

## Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 27th January, 2020.

**Present:** Cllr Chris Barlow (Chair), Cllr Louise Baldock (Vice-Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Luke Frost, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Maurice Perry (sub for Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE), Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Alan Weston.

**Officers:** Jo Fryett, Mark Rowell, Marc Bould (EGDS); Stephen Donaghy, Lee Tweddell (A&H); Gary Woods (MD).

**Also in attendance:** None.

**Apologies:** Cllr Julia Cherrett and Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE.

**PLA  
29/19**      **Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and the evacuation procedure was noted.

**PLA  
30/19**      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

**PLA  
31/19**      **Draft Minutes - 16 December 2020**

Consideration was given to the minutes for the meeting held on the 16th December 2019.

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 16th December 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**PLA  
32/19**      **Scrutiny Review of Business Support and Engagement**

As part of the first main evidence-gathering for the Scrutiny Review of Business Support and Engagement, Members received information from the Council's Business and Enterprise Team. An in-depth report was presented to the Committee which covered the following:

- Key functions of the Council's Business and Enterprise Team
- How local businesses find out about the Council's support service; how this is communicated
- Types of business that exist within the Borough (size, sector and employment)
- Types of businesses (and where are they sited) that approach the Council and what they seek (case studies included)
- Types of support the Council provides to businesses (including the mediums used); feedback from business
- Business feedback relating to Business and Enterprise engagement activities
- How the Council links in with the TVCA and wider partners
- SBC Peer Review feedback – learning from this recent Council review in terms of support for local business.

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- People often assume that business support is predominantly about finance/cash – whilst this can be a feature, the definition of ‘support’ is much broader than this.
- Sizes of business that exist across the Borough are similar to those found in other parts of the UK, though Stockton-on-Tees is more of a ‘branch’ economy with larger organisations present but not with their headquarters registered here.
- There are a wide and varied number of industrial estates across Stockton-on-Tees – the Team try to match incoming/interested businesses to most appropriate locations.
- Types of support does not tend to change much, but providers and criteria can – it is important the Team are seen as a first point of contact, but can bring in licensing, planning, etc. if required at an early stage. Some prefer to communicate digitally than meet on a 1:1 basis.
- Fountain Shopping Mall (formerly Enterprise Arcade) – not all go onto trade on the High Street, but the Mall allows them to test out their business idea (e.g. might be better online).
- The Team offers specialist retail business advice (pricing, merchandising) via B-Supplied for any businesses needing additional support.
- In terms of wider local business support, the Team are not here to replicate anyone but aim to complement other partners/support organisations, and foster better links for local business.
- Members noted that a link to the Council’s website was the second result when searching for ‘Stockton business’ on Google which offers some encouragement in relation to the recognition of support offered by the Local Authority to businesses.
- It was queried why more contact was made with retail businesses as opposed to those sectors which had a greater number of businesses (i.e. professional, scientific and technical; construction; business admin and support). The Team are more visible within Town Centres due to the ongoing high-profile challenges around retail. Some businesses within certain sectors do not often request support.
- Understanding micro-businesses is important – although they may be categorised together, there is a big difference between a sole-trader and a business employing 2-9 staff. Noted that it is difficult to capture such data.
- Members questioned how apprenticeships can be better promoted and were informed of Tees Valley-wide work to try to understand the barriers to employing apprentices. The Team reminds businesses about apprenticeship opportunities as part of their business engagement work, and highlighted the Youth Employment Fund (£1,000 to take on Stockton resident).
- For those that make contact, the Team can direct start-up businesses to enterprise agencies.
- The Committee asked what the biggest barriers were that the Team faced. Retail is challenging with recent high-profile closures in Stockton centre mirroring national/international trends and have therefore provided a retail business support programme (offering mentoring, tailored 1:1 support). Further challenges around being modern and adapting to the changing landscape so the Team can meet the demands of business – greater use of dedicated social media accounts to link in with local business would help. Mentoring, advice and guidance is always key too and they need to work well and efficiently with partners.
- Members acknowledged that many retail issues were outside the Team’s

control, but queried what could be done with the buildings in town centres. For those businesses that close, the Council identifies who owns the premises, with directors made aware so they can engage in conversations. Moving forward, what do those buildings lend themselves to in terms of use? There is a database of property owners/agents, and an event was previously held to outline what the Council wants for Stockton. Town centres cannot just rely on the retail sector and national chains.

- The Committee noted the emphasis on businesses moving into Town Centres, and wondered why anyone would move into out-of-centre premises with high costs (rents/rates/length of lease), and why more units would be built in these places. The Team noted that it had no control of business rates and limited influence on landlords.
- The Team need to be able to work remotely and be out supporting business. They can also work within partners (Fusion Hive) - team meetings move around the Borough where businesses are located and hold drop-in sessions afterwards. The CRM system is a massive help – web-based so the Team can access when out and about (previously this was not great). There have been empty posts for 18-24 months and have had to adapt and become more reactionary than proactive. A lot of what the Team does is building relationships, so need to maintain regular contact. Social media could be used better, and need to keep up-to-date with changes (e.g. Tees Valley – moving from Business Compass to a new way of delivering the support under TVCA). The Team look at which types of events to engage in and endeavour to plan up to 12 months in advance and have a broader reach through networks and social media.

AGREED that the information be noted.

## **PLA 33/19 Contaminated Land (Reporting-In)**

The Place Select Committee work programme for 2019-2020 included a review of Contaminated Land. The current strategy was due for refresh in 2019, and since Officers had already made considerable progress in preparing for the review, it had therefore been proposed that this piece of work was conducted by Officers as a 'reporting-in' review. The Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee approved this approach in October 2019.

Local Authority Officers attended this meeting to present an overview of the Council's draft Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy 2019-2024, a mandatory document which is held along with the Council's Land Contamination Register. The presentation reflected on the following elements:

- Introduction to Land Contamination
- Local Authority Duties under Part 2A
- What is Contaminated Land?
- How is Contaminated Land Identified?
- Aim and Objectives
- Priority Actions and Timescales for 2019-2024
- Funding Site Investigation Work
- Means of Addressing Contaminated Land
- SBC Staffing – Current FTE for Land Quality
- Public Register

- Review and Consultation of the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- This is the fifth review of the Contaminated Land Strategy to reflect the changes in service provision, contaminated land legislation, and published guidance. The strategy sets out the manner in which Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council proposes to implement its duties under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- For any land to be identified as 'contaminated land', at least one contaminant linkage needs to be established (as part of the risk assessment that the Council undertakes). A contaminant linkage consists of three main elements: 'contaminant', 'pathway' and 'receptor'. Regarding the latter, consultation with the Environment Agency was noted due to potential water issues.
- The two assessment phases were outlined, the second of which involves intrusive ground sampling via bore holes or trial pits allowing for scientific assessment of soils against soil guideline values – this is not commonly undertaken by Local Authorities.
- Following assessment, and as part of the Planning process, the Council would then look to determine the work required to bring land back into use.
- The Council ensures wherever possible that the original polluter pays for land remediation carried out under the Part 2A regime. There is one site within the Borough which has been remediated.
- Members queried how many sites in the Borough were contaminated. Officers stated that an answer could not be given to this question as land is assessed on a case-by-case basis should someone want to develop it. The Committee was assured that the Council's Senior Environmental Protection Officer was notified of every planning application.
- Storage of chemicals has been an issue in terms of awareness of what is out there. Members urged the need for partners to work together regarding knowledge of sites across the Borough, and noted the role and potential input of Cleveland Fire Brigade. Officers confirmed that they would be added to the list of consultees for this strategy.
- The Committee noted the number of sites still to be inspected (page 19). Officers stated that efforts will continue to ensure any historic issues have been remediated, and that completed investigations are uploaded to GIS mapping systems. Underground water is not disturbed as this would run the risk of contaminating the land – major rivers and tributaries are monitored by the Environment Agency.
- The Council has retained the ability and skills to examine any site, and have identified and remediated sites in the past where required. This helps reassure the public that there is no impact to them.
- Members sought confirmation that if a piece of land was not being disturbed, then that is not affected by this policy, whereas if land has potential for another purpose, then the policy kicks in (apart from unforeseen circumstances as listed on page 23). Officers confirmed that this was accurate.

AGREED that the draft Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy 2019-2024 be endorsed by the Place Select Committee subject to the addition of Cleveland Fire Brigade as a further consultee.

**PLA  
34/19**      **Work Programme 2019-2020**

Consideration was given to the Place Select Committee Work Programme 2019-2020.

As part of holding to account Cabinet Members and Services, and understanding the challenges and issues arising ahead of the next year's work programme, overview reports from each directorate will be considered at the appropriate Select Committees during February / early-March. Reports from Community Services and Economic Growth and Development Services will be considered at the next Place Select Committee meeting in February 2020.

The Committee was keen to initiate the Planters in Residential Streets review as soon as practicably possible. Councillors Baldock, Beall, Frost, Perry and Vickers expressed interest in being part of a Task and Finish Group that could scrutinise this issue, and it was proposed that a draft scope was brought to the Committee meeting in March 2020 for consideration and agreement.

AGREED that the Place Select Committee Work Programme 2019-2020 be noted.

**PLA  
35/19**      **Chairs Update**

The Chair had nothing further to update.