

EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26th January, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Haszeldine (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Coultas, Grundy, Johnson, Landers Maddison and C. Taylor (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Francis, Swainston and L. Vasey (The Mayor) (3)

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Harker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director – Finance

ER6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillor Long declared an interest as a Board Member of Theatre Hullabaloo and Councillor Newall declared an interest as Chair of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

ER7. 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 Medium Term Financial Plan Task and Finish Review Group, following the work they had each undertaken in relation to the savings proposals within their individual remits.

Each of the Scrutiny Chairs presented the findings and recommendations of their individual Scrutiny Committees and outlined the background and discussions which took place at the meetings in making the recommendations.

Discussion ensued on some of the specific areas affected by the proposals namely CCTV provision with the Borough, the proposed closure of Cockerton library, the work undertaken into the provision of Arts within the Town; and the reduction in the Welfare Rights Service.

RESOLVED – (a) That the notes of the Efficiency and Resources Medium-Term Financial Plan Task and Finish Review Group be approved and that Cabinet be advised of the following views/comments of this Scrutiny Committee :-

(i) in relation to the proposal to implement a three-year pay freeze, the majority view of this Scrutiny Committee is to reluctantly support the proposal, with the minority view being to reserve the right to comment at this stage and to report direct to Officers in due course;

(ii) in relation to the proposal to implement three days unpaid leave, this Scrutiny Committee reluctantly supports the proposal, however, it recommends that, in relation to non-teaching staff within schools working under the terms and conditions of the Local Authority, this should be at the direction of the individual School Governing Body;

(iii) in relation to the proposal relating to debt management, this Scrutiny Committee supports the proposal and undertake further work in relation to the assessment management as part of its work programme;

(iv) in relation to the proposal to cancel the terrorism insurance, this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make;

(v) in relation to the proposal to withdraw Parish Grants, the majority view of this Scrutiny Committee is to support the proposal, with the minority view being to not support it; and

(vi) in relation to the proposal to withdraw Local Government Association subscriptions, the view of this Scrutiny Committee is to support the proposal

(b) That Cabinet be advised of the following views/comments of the Place, the Health and Partnerships, the Adults and Housing and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees :-

(i) in relation to the areas within the remit of the Place Scrutiny Committee :-

(A) bearing in mind Darlington's poor position in a range of measures of library provision, including being the worst in the country for its number of service points per head population and given the importance of libraries to disadvantaged groups in times of economic recession, this Scrutiny Committee cannot endorse the closure of Cockerton library until the following solutions have been pursued and therefore recommends that Cockerton Library continue to be supported in the next financial year :-

(1) that schools and Job Centre Plus be approached to determine if a contribution to the Library Service could be made;

(2) that Legal Services be requested to confirm that the Assessment of Local Needs has been undertaken correctly;

(3) that a further equalities risk assessment be made in relation to unemployed and low income people (Appendix 19/15 of the submitted report) in relation to social and digital exclusion;

(4) that the following governance options be pursued :-

- the Council collaborates with a neighbouring local authority to develop a joint-service model of delivery;
- the Council supports the establishment of a separate Libraries only company or trust as part of a company structure that secures the financial benefits of charitable status;

- the Council supports the establishment of a wider Leisure and Cultural Trust as part of a company structure that secures the financial benefits of charitable status; and
 - the Council considers supporting the establishment of an ‘employee-owned’ model, such as a mutual
- (5) that Members be forwarded information relating to volunteers providing the library service and that any volunteer programme be supervised by professional librarians;
- (6) that Community Partnerships and Friends Organisations be approached for assistance in running the Library Service;
- (7) that investigations be undertaken on the effect of local businesses if Cockerton Library were closed.
- (B) that the reduction in criteria for Northumbria in Bloom be investigated;
- (C) that, in relation to CCTV :-
- (1) Members be circuted a list of the CCTV cameras to be turned off; and
- (2) other areas of financing individual cameras be pursued;
- (D) that this Scrutiny Committee endorses the principles outlined in the paper ‘Vision for the Arts’ and is convinced of the argument in favour of building a new Arts Centre in a Town Centre location as a long-term and sustainable solution. It believes that Darlington’s past record as a provider and champion of the arts has worked as a driver of economic regeneration and must not be jeopardised. The Scrutiny Committee considers that uncertainty remains on the following issues and therefore wishes to monitor the situation closely by the establishment of a Task and Finish Review Group as highlighted at Minute EE11(f(iv))/Sep/11 of the former Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee :-
- the possibility of success of the grant application to the Arts Council for the provision of a new Arts Hub;
 - the position regarding the provision and facilitation of arts and cultural activity and the cost of such provision in the intervening period; and
 - any new governance model
- (E) that a full range of models for the re-development of the Vane Terrace site be pursued

- (F) that the Arts Centre continue to operate on a limited basis in conjunction with partners
- (ii) in relation to the savings proposals within the remit of the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee :-
 - (A) this Scrutiny Committee supports the proposal in relation to the fundamental review of Social Capital Equalities and Talking Together budgets;
 - (B) this Scrutiny Committee reluctantly supports the proposal in relation to the reduction in the Welfare Rights Service budget, and requests that, if anything can be done to keep the service, every effort should be made by Officers; and
 - (C) this Scrutiny Committee requests that Officers pursue the availability of PCT funding to continue to fund the Welfare Rights Post until it ceases to be in existence.
- (iii) in relation to the saving proposals within the remit of the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee :-
 - (A) this Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposal in relation to the review of support and consultation with older adults and requests that it be informed of the outcomes of that review;
 - (B) this Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposal in relation to the review of the Carers Service Contracts and requests that it be informed of the outcomes of that review;
 - (C) this Scrutiny Committee agrees with the proposal in relation to charging for the Financial Protection service; and
 - (D) that this Scrutiny Committee is concerned about the proposal in relation to the review of the Adult Transport provision and requests that it be kept informed of the outcomes of that review
- (iv) in relation, to the saving proposals within the remit of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee :-
 - (A) this Scrutiny Committee is concerned about the proposal to reduce the Early Years and Childcare Development service, however, it is confident that the reduction in hours will not affect the current level of expertise in the service;
 - (B) this Scrutiny Committee is concerned about the proposal to reduce the training element of the Parenting budget as it does not allow for replacement of trained practitioners who may leave the service in the future;

- (C) this Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor the impact of the services affected by the budget proposals within its remit; and
- (D) this Scrutiny Committee places on record its thanks to those members of staff with the Early Years Foundation and Childcare Setting Advisory Service who have agreed a reduction in hours rather than lose a post through redundancy.

(c) That the Place Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider undertaking a further piece of work into the effectiveness of CCTV within the Borough prior to the maintenance contract being retendered in October 2012.