

---

**OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Place Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Planning Position Whilst Preparing the New Local Plan**

2. We received a report clarifying the Council's approach to the application of planning policy in Darlington's context whilst a new Local Plan is being developed, following withdrawal of the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document.
3. An Interim Planning Position Statement, approved by Cabinet on 5 April 2016, provided clarification on the relevant material considerations in determining planning applications under national planning policy.
4. The Council still had an adopted plan and the Core Strategy, minus housing supply policies, and Local Plan saved policies would be used in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for any future developments.
5. As more housing has to be found over the next 20 years the sites identified in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document, although relevant, are insufficient and developers need guidance as to where additional housing could be located whilst a new local plan is being prepared. Not all identified sites, however, will meet the economic, social and environmental presumptions of sustainable development.
6. Committee was informed that changes were expected around the amount of affordable homes on site as the industry was unable to deliver 30 per cent. Although not ideal for Darlington starter homes are now to be added to affordable housing.
7. Members noted that the National Data Sets were currently being reviewed and the Objectively Assessed Need, last published in 2015, would also need to be reviewed to ensure the Council's plans were still robust.

**New Local Plan Process, Timescales and Strategic Issues and Options**

8. We received a report detailing the process and timescales for production of the new Local Plan (including the Local Development Scheme and draft Statement of Community Involvement), and highlighting associated challenges and risks.

9. Scrutiny Committee also gave consideration to the draft Strategic Issues and Options as the basis of consultation and community engagement.
10. The overall aim of a successful Local Plan for Darlington is to ensure well planned, high quality, sustainable places providing certainty for residents and stakeholders, economic growth and a vibrant retail sector.
11. The first key stage of the new Local Plan is to identify and consult on the Strategic Development Issues and Options facing the Borough. Focussing on the strategic Housing Issues will form the basis of consultation with key stakeholders over the summer.
12. A National Local Plans Expert Group, established to evaluate current processes with a view to establishing a more streamlined approach to producing Local Plans, had recently reported its findings and recommendations.
13. A communications strategy is to be developed which will provide an engaging identity for the Local Plan, detailed topic and area focused intervention with key stakeholders, improved information delivered primarily online, more regular updates, and slimmed down, possibly more electronic, documents.
14. Key issues and challenges, aligned to priorities within One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, will need to be explored whilst developing the new Local Plan and the 'Big Debate' consultation exercise will focus on how to plan for the housing needs of the Borough up to 2036.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

15. We have had four special meetings to look at, in detail, the proposals contained in Phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as detailed within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20 which are specifically under the remit of our Scrutiny Committee. In considering the proposals, we also considered the impact assessments in relation to the proposed reductions in the core offer and those specific areas which it was proposed to include in the Futures Fund.
16. In addition, we also established Task and Finish Groups to look in detail at two specific areas which were included within the reductions to the core offer namely – Library Services and Street Cleansing.
17. We are holding a special meeting of our Committee on 13 May 2016 and taking into account all the discussions we have had at our meetings, will formulate a response on behalf of our Scrutiny Committee which will be submitted to a special meeting of Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 26 May 2016, as part of the consultation exercise.

**Councillor Bob Carson**  
**Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee**