

EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 May 2016

PRESENT - Councillor I Haszeldine (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Crumby, Crichlow, Johnson, K Nicholson, Mrs H Scott and C Taylor (8)

ABSENT – Councillor Coultas. (1)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director Finance and Human Resources.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Curry, Harker, Knowles, Newall, S Richmond and J Taylor.

ER40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER41. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2019/20 – (1) Response of the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee - The Scrutiny Committee met to further discuss those proposals contained in phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2016/17 to 2019/20, which were specifically under its remit.

Reference was made to the various meetings of this Scrutiny Committee which had been held to discuss the proposals contained within the MTFP 2016/17 to 2019/20, and to the Task and Finish Group meetings held specifically to examine Senior Management and Governance structures. The Chair circulated a statement at the meeting that he believed captured the discussions of the previous meetings, and the position of this Scrutiny Committee in relation to the proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2016/17 to 2019/20, which were specifically under its remit, and invited discussion thereon.

Particular reference was made to the comments contained within the submitted statement in relation to the reasons for the financial constraints on this Council, which Members felt was not appropriate for this Scrutiny Committee's deliberations.

Discussion ensued on the proposals contained within EffR5 (Members Allowances) and EffR19 (Senior Management Costs), both of which had been the subject of further work through Task and Finish Review Groups and it was suggested that, following the information provided to those Review Groups, this Scrutiny Committee were now in a position to reach a recommendation in relation to each of those proposals.

Members entered into discussion on Proposals EffR10 (Local Taxation) and EffR11 (Housing Benefits Admin.), and Members were reminded that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was not contained within the MTFP.

As it was identified that the subsidised rate received for the jobs portal would cease, offsetting the cost of the subscription, it was agreed that the additional benefits obtained by continued membership of the North East Regional Employers Agency (NEREO),

particularly in terms of Human Resources Management, would be financially beneficial to the Council, and therefore it is felt that membership remains cost effective.

In terms of Proposal H3 – Union Contributions, this Committee acknowledged that the work and partnership approach was of great value to all parties, and feels that future alternative funding arrangements should be supported, if it was decided that this position was to remain.

It was acknowledged that, in respect of services provided by the Local Government Association, further information received confirmed that continued membership was financially beneficial and provided support both in terms of the local and national perspective.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to Democratic Services for their work and efforts, which enabled this Scrutiny Committee to undertake this review of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20.

(b) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Heads of Service, Assistant Directors, Directors, the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, for their contribution, which enabled this Committee to undertake this process.

(2) Scrutiny Committee's Response – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of all of this Council's Scrutiny Committees which had been held to consider the specific proposals within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2016/17 to 2019/20, which were within their individual remits.

Each of the remaining four Chairs in attendance at the meeting gave a brief overview of the work undertaken by their Scrutiny Committee and outlined the reasons for the recommendations.

In relation to Place Scrutiny Committee, the Chair made reference to concerns surrounding the loss of the Christmas lights, citing that there was a business case for retention, and urged that alternative funding sources be explored, potentially through the Business Improvement District (BID), to ensure that the lights were not lost; the opportunities for economies in terms of the closed-circuit television (CCTV) system, and a potential move to a wireless system; the effects of dispensing with the Companion Pass, in relation to Concessionary Fares, and the need to await the outcome of an Equality Impact Assessment; and the impact of the proposal to move to the statutory minimum in terms of the Blue Badge Scheme, noting that there may be a large number of disabled people who were working, and who relied on long-term car parking provision. The Chair addressed proposals in relation to the relocation of the Library Service, with particular reference to the discharge of the covenant governing the use of the Crown Street Library Building, the required soundproofing in the Dolphin Centre, proposals submitted by Darlington for Culture to place Cockerton Library in trust, and the effect on vulnerable people following any withdrawal of the mobile library. The Chair stated that proposals in relation to the Indoor Bowls Club had been accepted, however that Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee felt that it was important that enforcement associated with environmental crime remain within the budget, together with an emphasis on mobilising the community to take responsibility and keep areas litter-free, and involving the Third Sector in parks maintenance.

In relation to the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee, the Chair reported that the Scrutiny Committee had reluctantly accepted all proposals, and having initially been informed of a reduction in training and development within the Commissioning and Contracting Team, had now been reassured that training provided to the team would continue. The Chair regrettably noted that, going forward, there would be a cumulative impact on the same vulnerable people.

In relation to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Chair acknowledged that, due to the large number of statutory services and an increase in staff following the Ofsted inspection, services were in a more fortunate position, however made particular reference to the proposal to cease the work with disabled children in the 0-3 age group, and their families, and stated that Members agreed that it was imperative that this service be retained. The Chair also stated that Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee expressed concerns regarding the costs associated with School Transport, and had given consideration to reviewing this area.

In relation to the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee, the Chair expressed great concern that many of the proposals would impact on many of the same residents, and in particular highlighted provision in relation to the Social Fund Budget, the impact on various organisations reliant on Strategic Grants, as a small budget cut on a small organisation could have a massive impact, and the reduction in capacity for the Substance Misuse and Drug and Alcohol Team in terms of engaging in proactive work, and to support partners in tackling alcohol and drug misuse. The Chair also noted concerns in relation to the loss of the Healthy Hub, and the limit that this would place on the Council's ability to achieve behavioural change in relation to obesity management. The Chair reiterated the concern that many of the proposals would have a cumulative effect on the same vulnerable people, and urged mitigation.

RESOLVED – That, in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, Cabinet be advised of the following views/comments of each of the Council's Scrutiny Committees :-

(a) in relation to the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee :-

(i) That, in relation to the Core Offer, this Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the proposals submitted within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, however in accepting proposal EffR5 (Members Allowances), this Scrutiny Committee recommends that the work conducted by the Governance Task and Finish Group be extended, and further examines the roles involved in, and the responsibilities placed on, this Council's governance arrangements over the forthcoming twelve months, including in the interim :-

(A) A training session being included within the Members' Training Programme aimed at enhancing Members' knowledge in relation to the business role of the Council, Scrutiny, scrutiny working, and the use of the Quad of Aims;

- (B) An overview being provided to Members on Council wide issues at appropriate times during the Municipal year, to assist Members in prioritising Scrutiny Work Programmes, and provide a greater understanding of the scale of Council business.
 - (ii) That, in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, this Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the proposals and information contained therein, with the exception that :-
 - (A) This Council continues its subscription to the North East Regional Employers Agency (NEREO) (Proposal H2 – Subscriptions – NEREO).
 - (B) Whilst this Committee accepted Proposal H3 – Union Contributions, particular concern was expressed at the loss of this funding.
 - (iii) That, in relation to the Futures Fund, this Scrutiny Committee feels strongly that :-
 - (A) this Council should continue its subscription to the Local Government Association (LGA);
 - (B) that funding for the Mayor, and Mayoral support, should be supported.
- (b) in relation to the Place Scrutiny Committee :-
- (i) 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;
 - (ii) in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, this Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the information contained therein, however, has particular concerns on the following proposals:-
 - (A) 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;
 - (B) 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;

- (C) 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;
- (D) 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;
- (E) 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;

- (F) 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
 - (G) 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.
- (iii) in relation to the Futures Fund, this Scrutiny Committee would urge Cabinet to :-
- (A) 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;
 - (B) 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;
 - (C) 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;

- (D) retain the amount of £228,000 to maintain key assets relating to the Borough's Railway Heritage;
- (E) retain the amount of £30,000 to deliver a Local Studies service within the Dolphin Centre;
- (F) 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;
- (G) 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;
- (H) 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
- (I) retain the amount of £120,000 to maintain South Park to existing standards.

(c) in relation to the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee :-

- (i) in relation to the Core Offer, this Scrutiny Committee notes the review of services which has 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 (with the caveat that the core budget for Performance/Project Management of £35,000 is split between children and adults) however, although it notes that assurances were given that any risks could be managed and mitigated against, it is particularly concerned about :-
 - (A) the impact of reducing the training and development package in place to ensure that staff are adequately trained and aware of legislative changes; and
 - (B) the potential safeguarding risks of the proposal to reduce the number of staff within the Commissioning and Contracting Team;
- (ii) in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, the Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the proposals and information contained therein however, :-
 - (A) it is particularly concerned about the cumulative impact of the proposed reductions on particular groups of individuals across a range of services, some of whom are the most vulnerable in society and disproportionately on those from deprived wards within the Borough and notes that further work is currently being undertaken to map those groups and the potential impact and will be looked at across this

Scrutiny Committee, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee; and

- (B) it is particularly concerned about the proposals to cease floating support for Domestic Violence Victims, Vulnerable Adults and Drug and Alcohol as ceasing this work will have a substantial impact and encourages future innovative working to be investigated by the Council and its partners to achieve the best outcomes and service delivery for those affected; and
- (iii) in relation to the Futures Fund, this Scrutiny Committee feels strongly that the proposed budget of £160,000 for Housing Related and Outreach Support for Vulnerable Adults should be retained as an absolute minimum and that additional funding, if possible, should be provided, particularly to support the provision of floating support services in the future.

