
OVERVIEW OF EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Wheeled Bins

2. Members received an update on the financial implications of implementing wheeled bins across the Borough in June 2013, and Members were pleased to note that the overall cost of implementation (£338,280) was less than the anticipated cost (£374,600), and resulted in a saving of £36,320. Members examined each individual budget area, and the variances between the anticipated and actual cost.
3. Concerns were expressed by Members at the 28% increase in small fly tips, and the potential cost implications, however Members were informed that this work was conducted as part of the generic StreetScene service, and therefore had no direct budgetary implications. It was noted that there had been a significant improvement in the cleanliness of back lanes, which had resulted in a saving in terms of street cleansing.

Corporate Health and Safety Report 2013/14

4. We received a report on the organisations performance in terms of Health and Safety for the financial year 2013/14, and Members noted the continued drive for health and safety improvements across the Council, and the need to ensure that health and safety was embedded as part of the Council's culture and core business.
5. In scrutinising the report, Members gave consideration to the number of near misses, employee responsibility for health and safety and the measures in place to encourage this, the training available for staff, and the support provided to management teams in terms of developing risk assessments.

Year End Sickness Absence Figures 2013/14

6. A report was submitted to inform Members of the levels of sickness absence across the Council during the absence year 2013/14, and included comparisons with other authorities within the Tees Valley. It was pleasing to note sickness absence had decreased from the previous year and that Darlington compared favourably when benchmarked. The report also provided an update on the management actions associated with sickness absence throughout the year, and the contributory support that was available from Occupational Health, Alliance

Counselling and Body To Fit Physiotherapy Services to support employees in returning to work, or stay at work.

7. Members examined the salary costs, and noted that these included some actual costs in terms of the provision of cover and overtime payments, and not just the notional cost of the sickness absence, and acknowledged that the nature of some roles may lead to higher levels of sickness absence in high pressure service areas.

Revenue Outturn 2013/14

8. Cabinet received a report on the Revenue Outturn for 2013/14 at its meeting held on 1 July, 2014, and the report was submitted to the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee for further consideration. Members welcomed the approach adopted where underspend was more readily identified and recouped, and transferred to reserves. A useful discussion followed on whether the Council's approach to budgeting was too pessimistic, and the reasons for identified underspend. It was pleasing that the Assistant Director – Finance and Human Resources reassured Members that budgets are constantly reviewed throughout the year and the rebasing exercise at quarter one was evidence of the proactive and fluid approach managers and Finance Officers have in regard to budgetary control.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter 1

9. We have looked at the Quarter 1 Revenue Budget Monitoring report, which was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 July, 2014. The Quarter 1 projections indicate an overall improvement of £2.449M, of which £1.392M relates to balances carried forward from the 2013/14 outturn, and so reflects an in-year improvement for 2014/15 of £1.057M, which was pleasing to note. This improvement follows the budget rebasing exercise which has become common practice over the last couple of years.

Work Programme

10. Members gave consideration to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee, and discussed additional areas which Members would like to see added to the previously approved work programme.

**Councillor Ian Haszeldine
Chair Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee**