
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.

Medium-Term Financial Plan

2. Again, as with all other Scrutiny Committees, we have been requested to provide a response to Cabinet on its proposals in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2014/15 to 2019/20.
3. We received a presentation giving an overview of the current financial position of the Authority; the anticipated further savings which were required by 2020, over and above the current planned savings; the savings achieved to date; 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; what the Council spends its money on; and the significant on-going financial challenges and risks ahead.
4. We were advised that, to date, Officers and Members have been very proactive and able to adapt to an environment of significant service pressure and resource reductions and that, despite the significant funding reductions, the majority of spending reductions to date have been achieved without direct impact on the public and we particularly considered the progress made against the key area Growing the Economy where there has been a significant amount of activity such as the increase in the number of houses built which has subsequently improved Council Tax and the new homes bonus targets.
5. There are clearly significant challenges ahead, particularly in social care where the increasing older population and high profile child cases are putting a strain on already financially challenged services and we discussed ways to meet some of those challenges faced which included the need to encourage people who required low level support to access services provided by the voluntary sector to prevent the numbers accessing Council services; future collaboration and partnership working, and the cost of external placements for looked after children and the need to challenge those costs.
6. We had another special meeting on 29 January, 2015, to formally agree a view to Cabinet on behalf of all of the Scrutiny Committees and this will be considered at a meeting of Cabinet on 17th February, 2015.

Darlington Partnership Arrangements

7. At the request of a Member of the Scrutiny Committee, we have been advised of the Governance arrangements, accounts, performance and reporting arrangements of the Darlington Partnership.
8. The Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee are regularly updated on the work of the Partnership as it falls within its remit, however, as the Partnership receives funding from the Council and other public bodies, it was requested that that this be looked at by our Scrutiny Committee.
9. The Partnership Director attended our meeting and advised us of the responsibilities of public bodies in respect of their partnership arrangements as set out in the Audit Commission's report 'Bridging the Accountability Gap' and the Council's own Partnership Toolkit which had been adopted by Cabinet to ensure that all the Council's Partnerships had adequate governance arrangements in place and that this was reported to the Audit Committee. The Partnership meets all this criteria.
10. We had a discussion about particular aspects of the Partnership's Constitution which related to the length of tenure and process for election of the Chair and Vice-Chair; the production of an Annual report and an Annual meeting which was open to the public; the availability of agendas, reports and minutes on the Darlington Partnership website; and the availability of the full statement of accounts. The Partnership Director agreed to raise these suggestions at the next meeting of the Partnership Board when the Constitution was being reviewed for discussion.

Performance Management

11. As all other Scrutiny Committees, we have received a presentation on the revised approach to performance management within the organisation which has been adopted to enable an assessment of the achievement of the One Darlington: Perfectly Placed outcomes and the performance of services delivered by the Council which contributed to the achievement of those outcomes to be monitored.
12. Detailed graphical information was also presented showing the summary of performance against the indicators for Quarter 2 and we discussed performance against a number of those indicators, together with the status of the change programme as at November 2014.
13. Each individual Scrutiny Committee will be considering, where appropriate, more detailed performance information in relation to any areas within their remits which they feel necessary, however, we will continue to monitor the overall performance of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed at the strategic level alongside the delivery level performance management of services within the Resources area and the full change programme status.

Councillor Ian Haszeldine
Chair Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee