
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.

Town Centre Assets

2. Scrutiny received a very interesting presentation on the Town Centre assets owned and managed by the Council. The Council has, over recent years, rationalised its office accommodation and vacated most of those which were leased. It has also sold some of its assets to obtain capital receipts, however, it currently has 90 property assets, some of which are rented out on a commercial basis. The presentation focussed on the main operational buildings such as the Railway Museum and Hopetown Carriageworks; Central House and the Annexe; the Arts Centre; Covered Market, Central Library, the Town Hall, Civic Theatre and Harewood House and Officers gave us an update on the current uses and condition status of each of those buildings.
3. We discussed the importance of ensuring that the buildings, particularly the council's heritage assets, were maintained and fit for purpose and that we have a planned approach to routine maintenance for all of the buildings. However some buildings would need significant future investment.

Trade Union Facility Time

4. Following a request by a Member of the Scrutiny Committee, we have looked at the cost to the Authority in relation to Trade Union facility time and the associated costs.
5. The Council does have a good relationship with a number of Trade Unions as part of promoting and resolving employee relations issues and we were advised that it currently recognises 13 Trade Unions, which included five teaching Unions, with the majority of the Council's workforce who subscribe to a Union being represented by UNISON.
6. The Council has, since 2013, monitored time off for Union duties and, from April to December 2014, there was 116 hours spent on Union duties that impact on work's time. In addition, the Council also pays for one full-time equivalent Trade Union representative at a current cost of £40,762, including on-costs.
7. We were informed that, in accordance with the requirement of the Local Government Transparency Code 2014, the Council was required to publish Trade Union Facility time and that this information would be available on the Council's

Website from March 2015.

8. We did have a discussion about the value of Trade Unions in relation to employee relations issues and whether the Unions themselves should contribute towards the cost of the full-time employee in the future in view of the current pressures on the Council.

Performance Management Information – Quarter 3

9. We have received detailed graphical performance management information in relation to a number of Place based, Healthy and Independent and Corporate Health service delivery level indicators as at Quarter 3.
10. We specifically discussed the indicator in relation to the number of apprenticeships for Darlington residents, which had, at Quarter 3 had shown a slight increase on the 2013/14 quarter 3 comparison and we requested information on the breakdown between white collar and blue collar apprenticeships and the indicator definition of apprentices which was taken from the National definition; and the intervention work which was being undertaken by Foundation for Jobs and the need to measure whether that intervention work was proving successful.
11. We also looked at the performance information in relation to Town Centre footfall figures and discussed the issues with accuracy as a result of counters not working accurately. The data suggests a decline as the same period last year, however, it was highlighted that the December 2014 figures did mirror the same period in 2013. It was pointed out the further analysis of the data would be needed to reflect the true picture of trends within Town Centre footfall and we thought it might be useful to look at comparative figures for other North East Towns and Northallerton to see their pattern in Town Centre shopping footfall. We also discussed that, following the completion of the Town Centre developments, the night time economy footfall figures might impact on the trend.
12. The information we receive in relation to performance management is extremely useful to us and will help us to formulate our future work programme.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter 3

13. As part of our Scrutiny role, we have looked at the Quarter 3 forecast of the 2014/15 revenue budget outturn. The report indicates projections showing an overall improvement of £3.336 million, of which, £1.392 million relates to balances carried forward from the 2013/14 outturn and £0.964 million relates to the budget rebasing exercise undertaken in Quarter 1.
14. We questioned Officers on a number of areas within the report but specifically in relation to the underspend on the prescription charge budget in 2014/15 and 2015/16 and the subsequent effective recommissioning of services within Public Health; the rebasing exercise undertaken in Quarter 1; whether the family support service was a statutory or part statutory service; and the reasons for the decision to carry forward £0.180 million which was allocated in 2013/14 within Adult Social

Care, to drive the integration of health and social care to deliver savings.

Work Programme

15. We agreed to have a look at the project management arrangements in relation to the multi-storey car park and this will be added to our work programme.

Councillor Ian Haszeldine
Chair Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee