

Overview Report

Place Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2020

24 February 2020

Community 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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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 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 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

Waste Collection services continues to be well-regarded by our residents with in satisfaction levels of around 90%.

Performance at the Energy from Waste Plant has been unaffected this year, resulting in more than 95% of all residual waste diverted to this facility with less than 5% landfilled.

Reliability within the service continues to be an ongoing trend despite additional pressures that result from the growth in property numbers within the borough. Missed collections reported are running at less than 0.1% of all scheduled collections (we collect more than 4.7 million bins per year).

Potential changes to the way in which waste and recycling are disposed of may follow as part of any published outcomes from the recent Waste Strategy for England consultation exercise which closed in Summer 2019 with feedback expected to be issued to LA's in Spring 2020. Areas that are being considered are a deposit return scheme for bottles, food waste collection, co-mingled recycling collections and whether LA's should charge for green waste collections.

Discussion are ongoing at a Tees Valley level to consider options for the procurement of a EFW provider based following the end of the current contract for waste disposal with Suez. Similarly, a project group has been established to consider options for a Household Waste Recycling Facility as the current contract for the site on Haverton Hill Road, which is operated on behalf of SBC and MBC, terminates in 2022 (the original contract end date was 2021 although a 1 year extension option has been taken).

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

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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 26% of household waste being recycled and therefore Stockton is in the lower quartile in terms of national recycling performance

Efforts to improve recycling levels still prove challenging and Stockton is currently in the lower quartile of LA's when it comes to recycling levels. Whilst this is the current position, we are committed to encouraging greater levels of recycling participation and have been working with colleagues in Comms to identify effective marketing to communicate what can be recycled at the kerbside and the most effective ways to access the service.

The larger capacity white recycling bag has proven very popular with residents as this removed the need for a separate blue paper bag and has a capacity of around 110 litres, meaning that tins, paper, plastic and cardboard can be easily recycled; we also offer free second bags for those households with a greater levels of recycling.

Again, the service performed extremely well this year with satisfaction levels from those residents who do access the service are high at around 90%.

Having reviewed use of community recycling sites (BRING sites) in 2019, we now have 7 recycling sites which are spread across the borough to provide accessible sites for all residents. Following the removal of 12 locations which only yielded 20% of all recycling collected at these sites, an investment and improvement programme was undertaken on the remaining 7 sites, with improved signage, replacement containers and, where appropriate, the provision of CCTV to deal with misuse, was undertaken. These changes have had yielded positive results and levels of use at the remaining 7 sites continues to be buoyant.

Street Cleansing

This is an area which does provide challenge in terms of achieving expectations that we set for ourselves as a high performing council as well as our residents' requirements. It is noticeable that, whilst the impact of the resource reductions in this area has taken some time to present themselves, satisfaction levels in this area of core activity have started to drop off.

We are still able to visit all residential streets on a regular basis, although revenue pressures has resulted in reductions in visits by mechanical sweepers which range from weekly to twice yearly depending upon the road classification. However, we do maintain 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.

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

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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.

Grounds Maintenance

Efforts to add some colour back into the borough with the provision of core funded and supplementary CPB funded wildflower areas have worked well on the whole over the past three years. However, we have experienced significant problems in the last 12 months with a perennial weed (fat hen) which has taken hold of many wildflower areas, taking over the growing area and stifling healthy wildflowers. This has resulted in 'patchy' growth, requiring the use of significant interventions to manually remove the weed whilst spot spraying of herbicide to encourage wildflower growth.

Some areas will be rested for 2-3 years to allow areas to recover and soil to regenerate whilst Officers have identified other suitable locations to ensure that we are able to provide summer floral colour in the borough.

Core service 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.

We have diverted resources to grass edging of main arterial routes over the last two years and we have been able to edge every primary route over the past two years. We will continue with this programme of activity in the future as this has proven extremely popular with residents and also provides significant aesthetic improvements to the street scene.

Registration & Bereavement Services

The new Crematorium opened in September 2019, providing a much-needed facility for the residents of our borough.

The facility has proven extremely popular with Funeral Directors and the bereaved with some very positive comments made both in terms of the quality of the facility and grounds, but also the levels of service and attentiveness that they have received from the site staff, including the additional of chapel attendants which sets Stockton apart from many local and national crematoriums.

We are now approaching 600 cremations since we opened (up to February 2020) and are already outperforming the business case when taking in to account the opening date in September 2019.

However, we are mindful that around 20% of residents still choose burial as opposed to cremation; burial spaces in some areas of the borough are sufficient although there is a need to serve communities based within central Stockton due to limited capacity in the one remaining open Cemetery at Durham Road which has a finite life. This continues to be a concern and one which it is suggested that Members review to ensure that appropriate burial options are identified to meet the needs of all communities.

Stockton's registration service continues to lead the way at a regional level as well in terms of performance with both birth and death registrations. One potential change for Members to be aware of is a current consultation on the issuing of marriage licenses which are currently issued in paper form; the General Register Officer (GRO) are proposing to migrate to

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electronic licenses which would mean that the traditional 'signing' of the marriage license would cease. Results on the consultation are due from GRO in the coming months.

Catering and Cleaning

School meals are a vital part of the functions that we provide, especially when considering the demographics within the borough and the pockets of deprivation which exists in some of our neighbourhoods.

The provision of a healthy and nutritionally balanced meal is therefore crucial to many of our children; at the same time, many schools are transferring to Academy status and outsourcing school meal provision. This is of great concern both in terms of the loss of income to the Council but, more importantly, the potential impact of meal changes which may have a reduced nutritional value in some cases.

Whilst we acknowledge that the decision to use external catering providers is one for each school to make, this shift from the traditional council provision to external providers is a cause for concern especially in pockets of the borough where a the meal the children receive at school may be the only nutritious meal that they receive that day.

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.

- As detailed above, there is some concern that **burial space** within some areas of the borough is running out, therefore there is an opportunity for Members to review this issue and make appropriate recommendations.
- **School meal provision** is an area which continues to see a decline in terms of schools taking the service. Members may wish to review this, specifically in relation to the health related impacts which may result from the reduction in meal quality which may follow any change.

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2019-22 – 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:

- Deliver effective environmental services