

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 19th January, 2021.

Present: Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley(Chair), Cllr Maurice Perry(Vice-Chair), Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Kevin Faulks (Sub for Cllr Ken Dixon), Cllr Luke Frost, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Matt Vickers (Sub for Cllr Laura Tunney),

Officers: Ann Workman (DoAH), (Martin Gray (DoCS), Sarah Bowman-Abouna (DoPH), Julie Danks, Nigel Hart, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Judy Trainer, Margaret Waggott, Sarah Whaley,GaryWoods(MD)

Also in attendance: Cllr Louise Baldock

Apologies: Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Tony Hampton, Cllr Laura Tunney, Peter Snowden,

ESC 21/20 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

ESC 22/20 **Minutes from the Executive Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th December 2020**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Executive Scrutiny Committee meetings which was held on 8th December 2020.

AGREED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

ESC 23/20 **Council Plan and COVID-19 Update**

Members were presented with a report that provided an update on the implementation of the Council Plan and the priority actions for 2020/21. It was in three parts: an outline of the priorities; a commentary on progress (with the detail on each priority action); and an analysis of priority actions for the rest of 2020/21 and in future years which incorporated the implications of COVID-19.

The main topics discussed were as follows:

The Council were continuing to support residents and local businesses in terms of trying to deal with the pandemic.

The delivery of priorities in the Council Plan had been sustained wherever possible, approximately 60% of actions had remained on target. COVID-19 had had an impact in delaying some actions or requiring others to be put on hold. In some cases, this was because of direct Government advice and guidelines, and in others it was related to the restrictions imposed on other partners. The detail of this was set out at Annex 1 of the main report.

Many additional new services had been developed; others had seen their work increase significantly and others had adapted their focus to be on COVID-19 related activity. Some front line staff had had to change shift patterns, some were working from home. It was also highlighted that the Public Health Team were working extremely hard taking on additional roles including the provision of advice, guidance, support and risk assessment support to workspaces, schools

and other settings, 7 days a week.

Members attention was drawn to paragraph 25 of the report which detailed the period to March 2021 and beyond. This period would continue to require a range of specific and dedicated actions to support the response and recovery phase:

- a. Test and trace system
- b. Outbreak control and management
- c. Support for those self-isolating
- d. Financial support for business and the self-employed.

Officers also proposed to continue to focus on those more fundamental and long term actions which would be required to support long term recovery, and to mitigate for the negative impacts of COVID-19. This would require a more fundamental re-appraisal of the Councils approach to tackling some of the long term issues facing the borough. A number of these were already underway and would be developed further in this period, details of which were contained within the main report.

Questions were raised in terms of Priority 11 within the Officers report (Develop coordinated approach to identifying adults at risk of poor health and design coordinated offer for early intervention and support) which indicated a delay due to COVID-19. The Director of Adults and Health assured the Committee that the delay related more to preparatory work rather than what was happening on the ground and that work continued as it should with vulnerable adults. The Director of Adults and Health agreed to look at the wording.

Discussion took place around some other local authorities reporting that the pandemic was having an impact on the delivery of Children's Services. The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that Stockton-on-Tees had not seen an increase in demand for Children's Services and the service continued to remain stable, although there had been a slight increase in the number of child referrals since the start of the pandemic.

Members briefly discussed the future of Stockton's annual events programme and the need to strengthen safety procedures for events on Council Land and training for event organisers.

Although the Council Plan detailed that 60% of priorities were still on track Members requested updated timescales for those that had been delayed. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that updated timescales would be presented in the next 6 monthly updates including those projects which would need to be held over into the next Council Plan.

The updated priorities for 2021/22 would be brought to Cabinet in March 2021 with a further annual update on 2020/21 in May 2021.

The Chair acknowledged all staff within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council for their continued hard work during these difficult times.

AGREED that the report be noted.

Medium Term Financial Plan

Members were presented with a report which provided an update on the Council's latest financial position, including a projection for the current financial year and the emerging issues for the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The report built upon the report to Council in July 2020 highlighting the impact of COVID and approved the use of balances to fund the position should it be necessary. This report updated the position, integrating the COVID impacts into the Council's overall financial position.

The main topics discussed were as follows:

In terms of Government Funding to date, COVID Emergency Grant Support amounting to £16.499m had been allocated to Stockton-on-Tees which was an increase of £3.64m that had been previously reported. In addition, a Sales, Fees and Charges Income Compensation Scheme had also been introduced as well as Business Grant Administration, Test and Trace Allocation etc. Full details of all allocated funding were detailed within the Officers report

The Financial Position for 2021/21 was still evolving and would continue to be updated through the MTFP process.

