

People Select Committee
Overview Meeting 2022
14 February 2022
Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

Context

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
 - People live in cohesive and safe communities
 - People are supported and protected from harm
 - People live healthy lives

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive

- This means we will enjoy:
 - Great places to live and visit
 - Clean and green spaces
 - Rich cultural experiences

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed

- This means that the Borough will have:
 - A growing economy
 - Improved education and skills development
 - Job creation and increased employment

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

- This means that we will make sure that we provide:
 - Financial sustainability and value for money
 - Dedicated and resourceful employees
 - Strong leadership and governance

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

ADMINISTRATION, DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

Assistant Director – Margaret Waggott

Relevant services include:

- Administration
- Democratic Services

Council Plan 2021-2024

1. The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis. The key 2021-2022 priorities for Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services are attached at Appendix 1.

Emerging Issues

2. 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 - PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

3. Work continues to build on the vision for the Corporate Administration Service. The last remaining administration teams within Adult Services have been absorbed into Administration and work has already started to improve development opportunities, increase resilience and consistency in practice, this has also provided an improved sense of belonging within an administration profession.
4. The completion of the Childrens Service Review will see our services align further to meet the new administration requirements. We will continue to invest in team development, which is agile and confident in adapting to change and we will also explore opportunity for improvements and provide administration solutions, especially improved digital ways of working.
5. Our management team have recently re-structured team responsibilities, this is in response to the new teams which have joined Administration and the new administration requirements within Childrens Services Review. Additionally, Administration have also welcomed new appointments within their management and team leader roles. The focus initially is for officers to settle into their roles and responsibilities ensuring there is continuity and effective handovers within a six-month settling in period.
6. Following the introduction of the Business Administration Apprenticeship Programme, the model of delivery continues to go from strength to strength. Our January 2021 cohort are now approaching their final part of the apprenticeship and the focus is to support them through their final project and assessment. Six of the apprentices have since secured permanent positions within the organisation and continue to do well in completing their qualification. Our September 2021 cohort have settled into their apprenticeships and again two apprentices have already secured permanent positions within the organisation and continue well with their qualification. Planning for 2022 Business Administration Apprenticeships has commenced, this will continue to build and support existing workforce planning in both Administration and for the organisation.

ADMINISTRATION - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

7. Administration continues to focus on understanding and capturing the administration requirements across the Authority, this will continue to add to the successes of the introduction of the Corporate Administration Model. We will ensure services remain focused and effective, so our customers feel assured of the support and resilience a Corporate Administration Service provides.
8. Our range of services are presently across thirteen locations including the Childrens Service MACE Hub located in Hartlepool Civic Centre. We have thirty-six multi-skilled administration teams who are working across these areas thus providing further increased opportunity for an improved overview of work volumes and management information across the Council as a whole. Part of this service delivery identifies and supports digital innovation and ensures maximizing software to simplify tasks and operations whilst increasing the impact of improved practice across the organisation.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

9. Governance support for both scheduled and ad hoc meetings of Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Quasi-Judicial, Health & Wellbeing Board and Consultative bodies remains the priority to ensure that the Council's decision making is effectively carried out. Whilst our previous joint arrangement support for the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel has now transferred to Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, it is unknown at this stage exactly what impact the new Health & Social Care Act will have on our Governance structure going forward, but it is anticipated that it will at the very least see an additional demand placed on the business conducted by the Health & Wellbeing Board.
10. For the last two years we have provided required Governance support in respect of the Council's Covid response and we will continue to do so responding to peaks and troughs in demand as necessary.
11. The now established IT capacity of our elected members affords us the luxury of being able to utilise the available technology we have where possible to facilitate remote attendance at informal meetings and briefings, such as pre-meetings, policy briefings and informal consultations. In the absence of any imminent legislation which would allow this to be extended to include public meetings, we will continue to provide opportunities for members and officers to meet remotely where possible which, as many will no doubt testify, can be more convenient thus facilitating greater attendance and participation and contributes to reducing our carbon footprint as part of an overall Environmental strategy.
12. Following a successful pilot project within the Community Services directorate, Democratic Services will roll out corporately the introduction of an automated process for officers to declare and obtain approval for any Financial Interest or Gift & Hospitality offer they or a close family member have to make, as required by the Officer Code of Conduct. By streamlining such an administrative process by allowing it in its entirety to be completed electronically, we have made the process far more efficient and less onerous to complete and made it far more transparent for both employees, managers and internal audit where necessary. The process can also be extended to include elected members in the future should it be beneficial to do so.
13. With the relaxing of Covid restrictions and a welcome return to social gathering, we have been able to introduce within our civic calendar in the last 3 months both Remembrance services and Christmas Carol events with assistance and advice offered as necessary by colleagues within Events, Public Health and Health & Safety. We expect to be able to continue with events such as the Mayor's Ball and the Annual Council meeting in the

