

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th December 2013

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, Harman, Lawton and E.A. Richmond. (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Grundy, L. Hughes and Lewis. (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – (0)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning, David Burrell, Private Sector Housing Manager, Sue White, Economic Policy Officer, Owen Wilson, Principal Policy Officer, Economy, Transport and Housing and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P23. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 October, 2013.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

P24. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 – The Director of 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.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work over the next Municipal Year namely, Civil Parking Strategy, Town Centre Regeneration, Local Development Framework, Carbon Management and Economic Strategy.

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 it to accommodate further issues that need to be included.

Members were advised that a Special meeting to discuss the Local Plan was organised for 20 December 2013, Car Parking Strategy would be considered at the next ordinary meeting scheduled for 6 February 2014 and that three Special meetings would be arranged to give consideration to the MTFP proposals which fall within the remit of this Committee.

Discussion ensued on the inclusion of Regulatory Services to this Committee's Work Programme.

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.

P25. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING – The Private Sector Housing Manager gave a presentation to Members on Private Landlords, Housing Conditions and Empty Homes Projects.

The presentation covered the roles and responsibilities of the Section, the types of landlords present in Darlington, some of the conditions encountered by the most vulnerable tenants in the private rented sector, the powers and regulations available to the Council together with the enforcement legal process followed and the Empty Property Projects that were currently aiming to reduce the amount of empty homes in Darlington.

Discussion ensued on the types of inspections undertaken and the diverse range of properties available for the rental market, the safety regulations that landlords had to adhere to, the number of houses in multiple occupation (HMO's) increasing, the amount of complaints received from tenants and the relatively high percentage of tenants being on a pre-paid energy meter due to their many movements.

Committee were advised that HMO's tended to have the worst conditions and the most vulnerable tenants with damp, drainage and poor installation of stairs being particularly dangerous. In cases where tenants needed to be re-housed quickly the Private Sector Housing Section worked with the Emergency Housing Team to find suitable alternative accommodation. The majority of prosecutions were for housing conditions with housing legislation being far superior to building regulations. With regard to empty homes in Darlington a survey was undertaken once a year with legislation being in favour of owners' property rights and it was owners choice whether to occupy or not although there had been a reduction of 25 per cent in empty homes in Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to the Private Sector Housing Manager for his informative presentation.

(b) That the work of the Private Sector Housing Section be noted.

P26. ECONOMIC STRATEGY MONITORING AND REVIEW – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) on the first Annual Monitoring Report for the Economic Strategy which was approved in September 2012.

It was stated that the Strategy contained a commitment to annually review and assess progress against targets with good progress being made in the first year of implementing the Strategy across the four themes of Place, People, Infrastructure and Business Conditions. Ten priority actions had been identified to deliver the four themed headings which in turn led to 35 sub-actions that would contribute either individually or collectively towards delivering a priority action. Out of the 35 sub-actions six had been completed, 21 were on target, four were behind schedule and four had been deleted.

Discussion ensued on how profits of national chains were added to the local economy through staff employment and spending in other areas of Darlington. Scrutiny was

pleased to learn that North East workplace based GVA in 2012 was £41.9bn, this is an increase of 1.7% on 2011 compared to a UK increase of 1.6% and an England increase of 1.8%. Darlington out performs all other parts of the region with workplace based GVA per head of £20,163, a 1.34% increase on 2011 compared to a UK increase of 1% and England increase of 1.1% over the same period. Much of Darlington's growth has been driven by the production industries (including manufacturing), information and communications sector, business services sector and public administration, education and health.

Particular reference was made to the direct link between population and growth and it was highlighted that there was a need for Darlington to attract people in to work, not live here and work outside the Borough. The news that work place based earnings were levelling with residents based earnings was encouraging although concerns were expressed that jobs requiring low skills were not paid enough and that the lower end of the employment market needed support. It was accepted that not all people were academic (e.g. GCSE Grade C was not achievable for many people) and that low paid jobs needed to be sufficient to provide a living wage.

Committee were advised that the BT broadband initiative was progressing and that it was understood that a bid would be successful for broadband provision in rural areas. It was suggested that it would be useful to undertake a piece of work around alternative enterprise models as many people were struggling and pathways needed to be made available.

Members were also shown a section of a promotional DVD entitled Darlington the Right Town

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That this Committee notes the work being undertaken to reduce migration of people living in Darlington and working out of the Borough.

(c) That this Committee expresses concerns regarding the inequalities of earnings.

(d) That progress with regard to the Digital Strategy be noted.

(e) That alternative enterprise models be encouraged and investigations be undertaken to determine what they can bring to Darlington.

(f) That this Committee notes the restructure currently being undertaken within the local authority and welcomes the creation of the post of Director of Economic Growth.

(g) That this Committee understands and hopes to contribute to joint working with Tees Valley.

P27. MARKETS REVIEW GROUP – Submitted – The notes of the meeting of the Markets Review Group held on 21 November, 2013.

Discussion ensued on comparable markets within the Country for members to visit.

RESOLVED – (a) That the notes be approved as a correct record.

(b) That the progress of the Review Group be noted.

(c) That a tour of the Old town Hall, town clock and basement area of the markets be organised in the New Year.

P28. CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP – Submitted – The notes of the meeting of the Cultural Provision Review Group held on 24 October 2013.

RESOLVED – (a) That the notes be approved as a correct record.

(b) That the progress of the Review Group be noted.
