

## Overview Report

# Place Select Committee

## Overview Meeting 2021

15 February 2021

### Community Services and Transport

#### Context

The Council has a strong track record of sound financial management. In the current economic climate, finances are always going to be a challenge, and we work hard to make our budget go further. We have adapted to unprecedented funding reductions over the last eight years, saving around £53m. Our medium-term financial planning approach has allowed us to continually balance our budget through delivering savings and efficiencies but also to plan ahead and deliver invest-to-save schemes and innovative changes to service delivery models. We carefully target investments to stimulate economic growth, provide great assets and deliver financial returns to offset funding reductions.

Since the initial development of this Council Plan we have and still are experiencing the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus provides huge challenges for us to address in terms of community and economic recovery and dealing with the long-term implications of the pandemic. We have reviewed our priorities for the coming year and have adapted these to reflect the focus that is needed to respond to this challenge.

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 Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

- A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm, where
  - People live in cohesive and safe communities
  - People are supported and protected from harm
  - People live health lives
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed, creating
  - A growing economy
  - Improved education and skills development
  - Job creation and increased employment
- A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive, creating
  - Great places to live and visit
  - Clean and green spaces
  - Rich cultural experiences

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

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### **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>

### **Community Services and Transport - Director - Jamie McCann**

Relevant services include:

- Catering and Cleaning
- Community Services (Care for Your Area)
- Construction & Facility Services
- Highways Transport and Design Services

### **Council Plan 2020-2023**

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

The key priorities for 2020-21 for the Community Services and Transport themes 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 are summarised as follows:

#### **Catering and Cleaning - Priorities for the year ahead**

The past year has been challenging for all services as a result of the ongoing pandemic with a continuation of existing services, whilst also setting up a plethora of new services including establishing a food distribution service to ensure that all vulnerable children in the borough receive food both during school terms and during holidays.

The pandemic is still ongoing and, whilst some schools have now adopted a voucher scheme to allow direct purchase of items, the Catering service is still providing school meal provision to all LEA schools and home food parcels to pupils who are isolating and entitled to free school meals especially as pupil numbers attending school are still relatively high.

We want to retain existing contracts whilst adding more schools in the future as the delivery of balanced, healthy meals to improve children's concentration and attainment at Schools is at the forefront Stockton's catering service.

#### **Catering and Cleaning - Challenges and opportunities**

The challenges and opportunities are two-fold; firstly, the services will need to navigate through the current issues that Covid-19 has brought the service which is likely to ongoing through at least some of the next financial year. This may also provide opportunities as we have been able to show that the service can assist all schools with support at very short notice,

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including moving whole teams from school to school to ensure pupils can access healthy meals throughout these challenging times.

### **Community Services (Care for Your Area) - Priorities for the year ahead**

As with the Catering Service, many of the services that Care for Your Area provide will be influenced by the conditions that we are all living with due to Covid. This included the need to place additional resources in place to ensure that we are able to continue a 'normal' service, which included additional waste and recycling rounds that have been established in the past year to deal with the additional number of domestic households in the borough but also the extra waste generated as many people work from home.

The outcome of the Waste Strategy for England consultation is due in the Spring which, if Members recall, sought views on a range of potential challenges including how we deal with food waste, placing the onus on manufacturers to pay for disposal of plastics, whether LA's should charge for additional green waste services, the frequency of waste collections as well as how LA's collect and separate recycling materials. The outcome of the consultation may have some significant impacts upon the way in which and how frequently we collect domestic waste.

We have recently extended the contract with Suez for the provision of a Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) until August 2022 with the potential option of a further 1 year extension. We currently share the site with Middlesbrough although the next year will see Officers enter a procurement process to identify provision in the future whether this be a shared site or specifically for Stockton residents only.

The Energy from Waste Plant (EFW) at Haverton Hill Road will see the current Tees Valley wide contract end in 2025 although a Project Group has been formed to ensure that an appropriate outcome which will ensure an appropriate solution for Stockton and the Tees Valley is in place prior to the end of the current contract.