months ahead, and ultimately show our support once again for our Armed Forces community in June this year by staging Armed Forces Week, at the same time as celebrating the freedom rights of one of our three Freedom Regiments, the Rifles, who will 'Sound the Retreat' at a public event on Armed Forces Day in Stockton High Street on the 30 June 2022.

14. Once our Annual Meeting is held and our new Mayor confirmed, we will strive to support the Mayor in delivery of their Mayoral Strategy, again being responsive to any change in circumstances as we continue to learn to live with the effects of Covid. We will therefore continue to take advantage of the new digital 'footprint' we have been able to imprint over the last two years which has allowed us to be able to stream digital events and engage the public through social media.
15. The Local Government Boundary Commission's Stockton on Tees Electoral Review is expected to conclude shortly with the Commission's final decision on council size to be ratified by March 2022 which is expected to see the number of our elected members increased by one to 57 in total in readiness for the local elections to be conducted in May next year.
16. In anticipation of those local elections in May 2023, our priority will be to ensure that a comprehensive Member Induction programme is delivered as part of an overall Member Learning & Development strategy covering the Council term 2023-2027. We will use member feedback from previous inductions to provide a thorough programme containing essential advice and information that is beneficial to both re-elected and new members alike. The programme will include both in person, remote and E-Learning opportunities all designed to bring members up to speed as soon as is possible; and will be supplemented by the latest advice and training opportunities provided by the Local Government Association.
17. Our Be a Councillor campaign will commence in earnest from March 2022 and will encompass events held during the early Summer that will seek to provide anyone considering standing in the May 2023 local elections with all of the necessary knowledge and insight they need. As part of this, we will seek to confirm a 4-year schedule of Council and Committee meetings for 2023-2027 that provide some degree of certainty as to the commitment required from members attending these public meetings.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

18. It is unknown whether legislation will be introduced prior to the next local elections that will give local authorities the ability to host public meetings remotely, as it was able to do temporarily during the first year of the pandemic. Should legislation not be forthcoming, the format of meetings will continue as at present however, a decision on the long-term future and viability of use of the Town Hall for meetings will be necessary given it is the only venue of our own that has sufficient capacity to accommodate all members for meetings of full Council. At the present time, external venues such as Thornaby Pavilion and Baptist Tabernacle are being used which obviously incur additional expenditure and are subject to availability.
19. However, should legislation be introduced that does facilitate Council & Committee meetings being held remotely, that will present its own challenge in terms of being able to provide again a hybrid solution that facilitates both in-person and remote attendance. Support and advice will therefore be required from colleagues in IT, whilst our own officers keep abreast both locally and nationally with how Democratic Services colleagues in other local authorities approach such challenges.

20. In addition to preparations for Member Induction post-election, there is a considerable amount of administration and preparation required to equip our newly elected members with all of the essential resources required to carry out their role; and to calculate and make appropriate appointments that reflect the overall political balance of the authority on all committees of the Council.
21. With a small but experienced current workforce, it is expected that there will be some staffing changes in the not too distant future with some staff taking retirement, others on maternity; which in itself provides a challenge and an opportunity for other members of staff to take on additional responsibility. Our preparations for this have been in place now for some time with a sharing of knowledge and experience amongst existing staff, and the development of our two Business Administration Apprentices. We will continue with this development and utilize training opportunities such as those provided by the Association of Democratic Services Officers to supplement the support we are able to give staff.

