

## Overview Report

# People Select Committee

## Overview Meeting 2020

2 March 2020

### Finance and Business Services

#### Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £68 million over the last seven years and future funding is uncertain.

The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as the uncertain financial position, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protect the vulnerable by**
  - protecting people who are subject to or at risk of harm
  - helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
  - supporting people who are financially excluded
  - assisting people whose circumstances make them vulnerable
  
- **Create economic prosperity by**
  - ensuring the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy
  
- **Tackle inequality through improving**
  - health
  - job opportunities, skills and training
  - educational attainment for all
  - affordable housing and fuel poverty
  - financial inclusion
  
- **Help people to be healthier by**
  - providing mainstream services that are available where needed
  - providing preventative services that are available where needed

It is within this context that the Select Committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

#### Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in July and November 2019, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

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### **Finance and Business Services – Director – Garry Cummings**

Relevant services include:

- Finance and Assets
- Procurement and Governance
- Revenues and Benefits, including Welfare Support
- Information and Improvement Services

### **Council Plan 2019-2022**

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The 2019-22 objectives for the Our Council theme are attached at Appendix 1.

### **Emerging Issues**

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities are summarised as follows:

What has been achieved

- Reviewed and updated Medium Term Financial Plan
- Review and update of Council Plan format
- Work is still ongoing to feed into review of Local Government Finance
- Completed the acquisition of Wellington Square and Castlegate Shopping Centre
- Provided support to a range of regeneration schemes, particularly Stockton Town Centre
- Completed review of accommodation as part of the Smarter Working Programme
- Annual Accounts and Governance Statement approved and positive Value for Money Statement
- Continue significant investment programme in our Schools
- Long-term collection rates for Council Tax and Benefits remain high
- Implemented new Children's Social Care system
- Developed approach for Information Asset Registers and led improvements in Information Governance and Records Management
- Commenced with improving of digital access for Revenues and Benefits
- Reviewed contracts for a number of Children in our Care and Adult Social Care clients, delivering significant savings
- Commenced review of Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Emerging Issues / Challenges

- Continued uncertainty around National Funding (Spending Review, Fair Funding Review and Review of Business Rates Retention)
- Decant of tenants from Castlegate to Wellington Square is underway
- The Scrutiny review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme will be completed
- A review of our Land and Assets is underway
- Collection of Council Tax is becoming more challenging
- Continue to develop digital solutions for Revenues and Benefits
- Commence planning for accommodation changes
- Financial modelling of funding options for Accommodation and Town Centres

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### **Potential Areas for In-Depth Review**

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2020-21. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.

Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 24 March.

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### **Appendix 1**

#### **Council Plan 2019-22 – Our Council**

Our vision is of a Council that prides itself on being open, honest and fair. On leading by example. On having big plans and the determination to see them through. We're facing difficult financial challenges and we can't do all we used to do so we're facing some tough decisions. Throughout this we'll stay focused on delivering genuine value for money, on setting the highest standards of public service, on communicating clearly and regularly with the community we serve and on being challenging, innovative and well organized.

Key relevant objectives:

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable medium term financial plan
- Maximise and safeguard income for the Council
- Ensure the Council uses its assets effectively