(d) in relation to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee :-

- (i) in relation to the Core Offer, this Scrutiny Committee notes the review of services which has 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 (with the caveat that the core budget for Performance/Project Management of £35,000 is split between children and adults), however, it is particularly concerned about :-
 - (A) the reduced grant for Staying Put and the future budget pressure on the Leaving Care Service for Looked After Children;
 - (B) the loss of early support for disabled children aged 0-3 years and Members agreed that this service should be retained. The performance of the service should be scrutinised to ensure that it is working to maximum effectiveness. In the long term this service should be financed by looking for efficiency savings in other areas of Children and Young Peoples services.
 - (C) the lack of detail currently available in the redesign of the Early Help Service and therefore Members were not in a position to make any formal decision without further information and consultation.
 - (D) the potential impact of the significant reduction in the anti-social behaviour services and the impact on the Youth Offending Services.
 - (E) the future of school improvement taking into account the governments White Paper proposals relating to Education.
 - (F) school transport costs and proposed that a reduction target be set for the level of saving to be achieved.

(ii) in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, the Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the proposals and information contained therein however, :-

(A) it is particularly concerned about the cumulative impact of the proposed reductions on particular groups of individuals across a range of services, some of whom are the most vulnerable in society and disproportionately on those from deprived wards within the Borough and notes that further work is currently being undertaken to map those groups and the potential impact and will be looked at across this Scrutiny Committee, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee; and

(B) it is particularly concerned about the closure of the children's centres and the future impact on the Council that this may incur.

(C) it is particularly concerned about future contributions to the youth offending services by the reduction in anti-social behaviour services and the potential increase in anti-social behaviour and offending from the removal of the early intervention services.

(iii) in relation to the one-off Investment of £100,000 for the Voluntary Sector Development Fund, the Committee support this investment to develop new initiatives with the Voluntary Sector in particular in respect of support to vulnerable children.

(e) in relation to the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee :-

(i) 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;

(ii) in relation to the Impact Assessment Forms, this Scrutiny Committee regrettably accepts the proposals and information contained therein, however, has particular concerns on the following proposals:-

(A) S13 – Social Fund Budget – Members raised concerns around the effect of these proposals on the most vulnerable people in the Borough as several proposals affected the same group of people however noted that provision had been made in the Futures Fund, detailed below, for the retention of this service;

(B) S14 – Strategic Grants – Members raised significant concerns around the effect this proposal would have on various organisations as smaller organisations facing a small budget cut would experience a massive impact, whereas some larger organisations would feel less of an impact; resulting in a varying degree of consequences. Members also took into account the impact assessment undertaken on all

voluntary organisations currently in receipt of strategic grant and other funding, including discretionary rate relief and waste collection arrangements;

- (C) HP8 – Healthwatch Contract and Complaints Advocacy – Members raised concerns around the proposals to the service, provided by Healthwatch as the current budget would be cut by 50 per cent, with effect from April 2017, resulting in a much more streamlined service offered by fewer staff, no office space and providing only statutory functions;
 - (D) HP3 and S2 – Substance Misuse and Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT) – Members raised substantial concerns around the impact this proposal would have on vulnerable people and performance management of the service. Serious concerns were expressed at the loss of expertise and the results achieved. Members raised concerns that this proposal would have an impact on capacity to engage in proactive work and support partners in the work to tackle alcohol and drug misuse.. Members have worked well with The Gate (The Darlington Substance Misuse Services) and have been impressed by the dedication of The Team and will continue to work with and support them; and
 - (E) S9 – Obesity Management – Serious concerns are raised regarding this proposal particularly around young people and physical activity and the impact on vulnerable people. Members note that the loss of the Healthy Darlington Hub will limit the Council’s ability to bring about behavioural change, however, the Healthy Darlington approach could potentially be utilised to influence the Public Sector and NHS Organisations to work together for positive outcomes, as highlighted in the prevention element of the NHS 5 Year Forward View and Social Prescribing in the Better Care Fund.
- (iii) in relation to the Futures Fund, this Scrutiny Committee would urge Cabinet to :-
- (A) retain the amount of £13,000 to ensure business, public sector, voluntary organisations and the Council continue the partnership to develop and deliver solutions to problems and opportunities;
 - (B) retain the amount of £220,00 in relation to crisis support and community care fund and financial inclusion. The crisis element of £50k to be pooled with the £50k for financial inclusion to form a contract for a new wrap around service. The remaining £120k to be used for community Care support;
 - (C) retain a staffing budget of £50k for the Community Engagement Team to stimulate and support the development of the voluntary sector in Darlington and a one-off funding of £50k to support public sector

volunteering;

- (D) retain the amount of £100,000 to help develop new initiatives with the Voluntary Sector in particular in respect of support to vulnerable children;
- (E) retain the amount of one off match funding of £20,000 to the County Durham Charity Foundation to assist smaller community organisations deliver projects and investments. Members hope that partners will also contributed towards this to increase the funding pot; and
- (F) retain the amount of £80,000 to ensure the Move More element of Healthy Darlington is retained to continue supporting involvement in Sport and Physical Activity, in particular engaging schools, volunteers, clubs and coaches.