

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 18th December, 2017.

Present: Cllr Jean O'Donnell (Chair), Cllr Eileen Johnson (Vice-Chair), Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Carol Clark (sub for Cllr Barbara Inman)

Officers: John Angus, Andrew Corcoran (EG&D); Diane McConnell (CHS); Paul Diggins (F&BS); Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Di Hewitt

PEO 34/17 Evacuation procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

PEO 35/17 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO 36/17 Monitoring the impact of previously agreed recommendations

Consideration was given to progress of the implementation of previously agreed recommendations. There were outstanding recommendations from the reviews of Disadvantage in Early Years, Child Poverty, Wellbeing and FASD as follows:

Disadvantage in Early Years

- Most of the outstanding recommendations contain elements that are ongoing, though some have been fully achieved.
- Health checks for 2 ½ year olds had been recommissioned as uptake and performance had not been as strong in this area. From April new providers with a very different model will hopefully have a far better impact working alongside family hubs.

Members asked for clarification between the integrated 2 year-old check with health and education professionals and the 2 ½ year-old health development review. It was noted that 2 ½ year health checks are carried out by Health. The integrated check works with Early Years providers to carry out the learning development check at the same time to enable improved multi-agency sharing of information.

Child Poverty

- The "A Fairer Start Project" being piloted in Stockton would come to an end in March 2018 – the approach had been deemed successful and would be embedded in a wider 0-19 service model.
- To date, a contact had yet to be found to work with other partner agencies to further explore the provision of speech and language therapy for children.

Members discussed the importance of speech and language and recognised

the long-standing issues in this area.

Wellbeing

- Discussion at adult HWB partnership in relation to arts and cultural options when commissioning preventative and mental health services (recommendation 4) still to be scheduled.
- Celebration event completed and animation launched (recommendation 5). As session plan completion and embedding into wider work is an ongoing process, Members agreed that this recommendation can be assessed as fully achieved.

FASD

- The action in relation to promoting and monitoring use of the FASD animation (recommendation 2) will be subsumed within the revised Alcohol Strategy.
- Still awaiting results of the Regional FASD Research Project (recommendation 5).
- Development of the revised Alcohol Strategy (ensuring FASD prevention is reflected) (recommendation 6) has been slowed by changes in personnel involved in the Alcohol Strategy Group. Support to be sought from Adults Partnership to progress.

AGREED - that the Progress Updates be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed subject to the one amendment (Wellbeing) outlined above.

**PEO
37/17**

Welfare Reform Monitoring

Members received an update on Welfare Reform Q2 2017-18, the key points as follows:-

- Universal Credit roll-out expanded service into Stockton scheduled for April 2018. Service to be rolled out via job centres in Stockton from July 2018.
- A briefing note had been circulated to Members from Revenue and Benefits to assist in understanding the roll-out.
- The Welfare Support Service had delivered some excellent results for some of the most vulnerable people in the Borough - almost £1.3m in additional benefit payments was received in the first 6 months of the year.
- Three case studies were highlighted where Council support had been given to assist people in looking after their affairs, including crisis payments, benefits checks and discretionary housing payments.
- Social fund/crisis payments totalling £51,973 had been paid to claimants meeting the eligibility criteria in the year to date.
- Stockton allocation for Discretionary housing payments had been increased to almost £600,000 in 2017/18.
- It had been recommended that each council have its own support team in relation to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Stockton's would be rolled-out in 2018/19.
- To date, 33 young people in the borough had been helped with discretionary council tax discount for care leavers up to age 25.
- Tees Credit Union – a major change was the re-branding of Tees Credit Union as 'Moneywise'. Although still operating from Stockton Town Centre, an

amalgamation of local service with Moneywise Newcastle would provide better expertise and back office support.

- Focus on encouraging people to save at source, using Credit Union for loans.
- Council Tax collection rate for 2017-18 was over 55% currently and at the end of the financial year would be 95-96%.
- The Council would continue to support the roll-out of welfare reform issues, and work is ongoing to mitigate the impact.

Members questions and comments could be summarised as follows:-

- Were Council Tax discounts for care leavers being promoted? Members noted that this was currently targeted at those in care in recent years, mainly due to the £10,000 budget.
- Clarification was requested on the system of payment collection of Council Tax – it was noted that long term collection rates remained high with over 98.5% of the annual debit collected after 3 years.
- Concern was expressed about possible housing issues with Universal Credit. If not in receipt of income, whilst waiting for a claim to be processed was there a risk of people losing their homes in the sometimes lengthy interim period? Also, on receipt of UC, would a claimant know what proportion was for rent? Previously, housing benefit could be claimed on nil income and rent paid – if sanctioned, would this still be the case with Universal Credit? Members noted that although no details of how a sanction would apply were known, there were alternative payment arrangements available, particularly for new claimants, where an up-front payment of 60% of estimated UC benefit (including housing) could be made, then deducted from future payments.
- Was Discretionary Housing Payment an entitlement? It was noted that an application had to be made for a DHP which was not guaranteed, but depended on circumstances such as outgoings and domestic situation.
- Would UC claimants know what amount they would receive or have to contact DWP to ask about entitlements before the roll-out in July? It was noted that government websites were available to check allowances and entitlements. Clarification in the form of an anonymised version would be provided to Members.
- Why was the system changing to UC? Members noted the statement given ‘to encourage people back into work’.
- Would there be a presence from DWP or Benefits at the Members Seminar in the New Year to clarify implications of the roll-out of UC? It was noted that a request would be made to ensure a suitable presence.

Members asked to place on record their appreciation of the excellent service carried out by the Welfare Service team, their hard work and effort to respond quickly.

AGREED:

- 1) That the information be noted.
- 2) That UC clarification of entitlement be provided.
- 3) That attendance of DWP/Benefits be requested at the forthcoming Members Seminar.

**PEO
38/17**

Community Participation Budget

As part of an agreed Officer-led ‘reporting-in’ review, Members received an

overview of the Community Participation Budget, outlining the current financial situation and details of uncommitted Ward allocations. Key points were as follows:-

- The CPB began 10 years ago to fund a variety of small highway projects.
- The budget of £400,000 is divided across the Borough on a Ward-by-Ward basis depending on population.
- Unspent monies were previously carried forward, however in future allocated funding would be more closely monitored.
- A breakdown was given on original and remaining budgets by Ward, and showed uncommitted resources of almost £93,000.
- A guidance document was given to Committee Members, seeking endorsement from Cabinet for the reallocation of uncommitted funding.
- Discussion on budget issues would be held with Cabinet Member early-January.
- A record of eligible schemes had been kept by Officers of requests by Ward Councillors and residents over the years – for example kerbs, parking requests, mobility issues and bins.

Members comments and questions could be summarised as follows:-

- This seemed a much improved scheme than in previous years where allocation had been more on a 'first come, first served' basis.
- There were issues with split Wards – would it be possible to split allocation two or three ways (depending on the number of Councillors within a particular Ward) to prevent delays in agreement by all parties? Members were advised that this would be relatively simple to set up and administer, and could be put forward as a suggestion by the Committee.
- There was concern that funding would be taken back if deemed not needed, and if a Ward did not use all of its budget – would this still be carried forward as previously? Members noted that carry-over should be kept to a minimum and that areas with significant under-allocation would be referred to Cabinet to make a decision to carry-over or reallocate to other schemes that may have been underfunded. Constant carry-over meant under-resourcing one year and over-resourcing another year.
- Could the scope of the CPB be extended for the benefit of Stockton residents in order to address unallocated funds. Members were advised that consideration of projects requiring one-off payments (rather than schemes requiring ongoing costs/maintenance) could be put forward as a proposal by Members.

Members were advised that the Committee's comments on the content of the presented report would be included as an appendix to the Officer report that is presented to Cabinet.

AGREED:

- 1) That the information be noted, and the two recommendations within the Officer report be endorsed.
- 2) That split Ward allocation be considered.
- 3) That consideration is given to extending the scope of the CPB to projects requiring one-off payments.

**PEO
39/17** **Work Programme 2017-2018**

Next meeting to be held on 22nd January 2018.
Two meetings to be held in February 2018 (an additional meeting scheduled on 19th).

AGREED – that the Work Programme be noted.

**PEO
40/17** **Chair's Update**

The Chair had nothing further to report.