

**PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

13 May, 2016

**PRESENT** - Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Donoghue, L Hughes, Lyonette, MR Nicholson, Wright and York. (7)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Baldwin, Cossins and Kelly. (3)

**ABSENT** – Councillor Grundy.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director – Community Services, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Lead Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**P55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**P56 – MINUTES** – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 11, 14, 15 and 18 April, 2016.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That, Councillor York be deleted from the list of apologies for the meeting of 18 April, 2016.

(b) That, with the above amendment, the Minutes of the meetings of 11, 14, 15 and 18 April, 2016 be approved as correct records.

**P57. NOTES OF MEETING** – Submitted – The notes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Library Services Task and Finish Review Group held on 4 May, 2016.

**RESOLVED** – That, with the deletion of ‘Quality’ and insertion of ‘Equality’ in the first line of the fifth paragraph on Page 2, the notes be approved as a correct record.

**P58. NOTES OF MEETING** – Submitted – The notes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Place MTFP Task and Finish Review held on 4 May, 2016

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

**P56. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2019/20** – The Committee met to consider its response to the proposals contained within the Medium-Term Financial Plan which were within its remit.

Reference was made to the various meetings of this Scrutiny Committee which had been held to discuss the proposals contained within the core offer, the Impact Assessment Forms and the Futures Fund and to two Task and Finish Review Group meetings which had looked specifically at the impact and mitigation against the proposals in relation to the Library Services, including Cockerton Library, Mobile Library, Crown Street Library, Centre for Local Studies and the Art Gallery; and Street Cleansing and Environmental Crime.

During consideration of W20 – Blue Badge Parking, Members expressed a wish that people with a real need to park in the car parks, e.g. due to employment, would be taken into consideration during the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Process and requested the results of the EIA be submitted to Place Scrutiny Committee once complete.

Detailed discussion ensued around the Library Service, including the Mobile Library, Cockerton Library, Crown Street Library, Art Gallery and Darlington Local Studies. Members had concerns that there were outstanding issues surrounding the covenant on Crown Street Library which needed clarification prior to any decisions being made.

Particular reference was made to the possibility of the Third Sector submitting proposals for some of the Library Services and Officers are urged to give careful consideration to any proposal put forward.

Members had concerns around the closure of Cockerton Library which is a valued facility and expressed a desire for the Third Sector to be approached to determine if there was scope for it to run the Cockerton Library.

Members of the public expressed concerns including access to the Dolphin Centre for the elderly; the suitability of a vibrant leisure centre as a location for a Library; reduced access to the Archives thereby disadvantaging users; and more time to be allowed to research how a Library Service can be developed to provide a neutral and accessible service to the community; and the space allocated to the relocation not being smaller.

In relation to LLE14 – Street Cleansing – Members were keen to retain an element of environmental enforcement to deter increased fly tipping within the Borough. Committee also considered that Town Centre Traders should be encouraged to keep their shop fronts clean, tidy and litter free.

Members considered that Take Away establishments should take some responsibility for the litter around the Borough, especially from drive through establishments, and requested that some representatives of Take Away establishments be invited to attend a future meeting of this Committee to try and address the situation.

Members were informed that the street cleansing service cost £1.4m and stressed the need for the public to be aware of that cost with a view to taking responsibility for litter.

**RESOLVED** – That the following views and comments be forwarded to the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee as this Scrutiny Committee's majority response to the proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20 which are within its remit :-

- (a) the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Officers who have supported and provided information to enable it to make an informed recommendation on those proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan which are within its remit;
- (b) in relation to the Core Offer, this Scrutiny Committee notes the review of services which have been undertaken to ascertain which services the Council must provide by law, the cost of those services and to what level they should be delivered using a risk based approach and supports the findings of that review;
- (c) in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, this Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the information contained therein, however, has particular concerns on the following proposals:-
- i. **Mc10 – Christmas Lights** – Members feel strongly that the Christmas Lights should be retained in the Town Centre to encourage footfall and aid Darlington’s economy and would encourage Officers to seek sponsorship from the BID and Town Centre Traders to ensure their continuity;
  - ii. **Er10 – CCTV** – Members noted that, although the Police previously contributed £20k towards this service, there is currently no agreement in place for financial assistance; Scrutiny Committee would urge Officers to liaise with Durham Constabulary which uses the service on a daily basis, with a view to securing an annual financial contribution towards this service;
  - iii. **W15 – Concessionary Fares** – Members noted that companion pass holders were being contacted to seek views of the impact of removal of the disabled person companion pass and the views of DAD and other groups were also being sought; the results of this consultation will be considered by Cabinet and Council as part of the decision making process;
  - iv. **W20 – Blue Badge Parking** – Members noted the proposal to introduce charging in off-street car parks for blue badge holders and in doing so noted that, by law, only free parking on street had to be provided. Members also noted that the Assistant Director – Regulatory Services was in the process of writing to a large sample of blue badge holders and organisations to determine their views and understand the impact of this proposal. Members look forward to receiving the results of the consultation and requested Officers to consider the introduction of a transferrable ticket for car parks;
  - v. **LLE2, W3, W4 and W5 – Library Service – Including the Mobile Library, Cockerton Library, Crown Street Library, Art Gallery and Local Studies** – Members raised some concerns surrounding the proposals which included the closure of Cockerton Library, withdrawal of the mobile library service, closure of the Centre for Local Studies and relocation of the services provided within the Crown Street Library to the Dolphin Centre.

