

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 August 2017

PRESENT – Councillors Carson (in the Chair), Cossins, Donoghue, Tostevin and Wright. (5)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lyonette and Nicholson, Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director, Highways, Design and Projects and Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager. (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – (0)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services; Bill Westland, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services; John Anderson, Assistant Director, Economic Initiatives; Andrew Casey, Head of Highway Network Management; Barbara Copson, Performance Manager; Dawn Taylor, Principal Officer (Trading Standards and Animal Health) and Lead Officer; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P11. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 1 and 21 June 2017.

RESOLVED – (a) That, with the deletion of Councillors Nicholson and KE Kelly in the list of Councillors Present at the meeting held 1 June 2017, the Minutes be approved as correct records.

(b) That a report be submitted to Scrutiny in six months' time providing an update on fly-tipping and the condition of the Borough's back lanes.

P12. MATTERS ARISING – The Chair informed Scrutiny that, in relation to grounds maintenance, he had presented the findings of Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet which had concluded that it would not be possible to look at this budget in isolation and that the reduction in this budget would need to be re-assessed at the same time as all the other reductions within next year's MTFP.

P13. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) and detailed performance scorecard (also previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators for Quarter 1, April to June 2017/18.

It was reported that the performance indicators were aligned with key priorities and likely to be used to monitor the Corporate Plan which was currently being developed. Many indicators for this Scrutiny Committee were reported annually and therefore, as quarterly updates were not available, it was suggested that annual indicators be included in the Quarter 4 report.

Details were provided for indicators which had previous data for comparison with eleven indicators better than previously reported, two the same as previously reported, and seven not as good as previously reported.

Particular references were made to performance against non-major planning development decisions improving and whilst performance against major planning applications was down, as the number of applications was low, a single additional application decided within target time would have resulted in target being achieved.

It was also stated that fly tip removal within target time had improved in the course of the quarter with 100 per cent of large fly tips removed within target time and target was also achieved for both large and small fly tips. Noise complaint investigation within target time was down slightly this quarter although target had still been achieved.

All relevant Assistant Directors attended the meeting to provide Members with performance updates and background information on indicators within their remits.

Discussion ensued on Annual indicators remaining in all quarterly reports to ensure that Scrutiny was mindful of all indicators within its remit and both government and local targets identified where appropriate, together with contextual and performance related information included in the comments section of the performance scorecard.

Following a question relating to ECI 305 Town Centre footfall trend, the Assistant Director Economic Initiatives advised Members that nationally the trend was down, online shopping had increased by 20 percent over the past five years and that nationally it is estimated that there is 20 percent too much retail floor space in Town Centres. It was also reported that Darlington was the fourth best performing location in the north east and was in the top 100 nationally.

Members were advised that Darlington's leisure offer had to be improved; there was a focus to provide more employment and housing in the Town Centre; and that the Experience Darlington Strategy 2016-2026, a visitor economy strategy, would be submitted to Cabinet for approval during September 2017. It was also reported that the Retail Assessment Analysis would be available in September as part of the Local Plan.

It was stated that, in relation to ECI 401, the Council was charged by Government to have a five year land supply and that the Local Plan would be submitted to Government in March 2018. It is anticipated that in October the Council will be able to demonstrate a five year land supply and Scrutiny noted that this was an improving picture getting closer to the target of 500 new homes being delivered per year.

In relation to the Performance Indicators under the remit of the Assistant Director, Community Services, it was reported that Scrutiny Committee had received reports at the last two meetings and were satisfied that PI's were looking healthy after the budget cuts.

The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services advised Scrutiny that he had no concerns with Performance Indicators for Regulatory Services and that REG 301 and REG 308 were performing well. He also stated that, in relation to the Food Hygiene Scheme, Darlington was the best performing authority in the Country.

In relation to REG 803, percentage of high risk inspections carried out, the Trading Principal Officer (Trading Standards and Animal Health) advised that although none had been undertaken in the first quarter, she had no concerns at this stage about meeting the year-end target of 100 percent and that a narrative would be provided at each quarter.

In relation to TCP 200 and TCP 202 the Head of Highway Network Management reported that Cabinet had approved the sum of £0.5m for the maintenance of unclassified roads. Maintenance works entailed slurry sealing the top surface to ensure the core underneath remained protected from water and frost incursion prolonging the life of the road. Slurry sealing would commence in September and affected residents were advised in advance of works to be undertaken.