The Director of Finance, Development & Business Services drew Members attention to the financial COVID related pressures and variants across individual service areas. The overall pressure currently stood at £18.4 million however after £16.5 million received in grants and £1.75m in income compensation the Council were around £4m less worse off than what was expected in July 20. This indicated that the previous anticipated call on balances would not be required.

It was also highlighted to Members that due to the closure of some facilities and services there had been a reduction in income which currently stood at just over £4m.

In terms of the Collection Fund the Council had seen an increase in claims for Council Tax support, and in addition, housing growth was slower than anticipated, both of which would impact on the Council's anticipated council tax budget. For the business rates part of the Collection Fund, there remained a significant number of businesses that would not benefit from the government's relief and grants, therefore there was a risk to the Council in terms of reduced business rates revenue if businesses were to fail or were unable to pay their business rates. The Government had indicated that they would cover 50% of these deficits, leaving the Council to fund the rest. Under normal circumstances regulations required that these types of deficits would be met by the Council in the following year however there were suggestions that a recovery of 3 years be allowed. As a contingency and due to uncertainty £2m of funding available had been earmarked to support either additional COVID costs or support Council Tax and Business Rates.

Members attention was drawn to the additional funding administered by the Council showing the level of support the Council had provided to various businesses, services, and facilities. The vast majority of £33.4m had been

allocated in business support however since then there had been additional funding and grants received and the Council were working through those which related to the November 20 lockdown. Some of the grants received had clear guidelines on how they could be used however there were discretionary grants which had been received and were being rolled out, whilst trying to keep a consistent approach across all Tees Valley authorities. An update would be provided as part of the next report.

AGREED that the report be noted.

**ESC
25/20** **Overview Meetings 2021 and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22**

Members were presented with a report that set out arrangements for Select Committee overview meetings 2021 and the process for selecting in depth topic suggestions for the scrutiny work programme 2021/22.

In addition, and based on previous Executive Scrutiny Committee workload and discussion at previous Executive Scrutiny Committee meetings, it was proposed the frequency of scheduled meetings be reduced to bi-monthly with meetings scheduled during the months of March, May, July September, November, and January.

Questions were raised relating to outstanding topics. Officers explained that those topics could be re-submitted for next year's programme. Some topics would straddle 2 municipal years.

AGREED that:

- 1) the report be noted
- 2) Executive Scrutiny Committee meetings for 2021/22 as detailed above be endorsed.

**ESC
26/20** **Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22 - Task and Finish Review - Police Ward Member Communications in Stockton-on-Tees**

Members were asked to consider a report which advised the Executive Scrutiny Committee of a potential Task and Finish Review – Police Ward Member Communications in Stockton on Tees for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22.

Members were informed that Cleveland Police and Crime Panel had established a Task and Finish Group to examine the existing communication methods of Cleveland Police with / between the public and other local stakeholders. The review was scheduled to report to the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel in Summer 2021.

Following on from and complementing this Cleveland-wide review of the Police Communications Strategy, it was felt that a Stockton-on-Tees focused Task and Finish Review would be beneficial in order to examine information sharing and communications in Stockton-on Tees between neighbourhood police, local ward Councillors, local residents and key stakeholders.

Members discussed the importance of the timeliness of the review alongside the Cleveland police and Crime Panels review and felt the review should commence as soon as possible.

Members of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee were happy to consider this task and finish review.

AGREED that the topic suggestion, Task and Finish Review - Police Ward Member Communications in Stockton-on-Tees be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22.

**ESC
27/20** **Crime and Disorder Select Committee - Scrutiny Review of Fly-Grazed Horses (Executive Summary for information)**

The Chair of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee presented the Committee with the Executive Summary of the Scrutiny Review of Fly Grazed Horses.

The main topics discussed were as follows:

Prior to COVID the review had started well, was intensive and presented many challenges. The review had had a period of being put on hold temporarily due to the pandemic resulting in additional meetings being scheduled, to gather evidence. The Committee had worked closely with various partners, landowners, and horse owners The Committee had begun to look at the review as a borough wide review however as this would require input from Cleveland Police it went further than just being a Local Authority issue.

The report and its recommendations would be presented to Cabinet at its January 2021 meeting.

AGREED the report be noted.

**ESC
28/20** **Place Select Committee - Scrutiny Review of Planters in Residential Streets (Task & Finish) - Executive Summary for Information**

The Vice Chair of the Place Select Committee presented the Committee with the Executive Summary of the Scrutiny Review of Planters in Residential Streets.

The aim of the review was to investigate the options for retaining, maintaining, or removing planters in residential streets. The review examined whether anti-social behaviour would be reduced, and savings made, if planters were removed or whether planters could be given a new lease of life by seeking third party or community involvement.

