

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Thursday 8 April 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors J Thompson (Chair), C Cooke, D Coupe, L Garvey, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, S Hill, L Lewis, J McTigue, J Platt, M Saunders, D Rooney (as Substitute for M Storey) and Z Uddin.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillors M Smiles (Executive Member for Communities and Education).

OFFICERS: C Benjamin, S Bonner, C Breheny, S Butcher, G Cooper, R Horniman, A Humble, C Lunn, C Nicol, T Parkinson, S Reynolds, P Stephens, M Walker and I Wright.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Mawston and C McIntyre and M Storey.

20/101 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

20/102 **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

20/103 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND EDUCATION**

****SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 - ORDER OF BUSINESS****

AGREED that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Board agreed to vary the order of business to consider the remaining agenda items in the following order: 5, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND EDUCATION

The Executive Member for Communities and Education, Councillor Mieka Smiles, was in attendance to update the Board on her aims and aspirations, progress made to date and to highlight any emerging issues relating to her portfolio. The following officers were also in attendance: the Director of Regeneration and Culture; the Executive Director of Children's Services; and the Head of Stronger Communities.

As part of her update to the Board, the Executive Member discussed her portfolio under three areas – Communities, Culture and Education.

Communities

- In terms of aims and aspirations it was explained that, overall, this was to achieve a safer Middlesbrough because this impacted upon wellbeing, business and perceptions of the town. In addition, the Executive Member wished to see further joint working to avoid duplication and to spread resources further, and also to support communities to help themselves.
- The Executive Member currently chaired the Community Safety Partnership. A Community Safety Strategy was currently being finalised, which had required extensive partnership working.
- The Neighbourhood Safety departments had recently been revamped, with a new structure consisting approximately 60 Street Wardens now in place. The Street Wardens had received new powers, including the ability to compel individuals to provide personal details. A new Operational Manager had also been assigned to post.
- Active Intelligence Mapping (AIM) – a Data Analyst had been employed to pull together crime and Anti-Social Behaviour statistics; fortnightly meetings were held to discuss major issues and the deployment of resources. This was progressing well.
- Locality working – this had been slightly delayed due to COVID-19, but a large amount of collaborative work had been carried out virtually.
- Regarding the Community Grants Scheme, there was £160,000 of grant funding available for community groups to apply for (for grants of up to £1500). The Executive Member sat on the grants panel that awarded the funding and felt that a lot of positive work was taking place in local communities.
- A Community Strategy was currently in development.
- In terms of emerging issues, reference was made to the reopening of the Community Hubs and Libraries from 12 April 2021.
- Reference was made to smaller community and charitable organisations; it was felt that close monitoring of their progress during COVID-19 was required.

Culture

- In terms of aims and aspirations, reference was made to the success of the Big Weekend event. Next steps to build on that success by bringing further high profile events to Middlesbrough were impacted by COVID-19, but work was now taking place to create a calendar of events.
- In terms of income generation, the Executive Member wished to enhance the Council's commercial outlook; reference was made to the Town Hall and increasing profits for reinvestment in cultural activities.
- Work was taking place to improve key assets, such as Newham Grange Farm and Teesaurus Park.
- Of importance to the Executive Member was heritage preservation, with mention being made of the Old Town Hall, Captain Cook Pub and the Transporter Bridge. Support to culture was also a key priority.
- Regarding progress made to date, reference was made to the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership, which was a collective chaired by the Head of Culture. Over the past year, all of the organisations had been awarded a collective £1m, which was an excellent achievement. A new website had been established and a dedicated Press Officer assigned to post.
- Reference was made to Newham Grange Farm, the work being undertaken and to the creation of a new, refurbished linear building which would host educational activities.
- Regarding Christmas lights, although people could not be invited into the Town last year due to COVID-19, these had been a success, with many positive comments being made on social media. This success would be built-

on later this year.

- Regarding the Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund, the Council had secured £36m, another excellent achievement. The Executive Member explained that she had been an advocate for use of a portion of the funding for heritage preservation and events.
- Over the last year, applications for recovery funding from the Arts Council had been made wherever possible; circa. £500,000 had been received for culture.
- In terms of emerging issues, this was about reopening and looking at the events calendar. The task of the Events Team was to achieve a balance between promoting events with the restrictions/expectations of COVID-19; progress was likely to be slow but steady to ensure safety. Museums would be reopening in mid-July.

