

## Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 26th July, 2022.

**Present:** Cllr Maurice Perry(Vice-Chair), Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Steve Matthews (sub for Cllr Niall Inness), Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Paul Weston (Sub for Cllr Pauline Beall), Cllr Barry Woodhouse

**Officers:** Julie Danks (MD), Garry Cummings (F,D&R), Martin Gray (ChS), Reuben Kench (CS.E&C), Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, Gary Woods, Rachel Harrison, John Devine (CS)

**Also in attendance:** None

**Apologies:** Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Jacky Bright, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Laura Tunney

### 1 **Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### 2 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

### 3 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th May 2022-For Approval**

AGREED that the minutes be confirmed as a true record of the Executive Scrutiny meeting held on 17th May 2022 and signed by the Chair.

### 4 **Medium Term Financial Plan – Draft Outturn - March 2022**

Members considered a report that provided an update on the Council's draft financial performance and position as of 31st March 2022.

Officers outlined the report to Members noting that overall, there had been an improvement in the draft outturn 2021/22 financial position compared to the projected costs from December of around £1.4 million. This report set out the breakdown, but the key reasons were:

- Additional grant and income being received, including Covid 19 support funding for 2021/22 and the final instalment of Covid 19 sales, fees, and charges income compensation scheme.
- Some projected pressures were lower than anticipated and additional savings were achieved.

The Capital Programme had been updated to incorporate new schemes and reflect those schemes completed, as at the financial year end.

The report also noted the continued national pressure in respect of Dedicated Schools Grant, specifically in relation to Special Education Needs and Disabilities which had resulted in a cumulative pressure of £5.48 Million at the end of 2021/22. Officers assured Members that the Council would continue to lobby for additional funding while working to resolve the position.

Regarding the stated lower-than-anticipated projected pressures and the achieved additional savings, the Committee asked for clarity on what these specifically were. Reference was made to the 'Detail' section of the report, with paragraphs 4 (Adults and Health) and 6 (Community Services and Transport) outlining the main reasons for the improved financial position.

In relation to paragraph 3 (Covid 19 Funding), it was noted that, whilst the Council's financial position was supported in 2021/22 by the Government's Covid 19 Support Grant, there was no projected funding for 2022/23 as yet.

Members asked what the excess sum of £1.413m quoted in paragraph 12 of the report would be used for – officers confirmed that this amount would support identified future pressures.

In terms of inflationary pressures (paragraph 13), the Committee asked about the potential impact of the latest staff pay award. The Council was anticipating a 3% rise, though noted the higher percentage increases being offered to employees within other sectors of the UK economy.

With reference to Appendix B of the report, Members asked if there had been any delays in financing the Disabled Adaptions in homes across the Borough ('other schemes'). Officers reported that there had been a delay at year-end regarding Disabled Facilities grants, but that the identified work had been planned and orders placed (though not necessarily delivered before the end of the financial year).

Regarding the completed parks and cemeteries schemes ('other schemes'), Members noted that flooding continues to be an issue in some of the Borough's cemeteries.

AGREED that report be noted.

## **5 Council Plan 2021/24 - Update**

Members considered a report, previously presented to Cabinet, that focused on the implementation of the Council Plan 2021/24 and progress on the priority actions in 2021/22.

Additional Priority Focuses in 2021/22 were identified in the report as follows:

- Community Safety. We have appointed 12 additional Civic Enforcement Officers. This additional resource will focus on our main town and village centres, supporting the local economy and continuing efforts to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. This additional resource has also allowed more time for the existing Civic Enforcement Officers to focus on resident priorities deeper within our communities, as identified by surveys and recent consultations.
- Road and pavement maintenance and repairs including targeted grounds maintenance and pavement and kerbside maintenance. We have carried out an additional 26 carriageway schemes, an area covering 23,500 square metres or approximately 4km of carriageway. Four of these schemes were trial areas for a

new material using a rubber crumb additive made from recycling old car tyres. In addition, approximately 4,500 square metres of planned patching work has been carried out, which is the equivalent of treating 2,000 potholes. We have continued large-scale street cleansing works resulting in a cleaner and more attractive environment for our residents, businesses, and visitors. In total, we have undertaken 76 job requests from all areas of the Borough including embankment clearances, weed removal, major fly tip clearance, graffiti clearance, programmed cleansing of the A66, autumn leaf clearance, bonfire removal and back-alley rubble removal. We also carried out additional gritting during the winter to enable completion of scheduled refuse collections.

- Support services for elderly people building on the Adult Social Care Strategy. The Council continues to work with stakeholders to support the delivery of services for older people post COVID. This work has included looking at how services, such as day opportunities, should evolve to meet the new expectations of people and their families, addressing the challenges of local care markets through support with recruitment and retention and implementing key actions following the Social Care Reform White Paper last year.
- Family hubs. A major restructuring of family support functions has been undertaken, including a successful procurement of a strategic partner to support aspects of delivery. The family hubs offer has been improved to offer a wide range of support to communities including drop-ins, parenting courses, health advice and community activities. The family support offer has now been streamlined and also now includes therapeutic work and family group conferencing. Family workers are now based within family hubs alongside other services and partner agencies. Family Action, our appointed strategic partner, have commenced working with us to improve the offer of universal family support for those children and families involved with social care services.

