

## Overview Report

# People Select Committee

## Overview Meeting 2020

2 March 2020

### Administration, Democratic and Electoral 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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### **Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services – Assistant Director – Margaret Waggott**

Relevant services include:

- Administration
- Democratic Services
- Civic and Members Services
- Electoral 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 Stronger Communities 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:

#### **Administration**

- The Corporate Administration Service continues to capture and understand the administration requirements across the Authority. The introduction of the Corporate Administration Model provides an administration service built for longer term success through detailed design, a service that is comfortable with change and ambiguity, working across multiple complex relationships.
- The service is managed by administration professionals, who can offer flexibility, skills and behaviour which are vital to delivering services to support the specialist frontline. The service has focused upon increasing consolidation and improved efficiency and effectiveness high service levels and embedded accountability. The provision of multi-skilled administration teams allows us to align resources where required, taking a realistic view of what works and learning from experience. We are working closely with the service we support consultation and communication is on-going to gain support and maintain momentum.
- Establishing multi-function admin achieves increasingly more savings from process improvement simplification and automation it also enable us to offer development opportunities which maximises potential, capacity and as a result improves staff morale. Currently Corporate Administration Services are provided across ten locations within sixteen teams. What's next further development scaling delivery and capability across the service / organisation during 2020.

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### Democratic Services

- Following the local elections in May 2019, all members were invited to participate in a comprehensive **Member Induction programme** stretching over several months, which was delivered as part of the overall Member Learning & Development Strategy 2019-23: Supporting Elected Members to Make a Difference in Stockton on Tees. The programme sought to equip members with the necessary knowledge and skills in order to fulfil their various roles. This programme, which included an increased number of committee related statutory training sessions and a significant refresh of Members ICT equipment, information and support, was commended subsequently by the LGA & NEREO when it granted the Authority once again Charter Plus accreditation for our approach to Member Development commenting that 'the Authority had demonstrated that it had a clear commitment to councillor development'; and that 'this commitment to supporting members was further evidenced by additional officer resource added to the Member Development Section in order to deliver the comprehensive Member Induction Programme post elections, and to continue to assist members in their use of technology'.
- Members now have available to them a **Member Casework system** to assist them in recording, tracking and resolving issues brought to their attention by their constituents, thereby supporting their community leadership role.
- The Authority continues to use technology and move towards reducing its reliance on paper by developing **an App hosting Council & Committee meeting papers** that is currently with a small number of members for testing, having undergone a lengthy period of testing by officers. The App will be offered to all members from the commencement of the next Municipal Year 20/21 allowing them the ability to both view and annotate meeting documents on their laptop and tablet device; and if necessary, their mobile phone.
- A combination of both scheduled and ad hoc meetings of Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Quasi-Judicial, Police & Crime, Health & Wellbeing and Consultative fora continue to meet to respond to the **decisions required to be made by the Council**.
- The Mayor has been supported throughout the year in delivering the aims of her **Mayoral Strategy** which will see her having attended almost 300 engagements by the year end, a year which only commenced in late May due to the local elections. The Civic Programme has included the Annual Council Meeting, Mayor's Sunday, Armed Forces Week, Murder Mystery at Preston Hall, Jazz Night on the Tees, Remembrance Service, 2 x Xmas Carol Services and a Mayor's Ball (7 Feb) with over 400 attending; the highest number of guests at such an event to date. The Mayor was also delighted to host attendance at the Great North City Games when an international quality athletics tournament was hosted for the first time within Stockton. The Mayoral Year for 2020/21 will be similarly busy in support of his/her chosen charities with a Freedom event in honour of the Rifles regiment scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> June as part of a combined Armed Forces Day.
- The Council has strengthened its **Armed Forces Covenant** to include specific initiatives designed to make it easier for the armed forces personnel to make the transition from military to civilian life; an area that was identified during the last Covenant review as the key area of support which the Council needed to focus on improving. This improvement was likely to heavily support the Council's ambition to be recognised as a champion advocate for the armed forces community through the M.O.D. Employer Recognition Scheme by achieving their 'Gold' award, having previously been assessed as having met the criteria for both bronze and silver.

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### Scrutiny

- **Scrutiny Work Programme** - Select Committees continue to carry out a diverse work programme. A four-year end-of-term report covering the period 2015/2019 summarised the work and impact of this statutory function and the 37 service reviews carried out during that period.

Select Committee are progressing a busy work programme for 2019/20; there are likely to be a number of carry forwards into next year's work programme. This highlights the need for prioritisation and a realistic programme as we set this for next year.

Scrutiny has worked flexibly to expedite the work programme, for example utilising Task and Finish Groups. This also enables us to react to issues that may crop up in-year (e.g. CCfA for Obstructive and Illegal Parking around Whitehouse Primary School and urgent issues such as the Scrutiny Review of the Safety of High Rise Buildings).

We have recently reviewed our monitoring arrangements and following approval of the action plan, an initial progress report will now be requested 12 months later. This should give services sufficient time to implement review recommendations and consider the impact of changes.

Executive Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the Council Plan and MTFP and any call-ins (e.g. call-in of the Globe).

Press coverage continues to give a high profile to the work of the Select Committees.

