

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 December 2014

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Cossins, Culley, Donohue, Harman and Lawton. (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors L Hughes and EA Richmond. (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth, Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P30. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23 October 2014.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

P31. MATTERS ARISING – In relation to Minute P25(d)/Oct/14 a Member advised that he had yet to contribute to the Register of Features and the Democratic Officer indicated that she would collate all contributions and forward to the Flood Risk Manager, Stockton Borough Council.

P32. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

It was also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee prior to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

The submitted report outlined the original Work Programme and requested Members to reconsider the Work Programme to accommodate further issues that needed to be included.

Discussion ensued on the next meeting of PESAG Review Group to include community representatives and the need for two special meetings of Place Scrutiny Committee to be arranged, in January, to give consideration to cycling within the Town Centre and the Local Enterprise Partnership. It was also confirmed that a special meeting had been arranged for 9 January 2015 to give consideration to the Combined Authority.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

P33. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15 TO 2019/20 – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2 December 2014 proposing a Medium Term Financial Plan for 2015/16 to 2019/20 for consultation including setting a budget for 2015/16.

Members also received a presentation from the Director of Economic Growth which gave an overview of the current financial position which included Government grant loss equating to £33.3m and a further anticipated loss of £16.5m by 2020. Total losses to this Council therefore equates of 56 per cent reduction in grant. Expenditure reduction to date is £25m and there are further plans to save another £10.3m by 2016/17. It was also reported that Government funding levels were due to be announced later today.

Scrutiny Committee was informed that anticipated further savings would be required by 2020 over and above the current planned savings. Details were also supplied of the savings achieved to date together with progress on the three key areas which it had been agreed would offer the best prospects of the Council being in a position to continue to serve the public well into the long-term i.e. Building Strong Communities, Spending Wisely and Growing the Economy.

Details were supplied of Council spending, with 39.6 per cent allocated to Adults Social Care, 23.4 per cent allocated to Children's Services, 18.5 per cent to Environmental, Highways and Regulatory Services and the remaining 18.5 per cent on democracy, financial costs, arts, culture and leisure, planning development and regeneration and housing welfare and benefits.

Finally, Scrutiny Committee was reminded of the significant ongoing financial challenges and further savings estimated to be in the region of £12m.

In relation to the economic growth target of £1.5m Scrutiny was advised that there had been an increase in the number of houses built which had improved Council Tax and homes bonus targets. A number of new business developments would also contribute to the National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) figures.

Members were informed that the Local Plan outlined Darlington's plans for new homes, Central Government controlled the NNDR calculation, the Council engaged closely with developers who only build when there is demand and empty homes within the Borough were actively being brought back into use.

The Director of Economic Growth advised Scrutiny that European Funding of £3m had been received, the Council was working with Tees Valley colleagues to identify where growth exists, Colleges were informed where it was anticipated the opportunities would be and a broad portfolio of job opportunities was to be created for Darlington.

Following a question Members were reassured that the car parking policy had been agreed, concessions were now in place to try to address traders' concerns and the

proposed multi-storey car park would operate on a pay on exit basis to alleviate concerns of rushing back to cars to avoid fixed penalties.

In relation to Cockerton Library, Scrutiny was assured that negotiations were ongoing with eVolution and other interested Groups including Age UK Darlington, Citizens Advice Bureau and Darlington for Culture for the provision of a community library. The handover would possible occur during June 2015 but as there was budget provision until March 2016 this date was flexible. Cockerton Library would be supported by Crown Street Library with the book stock and lending infrastructure also being supported by the Council. Additionally it was intended that opening hours would remain unaltered with possible expansion once up and running and the Library would also be used for community events and meetings. Scrutiny was advised that Cabinet endorsement would be required for any decisions regarding the building itself although it was proposed that a lease arrangement could possibly be in place for the first twelve to 18 months.

In relation to the Head of Steam Scrutiny was advised that following the decision to reinstate the £265k budget for the Head of Steam work was ongoing with colleagues from broader heritage campus projects on remodelling the museum to sustain its future.

Creative Darlington Board was also considered by Place Scrutiny Committee (see Minute P36 below).

RESOLVED – (a) That the report submitted to Cabinet on 2 December 2014 in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

(b) That the reinstatement of the £256k budget for the Head of Steam, be welcomed.

(c) That in relation to the Head of Steam the results of recent consultation include the exploration of the possibility of free entry with initiatives to increase ‘secondary spend’ on an ‘invest to save’

(d) That Scrutiny Committee welcomes the progress on Cockerton Library and notes the intervention of eVolution and voluntary groups.