Members highlighted concerns around affordable housing in the local authority area (priority 13), noting that, with no baseline to compare to, it is not clear if numbers of affordable housing are improving in the borough. Officers advised Members that they would be looking into refreshing the Council's Housing Strategy in the next 6-9 months.

The issue of social housing was also raised, and the Committee sought confirmation on how much social housing (as opposed to affordable housing) was being provided. Officers recognised that all types of housing needed to be looked at with providers and partners as part of a wider strategy.

Regarding priority 26 (implications of changes in travel patterns as a result of Covid), Members raised concerns about bus routes. A request was made for feedback from the bus operator regarding a lack of buses to Ropner Park, as well as clarification on what alternative provision was being made for holiday buses which would have previously dropped off in the layby outside the Castlegate Centre once the forthcoming demolition commences. The Committee was reminded that the Council was not responsible for bus scheduling but was willing to discuss issues with operators. Members suggested that conversations with the Tees Valley Mayor, who has transport

powers, would also be prudent, and also asked if there were any plans to resume the twice-yearly public transport meetings that used to be held at the Arc – this would also be followed-up.

With reference to the Council's future office accommodation plans (priority 27), Members were advised that tenants were still in Dunedin House, but an organisation had been appointed to timetable the phased move of SBC staff which would begin in early-2023.

Discussion ensued around the recent development of the Council's new website (priority 29), and how it should only be one of many ways that the public can get in touch with the Council, with the phone lines being a main contact point for some residents of the borough. Officers confirmed that a number of personnel had been seconded to Customer Services to deal with the influx of calls related to the Council Tax rebate and cost of living payments. Assurance was given that the council's call handling capacity had not diminished.

Members also congratulated officers for their work on the disabled access for the Billingham Train Station.

AGREED that:

- 1) the report be noted.
- 2) Responses are provided in relation to identified member queries.

## **6 Final Report of the Children and Young People Select Committee - Executive Summary for Information - Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty**

Members were presented with the Executive Summary for information of the Children and Young People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty.

Some key findings of the report were:

- In 2019/20 there were 4.3 million Children living in poverty in the UK which is 31% of all children. With 75% of that number coming from working families.
- The Northeast has the second highest rate of Child Poverty in the UK with a rate of 37%.
- In Stockton there has been a 71% increase in households in receipt of Universal Credit and a 24.4% increase in Stockton for pupils eligible for Free School Meals.
- The threshold for free school meals is low; extending this to all families in receipt of universal credit would benefit a further 2,900 Stockton children and help families to access other forms of support.

- In 2019/20 there were 13,922 children living in poverty in Stockton which was an increase of almost 4,300 since 2014/15.

The recommendations put forward in the report were as follows:

1. That a family poverty profile is compiled and updated annually from available data and input from those with lived experience and is used to identify a key priority for targeted action each year; an initial focus being take up of Free School Meals for those eligible and in need.
2. That support offered to families in poverty is enhanced through:
  - a. A more integrated and visible offer for families experiencing poverty focusing on information, advice, financial and other support
  - b. Roll out of Poverty Proofing the School Day across all Stockton Schools
  - c. Establishing a mutual aid/ giving scheme, in partnership with Catalyst, to facilitate community giving
  - d. Ensuring an enhanced support offer is available for communities and areas targeted through the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Framework
3. That specific interventions are put in place focusing on:
  - a. Healthy Food through the delivery of cooking and budgeting skills in schools, linked to Healthy Schools
  - b. Help with energy costs through warm energy schemes/ credits etc.
  - c. Digital inclusion for all children including schemes to re-use redundant laptops and roll out of skills training and family learning
4. That, subject to funding, a direct payments scheme is developed for those identified as in need, building on the examples of vouchers during the pandemic.
5. That all subsidy policies are reviewed and revised as appropriate to provide streamlined and enhanced support for families.

Members voiced their support for the recommendations outlined in the report.

AGREED that report be noted.

## **7 Final Report of the People Select Committee - Executive Summary for Information - Scrutiny Review of Tees Credit Union**

Members were presented with the Executive Summary for Information of the People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Tees Credit Union.

The aim of the review was to consider the operation of the Credit Union since the merger with Moneywise in 2017 to ensure that it is serving the needs of the people of the Borough and specifically supporting the vulnerable who rely on it for the provision of loans, banking services and savings accounts at reasonable rates. The Review provided an opportunity to consider whether any opportunities for collaboration arise from the new operation which may generate further benefits for the Moneywise customers in Stockton on Tees.

The review had also provided an excellent opportunity to consider whether increased support and collaboration can be achieved with businesses and

VCSE organisations in the Borough in terms of payroll giving and collaborative working. In addition, opportunities for generating greater take up of the Moneywise services with Council employees would seek to ensure that we have a healthy and high performing credit union in the Borough which is helping to tackle financial exclusion.