Members are aware of the public feeling in relation to the relocation of the Crown Street Library to the Dolphin Centre, particularly the restrictive Covenant on the Crown Street Building. Members request that the issues around the Covenant are resolved prior to release of any funding to relocate the Library to the Dolphin Centre.

Following a site visit Members are of the view that, should a decision be made to relocate services, then library provision can be made within the Dolphin Centre. The proposal includes for a main access in Bull Wynd. The Proposal does include for local studies provision. Issues remain regarding the location of the Art Gallery, the Borough Collection and the Archives.

In relation to Cockerton Library Members are keen to engage with the Third Sector in order to determine if the Library could be kept open. Members felt that Wards in Cockerton are the most digitally-deprived and access to computers is essential for job applications, benefit applications and pensions.

Members are also keen to ensure that vulnerable people are not affected by the withdrawal of the Mobile Library Service and hope every effort is made to promote the House Bound Service. Members also requested Officers investigate a sponsorship model, with the banking sector, for the Mobile Library Service.

Members also noted that impact and needs assessments were being prepared on all three library services which Cabinet are urged to consider prior to making a final decision on the Library Service;

Members are keen to ensure that any proposals put forward by any organisation or the Third Sector for any of the Library Services are carefully considered as viable options for running a Library Service;

- vi. **LLE6 – Indoor Bowls Club** – Members raised concerns surrounding the terms of the lease but accepted that investigations had taken place which suggest that it was a bona fide agreement and in doing so noted the health and social benefits the service brings to the elderly community; and
- vii. **LLE14 – Street Cleansing** – Members have significant concerns surrounding the proposals for Street Cleansing and believe that health issues could arise, flooding increase due to blocked drains and environmental crime would increase due to non-enforcement of environmental crime. However, Members accept that the service is now at statutory level and residents and voluntary organisations and groups had to be encouraged to take responsibility for litter and ensuring streets are kept litter free. Members also noted that the service would focus on main arterials and the Town Centre to ensure investment and economy within the Borough. There are understood to be proposals under discussion to encourage and mobilise volunteers to undertake some aspects of street cleansing and parks maintenance. Members strongly

support such initiatives.

(d) in relation to the Futures Fund, this Scrutiny Committee would urge Cabinet to :-

- i. retain the amount of £350,000 to enable teams to deliver external funding, business engagement and investment plans in order to bring forward new initiatives that would generate more private sector investment in the Borough to create jobs and increase business rates income;
- ii. retain the amount of £125,000 to enable the School Crossing Patrol Service to continue at existing standards ensuring a safe environment for children walking to school;
- iii. retain the amount of £100,000 to provide some match funding and capacity to ensure Darlington benefits from the Tees Valley Investment Strategy 'place and culture' themes working with the residual Economic Growth capacity and focusing on the towns rail heritage and to lever in external funding to support community and Darlington Hippodrome based arts activity;
- iv. retain the amount of £228,000 to maintain key assets relating to the Borough's Railway Heritage;
- v. retain the amount of £30,000 to deliver a Local Studies service within the Dolphin Centre;
- vi. retain the amount of £779,000 to maintain a centrally located multi-purpose leisure centre including relocation of the Registrar's Service and the Central Library;
- vii. retain the amount of £90,000 to fund events such as the Festival of Thrift and to match fund and staff other events in partnership with others to ensure tourism and footfall are brought to the Borough, thereby aiding Darlington's economy;
- viii. retain the amount of £100,000 ensure grass cutting of open spaces, parks and verges are undertaken on a less frequent basis to ensure that road sight lines are unobstructed for traffic and land is safe; and
- ix. retain the amount of £120,000 to maintain South Park to existing standards.