- **Member Induction** - As part of the Member induction programme following the May 2019 local elections, each Committee received a dedicated training session in June 2019. In addition, two scrutiny sessions for Members were hosted by CfPS; an officer session was also held. During the training sessions, CfPS commented that our Scrutiny Toolkit was best practice. The refreshed Scrutiny Toolkit was distributed to all Members and CMT.
- **Independent Review** - In autumn 2018 the Centre for Public Scrutiny were invited to conduct a desktop evaluation of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. The assessment was positive and recognised that the culture of the organisation was supportive of scrutiny and the scrutiny function was valued. In addition, the recent Corporate Peer Review concluded that Overview and Scrutiny is highly regarded and focuses on issues of significance and importance. These external assessments have complemented the Council's own self-evaluation of the Council's scrutiny arrangements against the new statutory scrutiny guidance published in May 2019 which has been considered in detail by the Executive Scrutiny Committee.
- **Health Scrutiny** - The past year and year ahead will continue to see the Council's Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee and local statutory Joint Health Committees involved in a busy programme of consultations on health service changes and reconfigurations. In addition, Stockton chaired and supporting the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee during 2018/19.
- **Police and Crime Panel** - The team continue to support the Cleveland Panel. Task and finish reviews of Off-Road Motorcycling and Budget were completed in 2018/19. An annual report summarising the work of the panel was produced for the first time during 2019.
- **Performance Monitoring and Overview** - Continue to review mechanisms for rigorous review and challenge.

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- **Promotion and Engagement** - We utilise our communications and work proactively with the media to positively promote the scrutiny process and engage with the public. Our webpage provides details of ongoing scrutiny reviews.
- **Staffing** - Workload pressures were caused by a member of the small team leaving in the autumn. Following a recruitment exercise, a new member of staff will join the team in February 2020.

## Electoral Services

- **Registration** - Registration levels continue to rise. The last monthly update showed 95% of the adult population registered and 37% of attainers registered.

Targeted approaches to attainers have proven to be highly effective. A more direct approach was adopted last year with letters sent via schools reminding 16/17 year olds of their legal responsibility to register. This was followed up with text messages to parents via schools systems where these existed.

Registration activity includes:

- Rolling Registration - carried out throughout the year with monthly updates made to the Electoral Roll
  - Annual Postal Vote Refresh - where signatures over five years old need to be refreshed in order to electors to retain their postal vote. The 2019 refresh included over 12,000 signatures to refresh
  - Household Notification Letter – a letter sent to every property to ensure that the register is up to date and accurate ahead of elections
  - Annual Canvass – A response required from every property, with reminders and a personal visit if necessary. This culminates in the publication of a Revised Register with updates sent to a range of individuals and organisations
  - Property Updates – adding new properties to the Register and regular matching the Council's property database
  - Data Mining – Using Council Tax notifications to invite potential new electors to complete a registration. There is a legal requirement to send reminders and make a personal visit where an application is not completed
  - Proactive Engagement Work – reaching out to schools and colleges and under-registered groups through a programme of democratic engagement work
- **Elections 2019** - The elections programme during 2019 was particularly challenging with District and Parish elections held in May 2019, following by snap European elections in May (with overlapping elections timetables) and a snap General Election in December (called during the busy canvass period). The complexity of administering a poll cannot be underestimated and planning for a scheduled election is a six month project; to deliver an election with 25 days' notice (twice) had required commitment and dedication from the small electoral team putting in long hours to meet the statutory deadlines.
  - **Canvass and Canvass Reform** - The revised register was published one month early on 1 November 2019 due to the General Election being called. Despite early publication 93% of the adult population were registered to vote and 31% of attainers were registered to vote. The percentage Canvass response rate at publication was 94%.

Work continues towards implementation of canvass reform in 2020. The new arrangements will utilise a data led approach matching the Electoral Register against Central Government records and focusing resource on properties where a match has not been achieved. A

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snapshot was taken when the data was sent for this year's canvass and will be used as a baseline data set for the Canvass Reform Data Test. Under the new arrangements, where all electors in a property match against DWP records, the property will receive a communication to confirm who is registered with no requirement for the household to respond; where a full match is not achieved, information will be required from the property to establish who is resident and send invitations to register if required.

- **ID in Polling Stations** - The Electoral Commission has published its statutory evaluation of the May 2019 voter identification pilots. The pilots have provided further evidence, but they do not allow for definitive conclusions to be drawn in all areas; several important questions remain about how an ID requirement would work in practice, particularly at a national poll with higher levels of turnout. Before introducing a requirement for elections in Great Britain, the Government and Parliament have been recommended to consider carefully the available evidence about the impact and proportionality of different approaches on the accessibility and security of polling station voting.
- **Boundary Review** - Ward boundaries will be reviewed by the Boundary Commission during 2020/21. Preliminary work has commenced to prepare the Council's submission. The statutory process will include consultation with Members. Any changes will take effect at the next local elections in May 2023.
- **Workload** - In view of workload pressures, a member of staff will be joining the Electoral Team from the Governance Team for a 12 month trial period. An additional member of staff will be invaluable taking into account the relentless programme of electoral events (scheduled and un-scheduled) in recent years, the increasing volume of registration work and forthcoming legislative changes. To illustrate workload pressures, in September there were 3891 calls to the Electoral Helpline to be dealt with alongside a range of other competing demands.
- **May 2020 Elections** - Stockton will once again be the Cleveland lead for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election and the lead for the Tees Valley for the Combined Authority Mayoral Election. Planning for the May polls is well underway. Central counts will take place for the PCC elections on Friday 8 May and the TVCA Mayoral on Saturday 9 May at Thornaby Pavilion.
- **Parliamentary Boundary Review** - The review has concluded. As the legislation currently stands, if the proposals are approved, the new constituencies will take effect at the next scheduled General Election in 2024.

### 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.

There are no topics suggested for scrutiny at this time.

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### **Appendix 1**

#### **Council Plan 2019-22 – Stronger Communities**

Our vision is for communities that are diverse, cohesive, caring and vibrant.

Key relevant objectives:

- Deliver effective local democracy