ELECTORAL – PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

22. **Registration** – Registration levels continue to remain high in the Borough due to proactive data mining and democratic engagement. 94% of the adult population are currently registered.
23. **Canvass** – Next year will be the third year that we have operated under the reformed canvass model. The new arrangements 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. The new model also allows for the greater use of digital communication channels and telephone canvassing. We will be seeking to build on improvements to match rates and response rates achieved in 2021:

24.	25. 2020	26. 2021
27. Route 1 Properties	29. 71, 468 (81%)	30. 78, 134 (88%)
28. Match Rate		
31. Route 2 Properties	33. 16, 722 (19%)	34. 10, 572 (12%)
32. Response Rate		

24. **Attainers** (16/17 yr. olds) – This group is nationally an under-registered group. In Stockton, targeted approaches to attainers via schools have seen attainer registration increase significantly in recent years. A direct approach is adopted with letters sent via schools reminding 16/17 yr. olds of their legal responsibility to register; this is then followed up with text messages to parents via schools’ systems where these exist. This exercise will again be carried out in February 2022.
25. **Elections 2021** – In 2021, Stockton were the lead in the Cleveland Force area for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and in the Tees Valley for the Election of Mayor to the Combined Authority. In addition, we had a number of Borough and Parish By- Elections which had been postponed due to Coronavirus regulations. A number of issues were experienced with external suppliers and business continuity arrangements and integrity plans are therefore being strengthened for future electoral events.
26. **Elections 2023** – Planning for the 2023 polls will commence in September.

ELECTORAL – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

27. **Staffing** – Staffing changes continue to bed in well. Three new members of staff in the team have completed the Association of Electoral Administrators Foundation Course and five members of the Team have embarked on the Certificate qualification.
28. **Ward Boundary Review** – The Local Government Boundary Commission undertook a further limited consultation on their recommendations for Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree, Fairfield, Grangefield and Newtown and Ingleby Barwick, Southern Parishes and Yarm. Due to the nature of the evidence received, they are also recommending an increase of one in Council size to facilitate a better pattern of wards. The consultation period ended on 10 January 2022 and final boundaries will be announced on the 29 March.
29. Work is underway to understand the changes that will need to be made to the boundaries within the Electoral Register and revisions to polling districts. The changes will need to be implemented for the May 2023 local elections.
30. **Parliamentary Boundary Review** - The Boundary Commission for England published its initial proposals for new constituency boundaries and the first stage consultation period has closed. The proposals and maps for the nine English regions have been published on the website. Following the announcement in December of the locations and dates for the public hearings during the second consultation phase of the current review, the booking system is now open, with details of the specific venue for each location where hearings will be taking place.

Elections Bill - The Bill will:

- require voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued; commitment to introduce for May 2023 polls
 - require Electoral Registration Officers based in local authorities to issue free voter identification documents to those without a valid form of photo ID
 - require postal voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years
 - restrict the handling of postal votes, including limiting the number of postal votes an individual can hand in at a polling station
 - further limit the number of people someone may act as proxy for
 - extend accessibility to elections including requiring Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations
 - simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence
 - change the voting and candidacy arrangements for EU voters
 - allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK
31. The Bill provisions will result in significant additional work and changes to business processes as well as communication and awareness raising with politicians.
 32. Final proposals and secondary legislation are awaited to understand the detail and assess the full impact and work required to implement these changes.
 33. Officers are taking part in discussions at national forums with DLUHC (formerly Cabinet Office) and regional networks.

SCRUTINY – PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

34. **Scrutiny Work Programme** – Despite reduced staffing levels, all topics from the 2021/22 work programme will have been completed, or work will have commenced, prior to March 2022 – 11 reviews (including task and finish work) have completed / will be completed by the end of the current municipal year, with a further six reviews beginning (these will complete in 2022/23). Given some element of carryover and the fact that there will be no scope to carry forward reviews into the following year due to the scheduled local elections in May 2023, it is proposed that one main in-depth review is identified for each Select Committee to be completed alongside other work.
35. **Monitoring** – Continued to ensure that agreed recommendations from reviews are acted upon via robust monitoring arrangements – this has included updates being requested earlier than the standard 12 months following approval of an Action Plan, and assessments of progress being challenged. Alongside in-depth review work, the team will be focusing on chasing progress on previously completed reviews so that the Select Committee membership can understand what has been accomplished from previous reviews ahead of the election period.
36. **‘End-of-Term’ Report 2019-2023** – Working with services, the team will collate an end-of-term report in late-2022/23 which looks back over the four-year term of office; this will focus on the impact of previous reviews following their implementation.
37. **Member Induction and Refresh of the Scrutiny Toolkit** – As well as looking back, we will be preparing Member Induction and Training Resources ahead of the new Councillor intake in May 2023, as well as refreshing our Scrutiny Toolkit.

