
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.

Welfare Reforms and Universal Credit

2. We received an update on the Government's welfare reforms, the implementation of Universal Credit and the potential impact on residents and Council services.
3. As Members will be aware a significant number of reforms to welfare benefits have been implemented since April 2013 and a number of reforms are proposed for 2016-17 onwards.
4. Universal Credit, which will replace six existing means tested benefits currently administered by a number of organisations, began its roll-out in Darlington in November 2015 with the full roll-out not expected to be completed until 2021 and we were made aware of a number of actions taken by the Council in preparation for the implementation, including signing a Partnership Delivery Agreement with the Department for Works and Pensions, to enable residents receiving Universal Credit to access personal budgeting support.
5. At this stage, the number of people currently receiving Universal Credit in Darlington is low and this is expected to remain the case.

Revised Weekly Collection

6. We received a report showing the financial impact following the introduction of Alternative Weekly Collections (AWC's). The service is currently achieving a saving of £380,000 and is expected to improve further as staffing costs should reduce as the service beds in.
7. We were advised that there has been an increase in small fly tips, which are generally black sacks that could potentially be attributed to the introduction of revised weekly collection. In the year prior to the introduction of revised weekly collection arrangements, October 2013 to September 2014, there were 2,680 small fly tips and for the same period October 2014, when revised weekly collection was introduced, through to September 2015 there were 3,285 small fly tips, a 22 per cent increase. This wasn't unexpected and is mainly related to back lanes where residents are placing out additional waste. This increase equates to approximately 11 additional fly tips per week. These fly tips are picked up within existing resources therefore there is no additional cost, however it does mean at times some resources are diverted away from other duties.

8. We were concerned at the level and type of fly tipping and we will ask Place Scrutiny Committee to investigate.

Medium Term Financial Plan

9. We received a report in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 December 2015.
10. The report sets out the two-stage approach to revising the MTFP and we noted that the first stage was to set the Council Tax for 2016/17, along with the fees and charges and that the second stage, to be considered by Cabinet in February, would be to further revise the MTFP, following receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement.
11. In relation to setting the Council Tax for 2016/17, we are aware that the Government is allowing Council's with responsibility for Adult Social Care to be able to levy a 'precept' of two per cent on top of the current Council Tax referendum limit to help fund the increasing cost of social care.
12. There are still a number of pressures and challenges on the MTFP, particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and the cost of the introduction of the living wage and we, as a Scrutiny Committee will be considered the proposals in detail to ensure full understanding of the proposals and risks and we will make recommendations thereon to Cabinet.

Councillor Ian Haszeldine
Chair Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee