

## Place Select Committee Overview Meeting 2016

14 November 2016

### Report from Richard McGuckin Director of Economic Growth and Development

#### Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £52 million over the last five years and that we are still confronted with having to find further savings. In relation to Economic Growth and Development Services this has meant delivering efficiencies and savings within Housing Services.

A Housing Service Review was undertaken during early 2016 and formally implemented on 1 June. This review secured a savings target of £125k for 2016/17 and £250k per annum for 2017/18 / thereafter.

Whilst we acknowledge that we have a strong track record of sound financial management and we have been dealing with these problems successfully for many years, it will not be easy to address the additional loss of government funding of over £20 million by 2019/20. Moving forward, expectations will need to be realistic as many more difficult decisions will need to be made.

It is both acknowledged and accepted that we can't continue to do all the things we currently do and that we won't be able to work in the same way.

**For example Homelessness Services:** following the Housing Service Review the way which service users access the service has now been changed.

The first point of contact for customers seeking advice and support is now via Customer Contact Centre (Stockton Library). Providing the service in this way has enabled the closure of the reception / interview area at 16 Church Road. General housing advice and support is now provided by the Customer Contact Centre with dedicated homelessness services (including prevention) provided by Homelessness Prevention Officers also based at the Customer Contact Centre.

**Another example of working differently is within Private Sector Housing:** an alternative delivery model will also be implemented. When requests for service are received (regarding poor property condition or management in the private rented housing), a triage model will be used to assess the complaint received. For non-priority repairs tenants will be supported to approach their landlord to request that the repair is undertaken. To ensure nothing 'slips through the net' Officers from the service will make follow-up contact with tenants to confirm if repairs have been completed, if the landlord has not undertaken works formal action will then be taken. Given the rapid increase in the private rented sector this will enable the team to support those tenants living in the poorest housing conditions

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 reduced budget allocation, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention**, particularly those people in our communities who are subject to, or at risk of harm, people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and those who are financially excluded or whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- **Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention**, specifically in relation to tackling health inequalities, meeting the skills gap and improving access to job opportunities, tackling fuel poverty, improving education and training opportunities, access to affordable housing and financial and digital inclusion.
- **Developing strong and healthy communities** through the provision of mainstream and preventive services that are available to all those who choose to access them.
- **Creating economic prosperity** across the Borough

It is within this context that the select committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

### **What has been achieved?**

We are targeting our resources carefully to make the borough a better place to live and a more attractive place to do business

We want people to be proud of our borough. We want them to feel that this is a place where strong leadership and genuine care are making a real difference. We take our responsibility to the environment seriously and will do what we can to protect it for future generations.

### **Housing**

Following the Councils Corporate Management Review we achieved the successful implementation of the Housing Service into Economic Growth and Development Services.

We have provided housing advice and support (via the Housing Options service) to 3500 service users / directly supported 743 service users becoming homeless and accepted 43 households as homeless and in priority need.

Via the Housing Gateway service we have supported 373 households to live independently.

We have also supported 279 residents to live independently. 194 residents received a Disabled Facilities Grant and 85 benefited from an Equipment Loan (ramp or stairlift).

We have delivered 119 new affordable housing units in the Borough (including the Winford House, the new 'care ready' housing scheme in Billingham).

We have directly supported 92 empty properties being returned to use, which provided 100 units of accommodation.

We have continued the successful delivery of the Mandale Park, Norton Park and Meadow Rise at Hardwick – 105 new build homes have been delivered across these site.

## **Highways Transport and Environment**

The invest to save Street Lighting mass replacement scheme has now been on-going for 2 years. Lighting works have thus far been completed in 11 ward areas and are currently on-going in a further 7 others. The scheme is contributing towards tackling climate change and assisting the Council in achieving its targets in relation to reducing carbon emissions and contributing towards a 'greener future'.

Improvement in the Highway Maintenance inspection regime has improved the process of identifying areas for repair. This initially increased the amount of repair notification being recorded however, was managed with a short term increase in resources to ensure the risk of road faults was managed in a timely way.

Work continues on the Lustrum Beck flood alleviation scheme which will reduce the risk of flooding to over 150 homes. The scheme is being carried out in partnership with the Environment Agency. Work to replace the existing Londonderry Bridge on Durham Road and construct a new, single span structure is coming to a successful conclusion.

Development of key infrastructure proposals continues in partnership with the Combined Authority to ensure our assets are enhanced and maintained to facilitate further growth in our economy and housing needs.

## **Economic Growth**

We are near completion of our Economic Strategy which sets out the Council's growth ambitions over the next fifteen years. Sitting alongside this will be a more detailed 3-year Economic Growth Plan setting out how we plan to deliver against the strategy in the short-medium term.

We are proposing to invite comments on a draft Local Plan which sets out a vision for development across the Borough and, once adopted, will become the basis for determining planning applications (alongside the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance)

We are currently investing £361K to secure £1.4M of ESF/YEI funding to support 261 15-29 year olds move closer to the labour market. We have helped to increase higher level skills by improving access to appropriate learning and training and are promoting and encouraging people to undertake higher level/degree apprenticeships that exist.

We are actively supporting the regeneration of our town centre sites. The refurbishment and reoccupation of the Globe Theatre continues along with and renovation and expansion of the Georgian Theatre in partnership with Tees Music Alliance.

We have also worked hard to promote, support and deliver our culture, heritage, specialist markets and events programme.

## **Business and Enterprise**

We have increased new business start rates by inspiring the next generation of young entrepreneurs to start and build new business ventures.

We are identifying growth opportunities under-represented in the Stockton and wider Tees Valley economy and we support the realisation of new enterprises and innovation activity in high potential sectors

We are providing a package of support to prospective retail businesses to support the sustainability and diversity of the Borough's town centre offer.

We supported the successful Stockton Town Centre BID and continue to support the Healthy High Streets programme.

We have provided a package of support to prospective retail businesses to support the sustainability and diversity of the Borough's town centre offer.

## **Challenges**

### **Housing**

We are challenged with working with our Registered Housing Provider partners to continue to provide new affordable housing which meets local housing need (having regard to the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance Rent 'cap' on social tenants). Whilst not implemented until April 2018 it will affect all new social housing tenants taking up a tenancy from April 2016.

Responding to the continued (and significant increase) in the private rented sector - working proactively to support both private rented tenants and landlords.

### **Highways Transport and Environment**

The number of Road Traffic Crashes has unfortunately risen in 2015, including the number of Killed or Seriously Injured, for the first time since 2012 although the three-year overall average continues to fall. Careful consideration needs to be given to these statistics to ensure this is not the start of a trend and investment is continued to be targeted at high priority areas.

Understanding and planning for the transportation needs of an aging population especially as older people tend not to drive and live in suburban or rural locations with limited or no public transport.

### **Economic Growth**

Building economic resilience to the effects of the slowdown in global economies sets is a real challenge. As does the high numbers of energy intensive businesses and energy cost.

We are reviewing and understanding the flexibility and capacity of Stockton Town Centre business units; understanding the scale and format of units and the needs of potential occupiers.

The re-occupation of vacant floorspace is one of our key priorities. Continued targeting vacant premises across Stockton Town Centre and, where possible, are working with owners to facilitate re-occupation of these premises.

## **Emerging Issues**

### **Housing**

Private Members Bill 'Homelessness Reduction Bill' (understanding the Bills potential implications on the Council and how best we can support those that are homeless or threatened with homelessness)

Government Consultation: Extending mandatory licensing of homes in multiple occupation (understanding the potential implications in terms of the number of additional properties which may now be included / ensuring landlords are aware of any new legal implications).

Proposed changes to the future funding of supporting housing: awaiting the release of a Government consultation paper (work is currently on-going to consider the potential implications for the Council and the number of households who may be affected by the proposed funding changes)

### **Possible Areas for In Depth Review**

**(This should be line with Council policy priorities)**