The main topics discussed were as follows:

It was recommended that resident / community groups, town and parish councils be invited to take on responsibility of planters in their area.

The importance of planning a coordinated approach and investigate best options to obtain funding.

That residents and local Ward Councillors be consulted about planters in their street, encouraging their involvement.

The review had focused specifically on concrete planters however there was a possibility that on the back of this review a piece of desk top work could be undertaken looking at wooden planters in residential areas which could come back to the Executive Scrutiny Committee.

The Place Select Committee Chair felt the recommendations could quite easily relate to wooden planters. It was important that regular update reports came to Committee highlighting where change had happened and what organisations were involved. The Chair thanked the Vice Chair and the Committee for the work they had undertaken.

The Vice Chair thanked the link officer for their work on the review as well as the Scrutiny Officers the task and finish members and the wider committee.

The Chair of the Executive Scrutiny Committee thanked all those involved for their hard work.

The final report would be presented to Cabinet at its January 2021 meeting.

AGREED the report be noted.

**ESC
29/20** **Statutory Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

**ESC
30/20** **Chairs' Updates**

Members considered the Select Committee Chairs' updates.

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee:

The Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee, gave members a brief update highlighting the following;

Prior to the January 2021 meeting ERS Medical had requested more time to prepare a submission for the Hospital Discharge (Phase 2) review and would now attend the February meeting.

In terms of NHS Updates / Consultations the Committee had a new contact for the CCG and a meeting had been arranged for 4th February 2021.

Children and Young People Select Committee.

The Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee, gave members a brief update highlighting the following;

To raise awareness of the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review

of The Cost of School Uniform, presentations would be shared at Governor and Head Teacher sessions to help raise awareness and share the committee's findings.

Work had already commenced on the Scrutiny Review of Care Leavers EET. The first evidence gathering sessions had been held in December 2020 and the second session was due at the Committee's January 2021 meeting and would be examining all officer roles. Healthwatch report on 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People' was considered at the December meeting of the Select Committee.

Crime and Disorder Select Committee;

The Chair of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee, gave members a brief update highlighting the following;

The Scrutiny Review of Fly Grazed Horses was due to be presented to Cabinet at its January meeting.

Initial meetings had begun in terms of the Scrutiny Review of Fraud Awareness (Personal)

With the agreement of the Executive Scrutiny Chair it was hoped that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee would be in a position to share a video which had been produced by local school children to highlight the issues around school parking at the next meeting of the Executive Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that parking outside schools had been an issue, across the Borough, for a number of years and considerable work had been undertaken to try and ease the situation, at affected schools, including the implementation of recommendations from a scrutiny review, undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Select Committee, in 2016. The Committee recognised the work the late Cllr Julia Cherrett had undertaken, in supporting the Select Committee, on this issue. The Committee also recognised Cllr Cherrett's role in bringing the Councillor Call for Action relating to Whitehouse Primary School, the outcomes of which would aid that school and potentially other schools within the Borough.

People Select Committee;

The Chair of the People Select Committee, gave members a brief update highlighting the following;

The Scrutiny Review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme had been paused until more was known about the affordability of the current scheme and any alternative proposals.

The final report of the Scrutiny Review of Public Consultation was approved by Cabinet on the 17th December 2020.

In terms of the Scrutiny Review of Carbon Monoxide Awareness, a one-off session to highlight the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning would be held on 25th January 2021.

Place Select Committee;

The Chair of the Place Select Committee, gave members a brief update highlighting the following;

It was highlighted that the Scrutiny Review of Burial Provision would be one of the most important reviews the committee had worked on. Although the Committee had a broad representation of Members, due to its importance the Chair had invited Members from all parties to attend the meetings to ensure all had an opportunity to contribute

Initially the Committee had looked at 11 possible locations for one new burial site, however this had now been narrowed down to 6 possibilities.

It was important that Ward Members of each possible location of the burial site were included in discussions in terms of suitability and or implications.

AGREED that the reports be noted.

**ESC
31/20**

Executive Scrutiny Work Programme and Chair's Update

It was highlighted that it had been agreed to move Executive Scrutiny Committee meetings to bi-monthly.

The Committee noted that there were currently no items to consider on the Executive Scrutiny Work Programme for the February meeting, however it was agreed that in order to allow Members the opportunity to discuss any additional topics at that meeting the Committee would wait until nearer the time prior to agreeing to cancel the meeting.

The Chair informed the Committee that Members would be asked for topic suggestions for consideration by the Scrutiny Select Committees for the municipal year 2021 / 2022.

AGREED that the information be noted.