The Crematorium has now been in operation for over a year now and has provided an essential service to the residents of the borough and, over a 12 month period, undertook more than 1200 cremations. This has been well received with many positive comments from users and we will continue to review how we can evolve and improve the site in the coming year ahead.

Burial space within the Borough continued to be a problem and, whilst we do not have a shortage when considering the borough as a whole, we do have an urgent need to identify suitable space that would service communities in the Central / Western Stockton area as we have two locations which predominantly served these communities although Oxbridge is closed for new interments and Durham Road has less than 8 years of burial provision. This is already a topic which is ongoing as part of a Place Committee Review.

### **Community Services (Care for Your Area) - Challenges and opportunities**

The impact upon financial resources within the collection service is also matched with waste disposal both as a consequence of additional property growth in the borough and, more recently, as a result of Covid implications with more people working from home. For example, the level of domestic refuse collected has increased by 5367.93 tonnes (9.9% increase) and for. The Kerbside Recycling Collection service, we have a seem a 1345.73 tonnes or 16.4% increase in the last 12 months. This operational and financial resource challenge has been included in the MTFP report.

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Whilst the outcome of the Waste Strategy for England consultation may identify a range of recommendations that alter the way in which we collect waste in the borough.

Street Cleansing continues to be a challenge with more people working from home (and the closure of Schools) which inevitably creates higher levels of litter both in litter bins and litter that is indiscriminately dropped throughout our green spaces. Thankfully, the efforts of our cleansing staff as well as active enforcement patrols do ensure that this is being managed effectively.

The new Environment, Leisure and Greenspace Team are responsible for the strategic direction of greenspace management both in terms of the Council's own open spaces and engagement with other organisations and stakeholders who undertaken environmental improvements in the borough e.g. Tees Wildlife and Groundworks. There are some obvious links with Community Services and opportunities may exist in being able to reduce maintenance costs or encourage greater involvement from other organisations through the work of this new team.

### **Construction & Facility Services - Priorities for the year ahead**

Construction and Facility Services are currently undergoing a review in terms of the operations model for the next 5 years. The review focuses on core activity and the reactive maintenance requirement across more than 150 Council properties. The work also considers the medium and long term requirements of maintaining Council building assets. This includes a refresh on the Condition Survey information held on all Council buildings. This specialist information helps officers understand and prioritise building maintenance identifying a spend profile which is clear, prioritised and well planned. The Facility Services team have designed a schedule of work to meet the statutory requirement necessary to make sure the council fulfils its legal obligations. This work ensures the Council are maintaining buildings in line with statutory requirements, across a range of disciplines including Legionella, Fixed Wiring Testing, Fire Safety and Lift testing.

The teams continue to manage the Council property portfolio against an increase in demand particularly under the current COVID 19 restrictions. The team have been able to maintain the Service and delivery with a combination of home working and attendance on site when necessary. The department has developed safe working practices which allow operations to continue and still meet COVID guidance.

### **Construction & Facility Services - Challenges and opportunities**

Despite the constraints of COVID 19 the planning team continue to prepare a schedule of Annual Maintenance projects. This schedule considers information from a range of sources and identifies a number of priority projects in two distinct areas, namely Council maintained schools and Council property (Non-Schools). This work aims to have an agreed annual work plan which is approved and funded by April each year. This work is almost complete and the delivery plan is now being prepared. Funding remains a challenge and there are plans to establish resources within the current MTFP which will ensure the Maintenance plan is deliverable in future years.

Maintaining a cohort of staff during the pandemic has been a real challenge with workloads remaining as normal but with a number of staff having to self-isolate in line with national guidance. Staff have been aligned to bubbles and this together with robust operating safety practice has kept self-isolation needs to a minimum so far.

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As we move to reduce the Council Carbon footprint, there are a number of initiative being explored within Community Services. Some of which will provide good “return on investment” as well as helping to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Some examples are installing LED lighting, Voltage Optimisation and the potential to generate electricity through the installation of Photovoltaic (PV) panels to the roof of Cowpen Depot coupled with Battery storage capability. This work is a real opportunity to have a positive impact on Carbon reduction and reduce energy costs.