SCRUTINY – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

38. **Scrutiny Work Programme** – The 2021/22 scrutiny work programme was an ambitious undertaking, not least due to the inclusion of three task and finish reviews alongside the more in-depth topics for each Select Committee – this has meant that some Committees have had two complex pieces of work being looked at in tandem which places additional time pressures on Members, officers and external organisations who were still having to deal with the impact of COVID-19 (particularly the Council’s health and care partners).
39. Select Committees have continued to hold-to-account the Council and its key partners (including local health and policing bodies) to ensure good quality service delivery for residents. For the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee, this has included Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) and Butterwick Limited being asked to attend Committee and respond to concerns raised by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), as well as the CQC themselves being invited to address Member concerns around their visibility during the pandemic, the reporting of their focused inspections around infection prevention and control, and their future regulatory approach.
40. The team continued to provide support to the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel (PCP) which included the production and distribution of the Annual Report for 2020-2021 (note: this support ceased in late-2021 following the transfer of oversight of the PCP to Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council). The team also continued to attend regional health scrutiny committees and regional and national scrutiny networks.
41. **New Ways of Working** – Members and Officers have now embraced the new technologies. Continuing to utilise Teams, a number of evidence-gathering sessions have been held as remote sessions. This has facilitated attendance by external groups

and from contributors from other parts of the country that in the past we would have been unlikely to involve. Pre-meetings and Officer planning meetings also continue to be held over Teams as a more efficient and streamlined way of conducting business.

42. As a result of a national stance adopted by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in late-2021 / early-2022 as a result of an emerging COVID variant, a one-off hybrid meeting was held in January 2022 enabling the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee to receive a virtual presentation on the CQCs Annual Report and then question CQC representatives on the current national and local health and social care domains – this allowed the Committee to discharge its function of holding-to-account key health-related bodies.
43. Looking forward to next year, we will undoubtedly continue to utilise new ways of working to gather evidence and secure wider engagement.
44. **Promoting the Scrutiny Function** – The team continue to promote its work via the Scrutiny webpage (on the Council's website) which also includes the Annual Report 2020-2021 infographic that was produced in mid-2021. Scrutiny Officers also assisted in the production and delivery of Democratic Services (including scrutiny) awareness-raising training for the SBC Adults and Health directorate, and have since been asked to do similar sessions for other directorates. The press is frequently present at Select Committee meetings, and issues being reviewed, or raised, continue to be highlighted in the local media.
45. **Staffing** – The team took on an Apprentice during 2021/22 who was supported to contribute to several aspects of scrutiny work, including meeting preparation, researching and minute-taking. This individual has since been successful in gaining full-time employment with the Council, therefore another Apprentice working within the directorate will be moving across to the scrutiny function to assist with the team.
46. One of the two full-time Scrutiny Officers has been on maternity leave since October 2021 and is due to return to work in September 2022.
47. **The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)** continue to provide consultancy and support to Members and Councils and produce a range of literature on scrutiny. This can be viewed on their website.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

48. Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-2023. 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.
49. Proposed topic suggestion to be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 22 March 2022.

Appendix 1: Council Plan – Key Priorities 2021-2022 (Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services)

We are committed to being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve means providing:

- Financial sustainability and value for money
- Dedicated and resourceful employees
- Strong leadership and governance

We have identified these key priorities for 2021-22 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Respond to the Local Government and Parliamentary boundary reviews.
- Lead on the COVID-19-secure delivery of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayor, Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner elections and 3 local by-elections in May 2021.