Education

- The Executive Member was awarded this remit in summer 2020. It was acknowledged that there had been some initial concern as to the vastness of the portfolio, but felt that a good understanding had been achieved since that time.
- Regarding aims, reference was made to Middlesbrough's maintained Primary Schools and to the Academies in the area. The Executive Member's aim was to ensure that staff felt supported by the Local Authority; this work commenced through visits to schools and discussions with Head Teachers. Consideration was given to statutory responsibilities, including the provision of school places.
- Mention was made of the Council's '50 Futures' initiative; the Executive Member wished to expand this.
- Reference was made to Children's Services and the challenges that had been faced; the Executive Member played an integral role within the improvement plan.
- In terms of progress made to date, it was explained that constant dialogue had been established with Head Teachers and school staff, with support being provided as required – the example of hand sanitiser provision during the pandemic was provided.
- Another significant achievement revolved around digital inclusion and £350,000 being invested to provide additional laptops to children across Middlesbrough. Work was currently being undertaken on the development of a wider strategy for digital inclusion.
- In terms of '50 Futures', the Executive Member had been approached by Teesside University who wished to see something similar to the initiative, but working across the town. Work was currently being undertaken to develop a 'one-stop shop' for anyone in Middlesbrough seeking work opportunities or career development.
- Regarding care leavers, the importance of ensuring the education of children in care was highlighted as a priority. As part of this, opportunities for work placements within the Council for care leavers were constantly being sought, and it was noted that several successful appointments had been made.
- In relation to new ideas, the Executive Member was currently working on a project entitled 'School Streets', which focused on limiting traffic outside of schools between certain hours. This would mean that children would be more likely to travel actively to school in a variety of ways.
- In terms of emerging issues, the biggest would revolve around children 'catching-up'. It was explained that the Government would be investing heavily in this and the funding would go directly to schools - further details regarding this were currently awaited. It was highlighted that the Council had been awarded £1m from the holiday activity fund, which would assist with this work. Regarding mental health in children, the difficulties experienced over

the last year in respect of this were noted. School attendance, particularly for vulnerable learners, was also highlighted as an emerging issue. Members heard that attendance was currently 93% in Middlesbrough versus 94.5% nationally.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member made reference to AIM and queried why this work had previously been discontinued. In response, it was explained that this had been undertaken by the previous administration. Work had been undertaken to reintroduce this and was proceeding well. Reference was made to ASB issues being experienced and the importance of these being reported by residents to Councillors and to Cleveland Police. A Member supported these views and commented on the importance of giving feedback to those reporting issues.

A Member made reference to heritage preservation, to the Old Town Hall and St. Hilda's. A congratulatory message was conveyed in light of the funding that had been received; the Member commented that they would like to see a plan as to how this would be brought back. In response, the Executive Member explained that the Old Town Hall building needed to be made safe. There had been some commercial interest in the building previously, but funds necessary to make the building safe had reduced interest. Ideas to develop the building would be progressed once it had been made safe.

A Member made reference to Albert Park and the condition of the fountain within it, which was felt required investment. In response, the Executive Member acknowledged this point.

A Member made reference to developments made in respect of the Southlands Centre and expressed disappointment over a lack of communication/engagement with Ward Councillors. It was requested that Ward Councillors be kept updated in respect of progress made in order to help them support their residents. In response, the Executive Member acknowledged this point and explained that Ward Councillors would be fully involved in the future.

A Member made reference to community grant funding and back alley gates, and explained that some gates had been removed. It was queried whether residents could apply for grant funding in order to have gates re-installed. In response, the Executive Member explained that this could be achieved; contact could be made with either the Executive Member or the Neighbourhood Manager to discuss this.

In response to an enquiry regarding the operation of the Street Warden service and AIM, the Executive Member explained that meetings were operational in nature and not attended by Councillors. Updates in respect of AIM could be provided by the Executive Member at the request of individual Councillors, but meetings were operational. There was also potential for monthly round-ups to be provided to Ward Members, if deemed appropriate.

A Member commented that the additional IT equipment provided to schools during the pandemic was extremely welcomed and a great effort by the Council. In response, the Executive Member commented that the Department for Education delivered 10,000 laptops in Middlesbrough; the remit was to help those children 'slipping through the net', e.g. children not seen as disadvantaged, but whose parents would struggle to fund such devices, particularly if there was more than one child in the household.

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In response to a request for further information regarding the Street Warden service, the Head of Stronger Communities agreed to provide a budget breakdown for staffing and equipment for the service. In addition, statistical information in respect of Fixed Penalty Notices and court action would also be provided. In terms of Public Space Protection Orders, it was explained that the majority of actions were instructions, i.e. warnings, concerning a change of behaviour, as opposed to being concerned with income generation.

