

Place Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2018

Monday 12th February 2018

Community Services

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.

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.

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.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan has been reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in September 2017 and January 2018, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

In addition the quarterly update to Cabinet on the Economic Climate will be forwarded to Place Select Committee members with key issues highlighted by the Chair at the next meeting.

Community Services – Director – Jamie McCann

Relevant services include:

- Waste Collection and Disposal
- Recycling Collection
- Street Cleansing
- Grounds Maintenance
- Registration & Bereavement Services
- Catering and Cleaning

Council Plan 2017-18

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

The 2017-18 objectives for the Environment and Housing 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 across Community Services are summarised as follows:

Waste Collection and Disposal

This continues to be an extremely popular service with our residents with satisfaction levels running at 90% or more every year since 2003. We have very few reports of missed bins, with the majority of these reports relating to residents who haven't placed them out on time. The current winter is the worst we have experienced since 2010/11 and, despite this, we have been able to deliver an extremely reliable collection service despite very challenging conditions and on only one day did we experience a slight delay to normal, scheduled collections. This is in contrast to other LA's locally and nationally, many of who cancelled scheduled collections.

Overview Report

As the borough continues to grow with new housing developments, so too does the pressure placed upon both the waste collection and disposal budgets.

The borough has experienced significant housing development in many part of the borough which has led to an increase of several thousand homes, all requiring a weekly service for waste collection. This has resulted in pressures on frontline waste collection rounds to an extent where additional collection rounds have been established, thereby increasing the pressure on revenue budgets.

As Members will be aware, Stockton disposed of approximately 90% of all household waste (Residual) at the Suez Energy from Waste Plant at Haverton Hill where, due to the technology at the plant, the majority of energy generated in the burning process is able to be directed towards alternative energy sources. The remaining elements of our waste are sent to Landfill.

The pressure on the Waste disposal budget has increased this year due to level of waste which continue to grow, as a result of the combination of more properties and fewer households recycling, although this is also due to a greater degree of unplanned maintenance at the site which mean that more waste was diverted to landfill at a higher disposal rate.

The current contract for the Energy From Waste (EFW) terminates in 2020 and the Joint Local Authorities (SBC, MBC, R&CBC HBC) are currently negotiating an extension of the contract until 2025. Similarly, the contract for the Civic Amenity Site (Haverton Hill Road) is also due to expire in 2020, therefore discussions are ongoing with Suez as well as other options being considered should we decide that there is a better option available to the Council and our residents.

The current policy of issuing wheeled bins has also proven problematic as we stand out as an authority that does not charge housing developers for new wheeled bins. Bearing in mind the large number of properties that are being constructed in the borough, this results in a significant pressure so is perhaps an area that Members could take a view on in the future.

Recycling Collection

This area of service is intrinsically linked to the Refuse Collection service which, although remaining a very popular service with residents, the retention of the weekly collection service is the main driver for very poor recycling participation rates as residents have the luxury of having their 240l wheeled bin emptied every week. This has resulted in participation levels of around 23% across the borough and Stockton being firmly in the bottom 5% of LA's in terms of recycling performance.

Again, the service performed extremely well this year with no collections missed over the winter this far, and satisfaction levels from those residents who do access the service are high at around 90%.

We currently have 19 Community Recycling Sites (BRING sites) across the borough which is in contrast to the direction of travel with all other LA's in the Tees Valley who are reducing the number of these sites. Of the 19 sites that SBC have, many are infrequently used which is illustrated by the fact that 80.28% of the total recycling collected are generated by just 7 sites. This is an area where Members may wish to undertake a review and forms part of the suggestions at the end of this report.

Street Cleansing

Despite significant budget reductions in the past 10 years, we have still been able to retain a high level of service. We are still able to visit all residential streets on a regular basis, we mechanically sweep road channels every four weeks and have a more high-profile service on main arterial routes as well as primary and secondary retail areas, such as Stockton, Norton and Yarm High Streets.

