

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

7th February, 2011

PRESENT – Councillor Haszeldine (in the Chair); Councillors Burton, Coultas, Francis, Johnson, Lewis, Maddison, Richmond, Swainston and Walker. (10)

APOLOGIES – Councillor Thistlethwaite (1)

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Curry, B. Jones, D. Jones, Long, McEwan and Mrs. Scott and Swift. (7)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – David Hall, Assistant Director – Finance and Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance.

R43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillor Long declared interests in Minute R44 below as a Board Member of Theatre Hullabaloo and due to a family connection.

R44. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – The Scrutiny Committee met to give consideration to the recommendations (previously circulated) from this Council's Scrutiny Committees and the Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group, following the work they had each undertaken in relation to the savings proposals within their individual remits.

Each of the Scrutiny Chairs, or in their absence, the Vice-Chair, presented the findings of their individual Scrutiny Committees and discussion ensued on some of the specific areas affected by the proposals namely the Anti Social Behaviour Team; Street Scene; Environmental Health, particularly the proposed reduction in food product sampling; Early Years Inclusion; public toilets; and the careers advice service.

Particular references were made to the importance of the Civic Theatre, the Dolphin Centre and the Arts Centre continuing to work together to provide a combined programme; the progress being made with Darlington for Culture, the potential impact on the health of Darlington if the proposal to cease food product sampling was accepted; a possible review of the Early Years Inclusion proposal; and proposals to reduce the opening hours and charge for the public toilets in the Market Place.

In considering the recommendations, the Scrutiny Committee also took into consideration, the views of a representative from the Early Years Inclusion Team and a representative of the Education Centre for Children with Down Syndrome who spoke against the proposals to reduced the number of staff in that area and the impact a reduced service would have on the education of those children and their inclusion into society.

Information was also given on the individual anticipated savings and the number of potential redundancies as a result of the proposals and it was reported that it was anticipated that the

number of redundancies at this point in time could potentially change as the consultation process continued.

RESOLVED – (a) That, with the deletion of ‘regrettably’ in the first line of the recommendation, the notes of the Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group be approved and that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee supports the principles, as contained in the draft Medium Term Financial Plan.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee requests Cabinet to undertake a review of the Early Years Inclusion Service to allow Members time to fully understand what it would mean cutting this service (Appendix 8/26).

(c) That this Scrutiny Committee requests Cabinet to look at the possibility of retaining the element of the discretionary services in relation to food product sampling, due to the possible impact on the health of Darlington residents (Appendix 8/17).

(d) That this Scrutiny Committee requests Cabinet to look at reconsidering the reduction in funding to the Connexions Service.

(e) That Cabinet be advised of the following views/comments of the Economy and Environment, the Health and Well Being, the Neighbourhood Services and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees :-

(i) in relation to the areas within the remit of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee :-

(A) that paragraphs 98 to 103 of the submitted report relating to Transport and Highways be noted;

(B) that, in relation to the savings proposals within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee:-

(i) Countryside and Rights of Way Services (Appendix 8/7), this Scrutiny Committee regrets the reductions of staffing in relation to Park Rangers, notes that Rights of Way work will be kept to the statutory minimum and that there is potential for external funding and volunteering;

(ii) Cycle and Pedestrian Training (Appendix 8/8), this Scrutiny Committee notes the position in relation to the Road Safety Grant and highlights that the free services are efficient and cost effective;

(iii) Road Safety Education Training and Publicity (Appendix 8/9), this Scrutiny Committee notes that the statutory minimum will be provided and that the responsibilities of the current post holder will be redistributed;

(iv) Supported Bus Services (Appendix 8/13), this Scrutiny Committee notes that the current position is unclear and that there is scope for further

scrutiny in June/July as the process continues;

- (v) Car Parking (Appendix 8/14), this Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposals as income generation;
- (vi) Contract Parking (Appendix 8/15), this Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposals as constructive and relevant to the green agenda by the production of travel plans;
- (vii) Public Toilets – Closure and Introduction of Charges (Appendix 8/16), this Scrutiny Committee supports the proposals and in doing so notes that there are alternatives available at West Cemetery and that Town Centre alternatives should be well publicised;
- (viii) Cultural Services (Appendix 8/20), this Scrutiny Committee wishes to place on record that it is the conviction of this Scrutiny Committee that cultural services are crucial to regeneration and attraction of inward investment :-
 - (A) Civic Theatre, this Scrutiny Committee accepts, with regret, Cabinet’s decision on the future of the Civic Theatre and wishes to highlight that, during negotiations, it is important to stress the advantages and efficiencies to be gained in working with other venues in the Borough, particularly the Dolphin Centre and partners involved in the future programmes at the Arts Centre,
 - (B) Arts Centre, this Scrutiny Committee welcomes proposals for the interim year at the Arts Centre and maintenance of a reduced subsidy; welcomes the Inquiry Group and looks forward to receiving further information on the outcome; embraces the continued support from the Arts Council but would stress that a valid cultural strategy is required to sustain such support and hopes that the ongoing strategic capacity investment of £100,000 per annum will remain as a minimum; supports Darlington for Culture and its success as an umbrella organisation; is concerned about reduced opening hours and its effect on the programme, provision for visual arts, the Borough Collection and the long term future of tenants’ position;
 - (C) Dolphin Centre, this Scrutiny Committee approves the proposals and supports all staff in their willingness to find solutions.
 - (D) Events Programme, this Scrutiny Committee notes that there is a need to find alternative means of provision of services by charging where appropriate and seeking sponsorship;
- (ix) Waste Management (Appendix 8/21), this Scrutiny Committee regrets the reduction in staffing and raises concerns over recycling and related

policies.

- (ii) in relation to the savings proposals within the remit of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny :-
- (A) Supporting People – Efficiencies (Appendix 8/11), this Scrutiny Committee notes that efficiencies have already been achieved within Supporting People contracts;
 - (B) Public Protection (Environmental Health) (Appendix 8/17), this Scrutiny Committee is very concerned that that some of the discretionary services will cease, particularly food product sampling, due to the potential impact on the health of Darlington residents and request that this element of the discretionary services be retained with a view to considering and exploring a more flexible approach;
 - (C) Public Protection/Trading Standards (Appendix 8/18), this Scrutiny Committee regrets the termination of the discretionary services and suggests that awareness is raised of where local services of this nature will be available;
 - (D) Reducing level of disregard given in the financial assessment under the fairer contribution policy (Appendix 8/22), this Scrutiny Committee notes the current position and seek assure that it is introduced carefully and sensitively; and
 - (E) Saving 10% on personal budgets (Adult Social Care) (Appendix 8/23), this Scrutiny Committee notes the current position.
- (iii) in relation to the saving proposals within the remit of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee :-
- (A) this Scrutiny Committee is concerned and regrets the proposals, within its remit, however, it will continue to monitor the impact on services and performance.
- (iv) in relation, to the saving proposals within the remit of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee :-
- (A) Library Service Review (Appendix 8/6), this Scrutiny Committee notes the position in relation to the Library Service Review, and that there may be potential to access alternative funding streams and extend volunteering opportunities;
 - (B) Local Education Statutory Functions (Appendix 8/24), this Scrutiny Committee notes that the statutory minimum will be provided, and regrets that non-statutory functions will be vastly reduced;
 - (C) Early Intervention and Prevention (Appendix 8/25), this Scrutiny Committee regrets the reductions in relation to Early Intervention and Prevention, acknowledges the importance of this service, and raises concerns in relation to

future provision;

- (D) Early Years Inclusion Review (Appendix 8/26), this Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the depth of feeling expressed in comments received from practitioners and parents, both at the meeting and as part of the consultation process itself, however regrettably accepts the recommendations outlined in the submitted report;
- (E) That regular overview reports monitoring Early Intervention and Prevention be received at future meetings of this Scrutiny Committee.
- (F) That regular overview reports monitoring the take up of School Meals be received at future meetings of this Scrutiny Committee.