A Member made reference to locality working and commented on the excellent work being undertaken in terms of providing wraparound support to children in care. The Executive Member welcomed these comments and felt that, once restrictions had been lifted and individuals could physically attend buildings, the service would develop further.

A Member made reference to AIM and issues such as fly tipping, and queried what work could be undertaken to increase reporting; in instances where individuals would not be willing to report matters, the alternative to that was queried. In response, the Executive Member acknowledged this point. It was explained that, as representatives, those in attendance at AIM meetings would be expected to raise any issues; it was understood that not all residents would feel comfortable raising issues.

A Member made reference to school uniforms and work being undertaken in this regard, and queried whether any further information was available. In response, the Executive Member advised that research and discussion had been undertaken with schools and it was hoped that a report would be available in the near future.

A Member made reference to AIM and queried the inclusion of matters such as fly tipping - the Executive Member confirmed that this was included. Reference was made to the Flying Squad initiative (the responsibility for which lay within a different Executive portfolio), which tackled fly tipping. Other issues, such as bin fires could also be reported. All information would be pulled together by the Data Analyst to look at those issues. It was confirmed that, when residents reported issues, they were not required to leave their personal details.

In response to a query regarding AIM and the provision of feedback to Councillors and residents, the Executive Member indicated that the Police did produce Ward newsletters, but felt that the potential for an AIM newsletter could be looked at.

A Member made reference to the Flying Squad team and queried how many members of staff it had, and whether Street Wardens also supported the service. In response, the Head of Stronger Communities advised that there were eight members of staff in total – four teams/vehicles with two in each. Four of the officers had previously worked in what was an Environment Services team, and four were Environmental Enforcement Wardens who had already been dealing with fly tipping enforcement.

In response to an enquiry regarding the potential timescales for permitted outdoor gatherings, Members heard that an Orange Pip event was being planned to take place in August. The Head of Culture advised that teams were cautiously looking at events, with different scenarios being worked on depending upon Government guidance being received. The Executive Member highlighted the Council's achievement in being named best digital MELA this year.

A Member made reference to fly tipping and commented that feedback was not always received in terms of reported incidents. In response, the Executive Member indicated that this issue fell under the Executive Member for Environment's portfolio, but this comment would be forwarded. Reference was made to the Flying Squad and consideration given to publicity and awareness raising around fly tipping.

A Member commented on the reopening of the Town Hall and queried the possibility of holding a relaunch event. In response, the Executive Member felt that this could be celebrated when permitted.

In response to an enquiry regarding the scope of the Executive Member's portfolio and management of the remit, the Board heard that progress and successful management had been achieved through positive working relationships with officers, and holding regular meetings.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted, and the agreed action be undertaken.

20/104

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation to update the Board in respect of the Council's response to COVID-19.

With regards to responses to previous OSB queries, the following information was provided:

- Following an overview of the revisions to be made to the Outbreak Control Plan in light of Lockdown exit arrangements being provided, a query around potential impact of revisions was made. In response, the Chief Executive advised that in order to provide assurance that relevant systems and processes were in place to respond to outbreaks, enduring transmission and any new variants that may emerge, the OCP was updated / revised as follows:
 1. Care homes: enhanced support extended into care settings to include supported housing, extra care housing and children's homes and the testing regime in care homes;
 2. Schools: enhanced support was now available to schools, including testing in schools and at home;
 3. High risk settings and the support to reduce risk in those settings;
 4. Updated testing section detailing all the symptomatic and asymptomatic testing available;
 5. Local contact tracing approach added, including support to isolate and local discretionary financial support;
 6. Surge capacity section added describing approach to surge testing for variant(s) of concern;
 7. Sections added on community insights, tackling enduring transmission and building COVID-safe communities;
 8. Section added on vaccines and improving uptake in all communities to minimise health inequalities arising from differential uptake in communities; and
 9. Section added on lessons learnt and feedback to Government.
- Following an update being provided on up-to-date vaccination numbers in Middlesbrough, confirmation of numbers had been sought as the totals of the age categories did not tally with the overall total. The Chief Executive advised that these totals, provided at the March 2021 meeting of OSB, included only specific priority groups, so excluded (for example) health and social care and care home staff, and those in priority groups five and six that had already

been vaccinated.

- Community testing numbers were shared and a Member had sought confirmation of numbers tested versus numbers of positive cases confirmed across all sites as a result. The Chief Executive advised that the total number of tests was 2,883, with 26 total positives (0.90%).
- Following discussion of vaccination hesitation and a request for provision of vaccination refusal rates, by ethnicity, the Chief Executive advised that data provided by the Primary Care Network (not specifically Middlesbrough) which had a combined population of 160k (against Middlesbrough's population of 149k and therefore not directly comparable) showed emerging vaccine inequalities (as at 23/03/2021). Work was being undertaken to better understand Middlesbrough's local data, and with the Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a Vaccine Equity Plan, to increase uptake of the vaccines across all communities in Middlesbrough and narrow the above gaps over the coming weeks.
- Following a request for confirmation of the standard PPE provision to Care Homes, the Chief Executive advised that PPE supplies were distributed to health and social care providers (top-up emergency supplies only); education settings; homeless provision; Local Authority staff; testing sites; Domestic Violence refuges; mental health community care; personal assistants; supported living services, extra care provision, and day services. The standard list of items available were face masks (various), gloves, aprons, visors, eye protections, gowns (surgical and non-surgical) and hand sanitiser.

In terms of the latest local COVID-19 data, as at 7 April 2021 the rolling seven-day rate of cases per 100k of the Middlesbrough population was as follows:

- Four new cases had been added to the system on 7 April 2021;
- 48 new cases had been diagnosed in the last seven days;
- 34.0 rate per 100k of population (last seven days); and
- 261.70 COVID-19 deaths per 100k population.

Regarding Gold Command decisions made between 5 March 2021 and 31 March 2021, on 11 March 2021 the decision was taken for a further £1m of additional restrictions grant funding to be made available, with an expectation that any uncommitted funds (£3m for Middlesbrough) would be allocated by 31 March 2021. Single payments of £500 would be made to taxi drivers to cover costs of COVID-19 impact / licensing fees, to a total of £500,000. Once further guidance was issued, a decision would be made on additional options of spend against a remaining uncommitted £2.5m.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member queried how GP surgeries would be encouraged to contact those older patients who did not have access to email and/or text facilities. In response the Board heard that patient lists would be obtained and direct contact made via a telephone call. It was anticipated that local contact tracing staff would assist with this.

A Member sought clarification in relation to the provision of home appointments for vaccinations for those over the age of 80. In response, it was explained that this was currently being looked into, particularly in terms of logistical planning.

A Member commended the work of the COVID-19 testing teams at Newport Community Hub, which through his own experience was felt to be very professional and well executed. The Chief Executive acknowledged this point and commended all staff working at the various testing sites for the work being carried-out. A Member echoed these comments and congratulated all involved for delivering this invaluable

service.

The Chief Executive highlighted that, from 9 April 2021, anyone could test themselves at home twice per week – planning was currently taking place in respect of this. It was hoped that individuals would be able to attend any one of the four test sites to collect their first test, where they would be assisted in completing it. Subsequent tests could then be ordered and undertaken at home independently. In response to a query regarding how long this initiative would last, it was explained that this was unknown at present, however, it was anticipated to last for some time as it was a national push from Government - alongside the vaccination programme.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

20/105

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-23 - PROGRESS AT QUARTER THREE 2020-21

The Head of Strategy, Information and Governance provided an update to the Board, which included the following points:

- This Q3 update was in respect of the previous Strategic Plan, which covered the period October-December 2020, and which was presented to Executive on 16 February 2021;
- A new Strategic Plan was approved by Council on 24 February 2021 – the process to begin monitoring and reporting on this plan would begin in the next quarterly report;
- The delivery of the Strategic Plan, which was developed prior to the pandemic, had been impacted by COVID-19;
- In Q3, additional restrictions were seen in response to rising transmission that impacted on individual communities and economies across the country including Middlesbrough; the Executive would receive a report in respect of revised recovery arrangements in due course;
- Achievements made during Q3 were outlined, which referred to improvements in crime and ASB interventions; action to support children with remote learning; progress made in respect of Children's Services and the improvement journey; Future High Streets Fund; completion of the first phase of the town pot hole purge; and submission of new plans for the Boho X development; and
- Strategic risks – reference was made to the risk faced in relation to business continuity from the UK's exit from the EU at the end of the transition period in December, which was stood down due to the approval of the trade and security agreement with the EU at the end of December 2020. Risks and longer-term impacts and opportunities, such as the free port, were outlined to the Board, which would be monitored and reported on in future reports.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member referred to paragraph 17 and the current position in respect of the new commissioning model. In response, it was indicated that an update would be sought from the Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration and details provided in due course.

In response to a query regarding paragraph 36 and the transformation of the town centre, it was agreed that the Director of Regeneration would be invited to the next Board meeting to brief Members. The Chief Executive indicated that there was a full list of projects that formed the basis for the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund, which would be considered by the Executive in the near future.