The conclusion of the review was that the Select Committee found the Credit Union provided local, accessible, and flexible support and noted that since the merger with Moneywise, the financial position had significantly improved with increases in loans, savings, and membership.

The Recommendations outlined in the review were:

1. That further opportunities to promote the Credit Union are explored, including:
  - Member Newsletters and social media
  - Council promotion through Stockton News and social media
  - Voluntary and Community Sector/ community centres
  - Charities and Charity Shops
2. That partnership working with other financial providers and sectors is strengthened, including:
  - Outreach through community-based organisations and volunteers
  - Reciprocal referral arrangements between financial providers operating locally
  - Strengthening of arrangements to refer Credit Union customers to SDAIS
  - Working to support the Fairer Stockton on Tees framework
3. That the Credit Union consider whether the name reflects the ambition of the organisation and might be better re-badged Community Bank or People's Bank.
4. That the app to assess benefit entitlement is investigated to understand its value and application and be promoted as appropriate alongside other sources of advice.
5. That Councillors and all Council staff are encouraged to set up payroll savings with the Credit Union and become members of the Credit Union.
6. That the membership of the Infinity Partnership be reviewed to ensure that it includes all relevant financial support organisations operating within the Borough.

Members voiced their support for the recommendations outlined in the report.

AGREED that report be noted.

## **8 Final Report of the Place Select Committee - Executive Summary for Information - Scrutiny Review of Residents Parking Zones**

Members were presented with the Executive Summary for Information of the

## Place Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Residents Parking Zones.

The recommendations outlined in the review were:

- 1) To increase understanding around Residents Parking Zones (RPZs), Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) produces and publishes a flowchart outlining the key aspects involved in the process, determination and, if approved, implementation of this scheme.
- 2) SBC revises its existing 'high-level' RPZ policy (making this available on the SBC website and via any other relevant publicly accessible mechanism) to:
  - a. Clearly define the different types of permits available and what these allow / prohibit.
  - b. Provide clear guidance on the eligibility requirements for a RPZ and define what is appropriate (giving any relevant examples).
  - c. Clearly define where a RPZ would not be appropriate (e.g., around schools and not deterring people visiting high-use areas like parks).
  - d. Outline who should be consulted regarding the determination of an RPZ request (i.e., affected residents, business forums, SBC Ward Councillors, Parish / Town Councils).
- 3) SBC reviews the current RPZ charging policy, particularly around the cost of business permits, and the maximum quantity of permits per household / business.
- 4) Ward Councillor briefings are scheduled to raise awareness of a revised RPZ policy, reinforcing eligibility / exclusion criteria and opportunities for Elected Member input during the process (including ways Councillors can feed back on the any issues regarding RPZs in their Ward).
- 5) When responding to a RPZ request, SBC ensures that clearly defined criteria is used to identify the appropriate extents of a RPZ, taking account of the impact this would have on residents, nearby businesses, and visitors to that particular part of the Borough.
- 6) The revised RPZ policy allows for consideration of permits to be approved for single streets (where appropriate) in addition to the existing 'zonal' approach.
- 7) Work is undertaken with the SBC Civic Enforcement team to establish an enforcement plan around existing, and potentially future, RPZs, and that any enforcement action be highlighted via SBC communication platforms as a means of deterring abuse of RPZs.
- 8) A periodic review of any RPZ is included as part of a revised RPZ policy (akin to West Sussex County Council).
- 9) An audit of existing RPZs be undertaken to ensure line markings are clear and signage is appropriate.

Members discussed the reports findings around Resident parking Zones around schools, but officers and committee members found that RPZ weren't

appropriate for School areas for a number of reasons. The Committee Chair noted that there was no one simple solution to the problem.

AGREED that report be noted.

## **9 Select Committee Chairs Updates**

Members were provided with updates from the Chairs of each Select Committee. Updates and discussion included:

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee: -

The Care at Home review's second evidence-gathering session had been deferred to September to allow for more time to plan the next session which would focus on views of people accessing services and their families/ carers.

Members were told that a reply had now been received from the Secretary of State about the concerns raised by the Council around the Tees Esk, Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) which was described as disappointing in its content by Members. The Committee has committed to continuing monitoring and following up diligently on the issue.

Also brought to the attention of Members was the new Health and Care Act 2022 and how it would affect the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's powers.

Children and Young People Select Committee: -

Members noted the updated from the Children and Young People Select Committee Chair.

Crime and Disorder Select Committee: -

The final evidence-gathering session for the Bonfires on Public Land review was held in May 2022.

Members enquired on the progress of the Tree Asset Management review; they were advised that the review is due to begin soon but no other major updates.

People Select Committee: -

Members noted the updated from the People Select Committee Chair.

Place Select Committee: -

The Planning (Development Management) & Adoption of Open Space review had begun with the first evidence-gathering session discussing the policy and protocol of the past five years. Site visits had also been planned to assess the open spaces.

AGREED that the updates and discussion be noted and actioned as



appropriate.

**10 Plan of Key Decisions**

AGREED that the plan be noted.

**11 Executive Scrutiny Chair's Update and Work Programme 2022/23**

AGREED that the work programme be noted.