Performance Indicators TCP 600, TCP 601, TCP 602 and TCP 603 (road traffic accidents) had shown a decrease of 40 per cent over the years which it was felt was due to safer cars and improved brakes as well as road safety improvements. TCP 900 was an Annual Benchmark and it was reported that the Council worked with Ipsos MORI to undertake a survey of 150 questions to identify public satisfaction with highways and transport services. Several years ago a harsh frost was followed by floods and the effects of this on public satisfaction with road condition can be seen in the indicators. The Survey Results are taken into account when allocating funding through the Local Transport Plan and the MTFP.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of Scrutiny Committee be extended to Officers for their comprehensive accounts in relation to Performance Indicators.

(b) That the report be noted.

(c).That Annual Indicators be included in all quarterly reports.

P14. CYCLING IN THE PEDESTRIAN HEART AND ROAD SAFETY AUDIT – Pursuant to Minutes P40/Feb/15 and P35/Apr/17, the Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an update on matters associated with Cycling in the Pedestrian Heart that arose from recommendations of Place Scrutiny Committee 5 February 2015 and agreed by Cabinet on 3 March 2015.

The submitted report detailed the actions that had been developed from those recommendations together with the updated position for each action.

Particular reference was made to the Road Safety Audit which had been undertaken by a ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) qualified Road Safety Auditor and investigated two available options. Option 1 was to prohibit cycling within the Pedestrian Area of the Town Centre and redirect cyclists onto a safe route to

navigate the Town Centre and Option 2 was to provide additional measures to retain pedal cyclists within the pedestrian area of Darlington Town Centre.

The Head of Highway Network Management advised Scrutiny that the submitted report focussed on Actions (e), (g) and (h) relating to improved signage, commissioning of a Road Safety Audit and investigating the provision of a dedicated cycle route around the Pedestrian Heart.

It was stated that signage banning cycling would not necessarily deter cyclists entering the Town Centre and many areas around the edge of the Town Centre were not conducive to both pedestrians and cyclists due to narrow footways and blind corners; Option 1 would entail costs of £150k to £200k for highway works; and that Post House Wynd had the requisite signage erected.

Discussion and challenge ensued on several issues including the timescale for new signage, improved safety in the Town Centre; Darlington being a cycling friendly Town; the prohibition of cycling in the Town Centre not deterring some cyclists; and enforcement of a cycling ban being difficult.

RESOLVED – (a) That the updated position on the agreed actions be noted.

(b) That the findings of the Road Safety Audit be noted.

(c) That, Option 1 an alternative cycle route around the Town Centre be not progressed.

(d) That, Option 2, provision of increased signage to delineate where cyclists can and cannot cycle within the Town Centre, be agreed.

P15. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the revised methodology for this Scrutiny Committee's current work programme.

It was reported that the proposed work programme has been reviewed and revised to enable the Committee to analyse information for each topic area aligning it to the eight outcomes and three conditions in the Sustainable Community Strategy, and relevant performance indicators from the Performance Management Framework.

The proposed structure of the work programme will provide Members with the opportunity to develop each topic through a series of questions and drill down to investigate particular aspects of extensive topics.

The Lead Officer provided Members with an updated position in relation to individual items within the schedule.

Discussion ensued on residents' concerns surrounding the works entailed in the Bank Top Masterplan together with the economic benefit to the Town especially in light of the 2025 Railway Celebrations; current status of the move of the library service to the Dolphin Centre; and the intentions of the new owners of Darlington Markets.

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.

P16. CREATIVE DARLINGTON BOARD - Submitted – The Minutes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Creative Darlington Board held 10 July 2017 which provided updates on various topics including an the Experience Darlington and Culture Strategies; Tees Valley Combined Authority Culture and Tourism Strategy; Creative Fuse and Creativity Works Programmes; Civic Theatre/Hippodrome working with children and young people; discussion on how to work together to benefit children and young people in the Borough; commissioning services for children and young people in Darlington; and the Creative Darlington Brand.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Minutes be received.

(b) That the Minutes stay on the Agenda for the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee and the Creative Darlington Manager be requested to attend.

P17. LOCAL PLAN PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS REPORTS 11, 12, 13 AND 14 - The Director of Economic Growth submitted Highlight Reports 11, 12, 13 and 14 (previously circulated) outlining the progress; governance; key tasks and milestones; and risks in delivery of the Local Plan 2016 - 2036.

The Chair provided Committee with an updated position on the issues detailed in the highlight report and in doing so advised Members that the current Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) methodology would be used with the latest data set to re-assess the Council's OAN. This was acceptable if the Local Plan was to be submitted to the Government in March 2018.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.