A Member referred to paragraph 28 and the increase in the rate of children subject to CPOs. In response to a query regarding management of complex needs, particularly during lockdown, the Director of Children's Services explained that work had been undertaken in this regard; two managed teams had been introduced to the assessments service and assisting with reducing the backlog of work. A decrease had been seen in the number of children subject to child protection plans in very recent weeks; the number of children looked after had also decreased. These decreases had provided resource to help improve practice. It was acknowledged that this was a steady work in progress; the service was on a three-year improvement journey.

A Member referred to paragraph 45 and the number of new jobs attributable to the Investment Prospectus; details were sought in respect of the target figure, together with the locations and status of the jobs. In response, the Head of Strategy, Information and Governance indicated that this information would be sourced from the Investment Prospects Tracker and forwarded accordingly.

A Member made reference to paragraph 15 and queried whether the figures stated in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour represented incidents or reportings, and whether (for example) the 46% increase in Hemlington was relative to that area or Middlesbrough as an entirety. In response, the Board was advised that figures related to reported incidents and were relative to the previous quarter, but further information in terms of the absolute numbers would be obtained and circulated.

The Chair thanked the Head of Strategy, Information and Governance for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted, and the agreed action be undertaken.

20/106

REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET - PROJECTED OUTTURN POSITION AS AT QUARTER THREE 2020/21

The Director of Finance and the Head of Financial Planning and Support provided an update to the Board; the following points were highlighted:

- The information detailed in the report was separated into two elements: COVID-19 related and non-COVID-19 related;
- The total projected outturn at the end of the year was £2.796m, which represented an underspend of £294,000 on non-COVID elements, and a cost of almost £3.1m on COVID-19 elements;
- Paragraphs 79-91 of the report detailed expenditure against the Investment Strategy, which had a revised budget of £50.363m. The current latest estimated outturn was £45.915m; there was a £5m underspend mainly due to delays in COVID-19;
- Paragraphs 92-93 of the report indicated that borrowing had reduced by £10.3m in Q3 to £221.7m;
- Total reserves were detailed in paragraph 94, which showed approximately projected to be £28.5m, which could be used and earmarked for particular purposes;
- Appendix 1 of the report detailed virements; Appendix 2 showed the revised Investment Strategy which would be used from this point onwards; and
- The main area of financial effect was in Children's Care (just over £4m). This was an area of concern; full year effects would be seen in respect of this next year.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

In response to an enquiry regarding Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care and the potential impact of COVID-19 on those budgets over the coming years, it was explained that this was a concern, but there were a lot of unknowns at present. Consideration was given to increases in Adult Social Care costs and further increases in light of a greater need for home support. It was hoped that a funding review would be undertaken in the near future. It was acknowledged that this was an issue, which would be monitored closely.

A Member made reference to paragraphs 59-63 in respect of income reduction and queried how much of a risk this was going forward. In addition, a reduction to mileage for staff had been noted – it was queried whether this would be pursued at the current time and/or whether this would be revisited. In response, it was explained that the reduction in the mileage rate would be revisited in September by the Executive. This matter had been postponed due to the pandemic, during which time a reduction in mileage had been seen. There was a need to monitor the income longer-term, which was ultimately why as many reserves as possible needed to be built-up. The authority was not necessarily going to receive all of the income that had been received pre-COVID-19, which provided reasoning as to why some COVID-19 contingencies had been built into the budget in future years.

A Member referred to the balance of reserves and sought reassurance that matters were in hand and that there had not been any significant (recent) changes. In response, it was indicated that, in the budget report, the General Fund Reserve had been increased from £9.4m to just over £11.5m in anticipation of this. The aim was to increase reserves without affecting service provision.

A Member made reference to Appendix 2 and queried the anticipated return on the £26m that was being channeled into the Boho X development. In response, the Head of Financial Planning and Support advised that he would source further information regarding this.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance and the Head of Financial Planning and Support for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted, and the agreed action be undertaken.

20/107 **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Chairs/Vice Chairs provided updates in respect of the work undertaken by their respective panels since the last meeting of the Board.

NOTED

20/108 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

North East Scrutiny Network

The Chair advised that she had attended a meeting of the North East Scrutiny Network on 26 March 2021. This covered the region and the aim of the group was about sharing information, knowledge and experience; it was not a decision-making body. The meetings met on a quarterly basis. During discussion at this meeting, it was agreed that six individuals from each Local Authority would be invited to attend. It was felt that this would be a useful forum for Scrutiny Chairs. It was explained that presentations were delivered from the Centre of Governance on Health and Housing

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Solutions, which covered poverty, homelessness, the impact of COVID-19, the response to COVID-19 and domestic abuse. The Chair found this network very useful and encouraged people to attend if offered the opportunity.

NOTED