b) Review the eligibility requirements for free school travel, especially for post-16 students and for pupils who attend a school that is not in the catchment/nearest school by parental choice, but they meet the low-income criteria. There would need to be an option included for consideration of special circumstances.
- c) Ensure closer collaboration between Children's Services, Schools and the Home to School Transport Unit to make certain that the most cost-effective and suitable transport arrangements are in place for each student, particularly in relation to students with SEND. The requirement for transport assistance should be included as a consideration in SEND assessments.
- d) Prioritise the promotion of independent travel to all parents and students, increase the number of travel trainers and bus buddies and encourage greater use of personal travel budgets.
- e) Introduce a spare seat scheme to offer discretionary transport assistance on existing transport for students who are not eligible for free travel assistance, with an option for

part payment of the full cost.

- f) Investigate whether increasing the Council's fleet of vehicles and reducing dependency on third party providers would be cost effective and whether this would enable better route planning.
- g) Explore whether entering into longer-term contracts with third party providers would provide for greater flexibility and consistency.

**ORDERED** that the conclusions and recommendations, as set out above, be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

24/87

## **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.

There were no questions from the Board.

## **NOTED**

24/88

## **FORWARD PLAN ACTIONS PROGRESS**

The Chair stated he had raised a question regarding the decision to dispose of land and assets to the Middlesbrough Development Corporation that was considered at the Executive Sub Committee for Property on 2 April 2025.

The Chair also stated the report associated with that decision was attached to the agenda pack and the minutes of the meeting were available on Modern.Gov.

## **NOTED**

24/89

## **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

In the absence of its Chair and Vice Chair, the Chair of OSB updated Members on work carried out by the People Scrutiny Panel. The last meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel was held on 24 March 2025 where an update was received by TEWV on their improvement plan as well as an update from Adult Social Care following the CQC inspection. The committee also heard further evidence in relation to the Panel's review into Homelessness. The next meeting of the Panel was Monday 4 April.

The Chair of the Place Scrutiny Panel advised Members there had not been a meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel since the last meeting of OSB to allow the Home School Transport report to be completed. The Chair of the Panel had also met with the Directors of Regeneration to discuss potential future topics.

## **NOTED**

24/90

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

The Chair of OSB invited the lead Member of the Community Cohesion Task and Finish Group to provide a progress update to the Board.

Members were advised the Task and Finish Group was set up largely in response to the riots that took place in Middlesbrough. The Task and Finish Group had spoken to Middlesbrough's MP as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Members were advised that, due to the complexity of the issue, more work was needed on the report in conjunction with Democratic Services. It was requested that an updated report be brought back to OSB in the new municipal year.

**AGREED** that an updated Task and Finish report be provided to OSB in the municipal year 2025/26.