This hasn't come without challenge and our resilience and ability to provide a response service has been impacted. Resources are also finely balanced at present to retain those service standards as detailed above, although they have been reduced over the Christmas period as staff from this area has been used to support the continuation of essential Waste and Recycling services as we have no capacity elsewhere within the service to add support.

Stockton has more than 1500 litter and dog bins in the borough which are providing extremely difficult to service; the number of litter bins continues to rise whilst resources have been reduced by around 40% since 2009. Requests for bins are subject to a thorough assessment to establish the 'need' for a bin in the requested location – factors that should always be considered are the ability to resource collections, locations of nearby bins, level of litter in the area and input from local cleansing staff. Bins are also very expensive to purchase and replace which does bring another problem in the future as the replacement of circa 1500 bins will be extremely expensive and beyond current budgets and therefore consideration needs to be given to how we manage, maintain and budget for them in the future.

Grounds Maintenance

Again, this is an area which has seen huge decreases in resources and is the area where the greatest visual impact of the reductions has been seen. Over a period of 3 years, more than 130 spring and summer bedding areas were removed to allow the remaining staffing resource to concentrate what our residents see as core functions such as grass cutting, weed control and vegetation/shrub maintenance.

We continue to perform well over the summer and currently cut grass within approximately 12 working days and achieve up to 16 cuts over the course of the growing season (weather permitting). We were also able to achieve 2 chemical treatments for weeds on hard surface areas and have a very effective spring minor pruning / larger winter maintenance programme to manage the multitude of hedges across the borough.

In an attempt to add some much-needed colour back in to the borough after the loss of our traditional bedding areas, we planted more than 350m² of wildflowers in 7 locations at points across the entire borough which could be enjoyed over the summer months by our residents and visitors. The visual appeal was well received and resulted in more than 200 customer compliments either via Members, e-mail, in person or through social media. We have plans to do the same this year and, where resources allow, will attempt to add several more displays which are likely to be in parks or cemeteries.

The decision was made by the Thirteen Group to carry out grass cutting and grounds maintenance functions in-house. This service has up until now been carried out by the Council as part of the ground maintenance of the whole borough on a scheduled basis. The areas Thirteen Group will now be responsible for include Thirteen Group owned open spaces, high rise and communal areas. This will inevitably lead to issues as it will be extremely difficult to align the timings of SBC and Thirteens separate grass cutting programme in areas where SBC land borders Thirteen Group areas.

Registration & Bereavement Services

The service has performed extremely well this year with extremely high levels of performance across all areas of the service.

The higher than usual levels of deaths registered this year has resulted in pressures for staff who have coped admirably.

The availability of burial space in the borough continues to cause concern with only 8 years of burial space left for the 'Stockton' area and a more pressing need for the South (Yarm, Eaglescliffe) where there is very few burial space available. However, there continues to be ample space for burials in both Billingham and Thornaby Cemeteries.

This is an area which has been given priority and efforts are ongoing to secure alternative sites which will replace what we currently have in Durham Road Cemetery (Oxbridge is closed for new burials).

Grave personalisation continues to be a problem, or at least for a minority of grave owners who are unable to conform to current personalisation policies, and it is these cases that attract negative press attention or evoke opposing views from other grave owners who find it difficult to understand why the Council won't take enforcement action. This is an area that is subject to a scrutiny review in the coming months.

Finally, we have the impending construction of the new Crematorium and the next 12 months will be extremely busy both in terms of the construction project, the appointment and training of staff as well as the continued search for best practice to ensure that incorporate this into our facility to ensure that we deliver the best Crematorium we can for our residents from day one.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2018-19. 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 27 March.

Some potential topics for review are as follows:

- Community Recycling sites
- Litter & Dog Waste Bins / Re-charging for Wheeled Bins

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2017-18 – Environment and Housing

Our vision is to make the borough a better place to live and a more attractive place to do business with clean streets, carefully tended parks and open spaces, affordable and desirable housing.

Key objectives and activities

Objective: **Provide sufficient sites and premises in vibrant, connected and distinctive places that businesses are attracted to and people choose to live, work, play and visit**

Objective: **Deliver Effective Environmental Services**