## Highways Transport and Design Services - Priorities for the year ahead

### Covid Recovery

The use of public transport was actively discouraged during the initial Covid lockdown and patronage is still only a fraction of pre-Covid levels. The use of Public Transport is essential to manage capacity on our roads, the only form of transport many have access to and is more environmentally friendly than the private car. Following the pandemic, it will be essential to reassure the public that Public Transport is safe to use and encourage its ongoing use.

When current restrictions begin to be lifted it will be necessary to help support people to return to our town centres, schools, and workplaces safely.

We will need to start to understand the longer-term change in peoples travel and work behaviours because of the pandemic and adapt our transport services accordingly taking in to account more working from home, more demand for local services and maintaining the increase in walking & cycling.

We will need to work with transport providers to ensure affordable transport for all due to the tough economic operating environment the pandemic has caused and the increase in unemployment.

## Highways Transport and Design Services - Challenges and opportunities

### Management of our Highway Assets

The current cost to replace Stockton’s highway asset would be £1.73bn. Due to a decade of austerity and the ever-increasing demand on maintaining our asset it continues to depreciate with the Government only allocating the Council approximately half the budget it needs to keep our assets (carriageways, footways, streetlights, bridges etc.) at a steady state. The highway asset is vital for the local economy and the residents’ quality of life. Keeping Stockton moving is one of our key priorities as good quality highway infrastructure is essential for Stockton’s economic prospects and resident’s quality of life.

Several of our key structures including Newport Bridge and the Transporter Bridge (which we are responsible for 50% of the maintenance cost) will require significant works to address ongoing issues.

### Climate Change

Transport is now the number one producer of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions in the UK. In 2018 transport accounted for a third of all UK carbon dioxide emissions with most emissions from transport being road transport. Supporting the transition from petrol / diesel vehicles to electric vehicles will be an immediate challenge alongside working with our contractors to mitigate the impact of our works on the environment.

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A key challenge will be balancing our economic growth aspirations and the need to reduce CO2 emissions from road transport.

Climate Change is predicted to increase the amount of adverse weather events which will put additional strain on our services and assets both Highways & Buildings. Adverse weather will depreciate them quicker requiring further maintenance and an increase demand on our services with more flooding and Winter Service demands.

## Growing the Economy

The Council working in partnership with the Tees Valley Combined Authority has secured funding for several major transport related projects such as Portrack Relief Road, Billingham & Eaglescliffe Station improvements, Elton Interchange, and improvements along the A689 corridor. The successful delivery of these projects, including minimising delays to the travelling public during these works, will help deliver economic benefits and reduce congestion helping tackle climate change.

It will be essential to ensure we maximise any future funding opportunities such as the recently announced £4bn Government "levelling-up fund" to ensure we can continue to deliver the required investment in our essential transport infrastructure.

To continue to support Stockton's ambitious plans for our Town Centre's and help facilitate new developments, new house building and the creation of jobs.

## Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2021-22. 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 23 March.

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### **Appendix 1 – Council Plan - Key Priorities 2020- 2021 – Community Services and Transport**

Making the Borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm means creating a place where:

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Review our approach in light of Coronavirus to ensure an effective continuation of the Targeted Action Area pilots in Stockton and North Thornaby

Making the Borough a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means creating:

- A growing economy
- Improved education and skills development
- Job creation and increased employment

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Work with Tees Valley Combined Authority on improving regional economic and transport infrastructure
- Maintain a safe transport network to ensure reliable access to learning and employment

Making the Borough a place that is clean, vibrant and attractive means creating:

- Great places to live and visit
- Clean and green spaces
- Rich cultural experiences

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Review approach to refuse collection and recycling
- Work in partnership with the five Tees Valley local authorities, Durham and Newcastle to procure new waste management arrangement
- Deliver plan for additional tree planting
- Continue to work towards carbon reduction targets at the Council and in the Borough