(e) That Scrutiny Committee is pleased to note that the opening hours of Cockerton Library are to remain unaltered, expects there to be professional supervision, continued digital inclusion and assurances that the Libraries budget takes account of this.

(f) That the Council Tax increase be endorsed for the reasons outlined in the submitted report.

(f) That European grant funding of £3m be welcomed.

(g) That, in relation to Creative Darlington, solutions be found to the need for support for the Creative Darlington Manager with regard to the management of the Bridge and the Crown Street Gallery.

P34. CAPITAL PROGRAMME – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources which had been considered by

Cabinet at its meeting held on 2 December, 2014, proposing a 2015/16 Capital Programme for consultation.

It was stated that capital expenditure was significant, one off expenditure used to purchase or improve assets to enable the Council to deliver its priorities. The report highlighted that the majority of funding for capital expenditure for schools and transport was received from government grants and for housing, from the Housing Revenue Account.

Particular reference was made to the Council being able to supplement Government funding from its own resources, such as capital receipts and borrowing although the ability to do so was severely limited in the current economic climate. There was also a need to maintain the buildings and assets which were Council-owned and provision needed to be made for this within the Council's overall strategy.

References were made to the proposed capital programme with regard to applying the resources allocated to the Council which were set out in an appendix to the submitted report (also previously circulated) and included on-going schemes from previous years. Detailed information in relation to the major elements of the programme, which, it was reported would be the subject of further reports to Cabinet, were also contained within the submitted report.

Discussion ensued on the multi-storey car park development, revenue receipts from the Arts Centre sale being allocated to culture, Achieving Real Change in the Community (ARCC) funding and flood management implications on the Town Centre Fringe development.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

P35. LITTER AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE PROJECT UPDATE – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted an update report (previously circulated) on work undertaken as part of the Litter Reduction and Grounds Maintenance project which continued to evolve.

It was reported that as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) a savings target of £600,000 had to be delivered by March 2017, the project combined litter and grounds maintenance with defined outcomes to identify alternative ways of maintaining green and open spaces and to facilitate behaviour change within the Borough to realise a reduction in the volume of litter and identify alternative means of collection.

Scrutiny were informed that an audit had been undertaken in Lascelles Ward working with Members, local community leaders, residents and local businesses to identify key issues and concerns. The Council aimed to learn what a community could do, what it would prepared to do and the support required to be able to do it. It was also hoped that the outcome would get people to take responsibility for their own neighbourhood, encourage active involvement and identify what Council support was required.

It was highlighted that Groundwork North East had been successful in securing £80,000 from the Rethinking Parks programme, a nationwide project aimed at finding new ways of helping improve and add value to the way urban green spaces are managed. South

Park, the Denes and North Park had been identified to trial the initiative as all three parks had received funding from various sources over recent years. The Rethinking Parks initiative would also explore new ways of working at these locations in order to ensure the improvements are maintained and improved upon through these difficult times. A key component is to work with Darlington Cares to ensure that the business community will be able to work with the friends groups on a variety of initiatives.

Data analysing to identify the greatest levels of demand is to be undertaken and an Action Plan is also being developed with local shops and businesses to get their involvement in maintaining and enhancing their local area.

Discussion ensued on providing incentives to prevent littering, collection of leaves from park areas, community involvement in projects, priority of wards on basis of need, the excellent work undertaken by street orderlies and the possibility of Councillors reporting 'hot spot' areas.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That Scrutiny Committee encourages the involvement of all elected Members to promote participation by residents and businesses in each Ward.

P36. CREATIVE DARLINGTON BOARD – The Chair of Place Scrutiny submitted a report (previously circulated) on organisational development of Creative Darlington.

It was reported that Creative Darlington had been working with consultants and received an interim report, which included a review of partners, potential partners and funders, on 24 November 2014. Also examined were current vision, core purpose and priorities and the workload of the Creative Darlington Manager.

It was reported that all but one of the recommendations had been agreed at a meeting of Creative Darlington on 16 December and that a Task and Finish Group had been established to develop a governance model for submission to the Board at the end of January.

Discussion ensued on board membership and the possible governance model.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That the Chair reports this Scrutiny's discussion back to the Creative Darlington Board.

(c) That this Scrutiny Committee considers assistance to the Creative Darlington Manager, by the creation of a part-time post, is necessary to support Crown Street Gallery and manage the Bridge until it can be more independent.
