

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29th January, 2008

PRESENT - Councillor Haszeldine (in the Chair); Councillors Burton, Coultas, Francis, Johnson, Lewis, Maddison, Richmond, A. Scott and Walker.

APOLOGIES - Councillor Swainston.

ABSENT -

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Harker B. Jones, D. Jones and Williams.

OFFICERS – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services, Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services, Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services, Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive and David Hall, Assistant Director, Accounting Services and Local Taxation within the Corporate Services Department.

R74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

R75. MEDIUM-TERM CORPORATE PLAN (INCORPORATING THE MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2008/12) – DRAFT – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) together with this Council’s first combined corporate and financial plan (also previously circulated), as submitted by the Council’s Corporate Management Team, which had been approved by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 16th January, 2008, as a basis for consultation.

A copy of the draft Sustainable Community Strategy; draft Corporate Plan; projected spend against the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP); report from Darlington Citizen’s BudgetPanel; detailed budget pressures that had been included within the MTFP; detailed reports from each department, including value for money assessments; proposed Capital Programme; and further detailed capital expenditure and revenue estimates, were all appended to the submitted report.

Councillor Williams, the Leader of the Council, presented the Plan to the Scrutiny Committee, and, in doing so, outlined the significant changes in the Council’s approach to combine its Corporate Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Plan. He reported that the draft plan had been prepared in accordance with the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and consultation thereon had been extensive in line with the Council’s increasing focus on community engagement, and that any views or comments received as part of the consultation exercise would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled to be held on the 19th February, 2008.

In considering the Plan, Members of the Scrutiny Committee heard the views of Officers, the Chairs of Sadberge and Middleton St. George Parish Councils and the Chair of the Darlington Association of Parish Council’s in respect of the proposed loss of posts within the Environmental Health Service and the Civil Advice Service on Trading Standard issues; the

withdrawal of grants to Parish Councils and the withdrawal of the subsidy given to bus routes 17 and 97, which would affect the residents of Sadberge. In presenting their views, speakers put forward alternative proposals which they felt would achieve some efficiency savings.

Questions were asked by Members in relation to the consultation process for developing the Corporate Plan; the process for consideration of the Draft Sustainable Community Strategy, which was subject to a formal consultation exercise in its own right and would not be formally considered by Council until March 2008; the current overspend of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the reasons for that; the risk factor related to the economic outlook which might prevent the Council achieving its objectives; the reduction of reliance of reserves by 2022/12 to £0.2 million; the Hummersknott School capital project and its funding requirements; proposals for the building of a new community centre at Skerne Park; additional resource allocation approvals by both Council and Cabinet; the possibility of additional savings being achieved through the management structure of the Authority; and the Council's Management of Change Policy for any staff who might be affected by the proposals.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be conveyed to the representatives who have attended and addressed this meeting and that they be advised that their comments and submissions will be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on the 19th February, 2008.

(b) That Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee, having considered the draft Plan, supports its recommendations.