

# Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 24th November, 2015.

**Present:** Cllr David Harrington(Chairman), Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Chris Clough, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Matthew Vickers, Cllr David Wilburn

**Officers:** Graham Birtle, Peter Mennear, Michael Henderson (LD), Kate Fulton, Laurayne Featherstone (R)

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** Cllr Michael Clark, Cllr Philip Dennis and Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell

## 1 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Harrington declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in the item entitled "Scrutiny Review of River Tees Crossing Infrastructure" as he was an employee of Middlesbrough Borough Council which was referred to in the report and mentioned during discussion on the item.

Councillor Javed declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item entitled "Report on Chairs' updates" as his children were pupils at Hartburn Primary School, which was mentioned during discussion on the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's review of School Parking.

## 2 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2015 - for signature

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 3 Draft minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2015

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2015 were approved.

## 4 Scrutiny Review of River Tees Crossing Infrastructure

Members considered a final report, produced by the Crime and Disorder Select Committee, relating to River Tees Crossing Infrastructure.

The review had shown the importance of the built infrastructure that was required to ensure Stockton Borough was accessible and economically viable.

Changes to funding at a national level and the financial pressures borne by local highways authorities were recognised and the Committee commended the work undertaken and delivered to ensure that Stockton Borough remained an attractive destination with ease of movement around its centres. The recommendations were provided to ensure the continuation and, where needed, strengthened resources.

It was explained that since the papers for this meeting had been issued the Crime and Disorder Select Committee had met on Thursday 19 November 2015

and had added the following recommendations to its report:

- that subject to further detailed discussions with Middlesbrough Council, Cabinet consider , at a future meeting, proposals for a new joint arrangement that would reflect a revised financial structure for the maintenance of the River Tees crossings, under which Stockton would assume responsibility for the Newport Bridge and Middlesbrough would assume a reciprocal responsibility for the Transporter Bridge.
- that additional investment, if required, be provided to deliver a database that met departmental requirements.

Members discussed the report and supported its recommendations.

Particular discussion took place around the Select Committee's recommendation, relating to investment, if required, in the inspections database. Members noted that the extent of any such investment had not been quantified and, if any proved necessary, it may be available within existing budgets. Members who had served on the select committee explained the context of the recommendation and felt that the database was very important in terms of monitoring structures and ensuring that necessary maintenance interventions were undertaken in a timely manner, to avoid large scale investments further down the line.

It was noted that approved recommendations would be monitored by the Select Committee, at 6 monthly intervals.

RESOLVED that the report be noted

## **5 Freedom of Information Review**

Members received a report that provided baseline information relating to the 'reporting in' review of Freedom of Information (Fol) requests made to the Council. Key information provided included statutory requirements, the Council's current processes, the volume and complexity of requests and the resources needed to respond.

Areas of discussion included:

- assessments of request and how long they might take to respond to.
- how exemptions were used and particularly the 18 hour limit and applying the vexatious/repeated requester section of the Fol Act.
- extending the types and amount of information available on the web.
- how long information was kept
- provision of CCTV footage and consent.
- the potential for streamlining processes.

Members noted that a further report would be presented to the Committee's meeting in December, which provide detail on :

- examination of where appropriate interpretation and use of the legislation might support managing demand.
- current use of exemptions and whether there was any scope for more

effective use/ application.

- on-going activity to support streamlining processes including impact of service reviews, review of policy, procedure and practice.
- the publication scheme and links to FOI's
- examples of good practice elsewhere
- examples of learning opportunities to be gained from FOI's

The report noted that recommendations coming from the review would be presented to the Committee's next meeting and these would include proposals designed to reduce costs to the Council.

The Committee asked if an estimate of the current total cost to the Council could be provided and details of how many requests were valid and how many were refused.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted.
2. a further report analysing detail and providing findings and recommendations be presented to the Committee's December meeting.
3. members be provided with details of how many FOI requests were valid/refused and, if possible, an estimate of what the total cost of FOIs was to the Council.

## **6 Scrutiny Review of Consultation**

Members received a report that provided baseline information relating to the 'reporting in' review of consultation.

Members noted that consultation in the Authority was undertaken on a number of levels;

Strategic - this involved large consultations and was managed within Policy, Improvement and Engagement (PIE). It included the residents' Survey and viewpoint panel (residents' consultation panel). Key examples included introduction of statistical weighting of survey data.

Thematic/Service Specific - this was undertaken by service groups with strategic support from PIE, if needed. Key examples included Asset Review, Service Review, School Nursing Review

Internal - this involved Human Resources and PIE undertaking service reviews and Employee Survey.

It was explained that work was being undertaken to procure a more comprehensive, multifunctional consultation software solution, providing a web-based 'Stakeholder Consultation Portal' for use by the whole authority. It was indicated that a demonstration of the portal would be provided at the Committee's next meeting.

Members were informed that the review would look to examine, in detail:

- How Consultation could be improved across all areas of the Council.
- Take up and adoption of a Stakeholder Consultation solution.
- Links between Stakeholder Consultation and the Customer Portal.
- Consultation, Community Engagement and Communication Strategies.

During discussion of the information provided the following issues were raised:

- the Viewpoint Panel was refreshed periodically.
- it was considered important to move towards electronic solutions but it was recognised that not all residents had access to a computer and hard copy consultation was still available.
- the need for officers, in individual service areas to take corporate advice on surveys relating to their own service provision

The Chairman asked members to email Laurayne Featherstone, should they have any further comments on the Review, ahead of recommendations coming back to next month's meeting.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted.
2. a further report analysing detail and providing findings and recommendation be considered at the Committee's December meeting.
3. the Committee receive a demonstration of the stakeholder consultation portal, at it's December meeting.

## **7 Timetable for Setting the Scrutiny Work Programme 2016/17**

Members considered a report that presented the timetable for setting the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2016/17

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **8 Scrutiny Development Session - January 2016**

Members considered a report that suggested a format for an Executive Scrutiny development session in January 2016

The report also summarised Stockton's Scrutiny Arrangements, including recent changes to Committee Structures, an assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements against the national picture, details of recent scrutiny training and some suggested areas which could form part of the session.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the development session take place on 26th January 2016 and include:

- Work Programme – setting the Select Committee Work Programme topics in 2016, reflecting on what scrutiny has already reviewed and the overview of services.

- The Effectiveness of the Scrutiny programme – How does Executive Scrutiny Committee monitor the effectiveness of Select Committees and support them in their role?; the role of Chairs Updates/ feedback at Executive Scrutiny Committee.

- Performance Monitoring – How can we improve challenge? How can we disseminate this information?

- Call in – how it works?

- Role of Cabinet Members - attendance at Scrutiny Committee's and Executive Scrutiny

## **9 Statutory Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the Statutory Forward Plan 1 November 2015 - 28 February 2016. was considered.

RESOLVED that the Plan be noted.

## **10 Report on Chairs Updates**

Members considered the Chairs' updates on Select Committee's reviews.

There was particular discussion relating to:

- the Adult Services and Health Select Committee update and specifically about proposals for the configuration of intensive neonatal care in the North East. In the Tees Area the proposal was that intensive neonatal care would be located at South Tees Hospital only. That element of neonatal care would no longer be available at North Tees Hospital. The North East Regional Committee had received the proposal in October and the Regional Committee would discuss it further at its meeting to be held on 17 December. The Council's Health and Wellbeing Board had received a presentation on the proposals and it had raised concerns about the approach to consultation.

- Crime and Disorder Select Committee's update and its Review of School Parking. Though 3 schools within the Borough had been identified to provide a particular focus for the Committee it was recognised that, problems revealed in those schools, were likely to be typical of problems being experienced at schools in all wards of the Borough. All members would have the opportunity to contribute to the review.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

## **11 Executive Scrutiny Work Programme**

Members noted the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the work programme be agreed.

## **12 Executive Scrutiny Chairs Update**

The Chairman explained that he had contacted the Chief Executive Officer to discuss the role of scrutiny in reviewing Stockton's involvement in the developing Devolution/the Combined Authority arrangements. Reference was made to the recent Members' Seminar on this matter and it was indicated that, if considered necessary, the Chief Executive could be asked to attend a meeting of the Committee in the New Year to further discuss this matter.

Members commented that, for certain documents, the colour used for Committee papers made reading them difficult. It was agreed that the colour used be changed to resolve this problem.

RESOLVED that the update be noted/actioned as appropriate.