

---

**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.

**Work Programme 2016/17**

2. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2016/17 and possible review topics, the work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

**Experience Darlington A Visitor Economy Strategy**

3. Scrutiny Committee received a report and four PowerPoint presentations in relation to Experience Darlington A Visitor Economy Strategy; Darlington Culture Strategy, Darlington Hippodrome – A Place for the Imagination; and Darlington’s Heritage Economy.
4. Members were informed that the proposed approach to a Visitor Strategy for the Borough could deliver significant economic benefits by creating more jobs and spending in the area, enable more participation and opportunities for the arts and culture sector to add value and opportunities to enhance and reinforce Darlington’s reputation and perception on a national and potentially international scale.
5. The overarching Experience Darlington Strategy ensures Quality of Place for visitors, residents and businesses of the Borough and has four key themes of Town Centre Economy, Gateway Economy, Place Making/Regeneration Economy and Arts Culture and Heritage Economy.
6. The draft strategy has links to the work of the Railway Heritage Group that has researched the important heritage that Darlington has and includes the backstory of the social and economic structures that emerged in the town and became the template for passenger railways around the world. The strategy also has roots in the work of the Creative Darlington Board that has formed a strong partnership to promote the arts and cultural activities within the Borough. These two agendas have combined to form the basis of a Culture Strategy that is one of four pillars to the wider Experience Darlington Visitor Strategy.
7. Creative Darlington Board recommends that the Culture Strategy should focus on three priorities, namely, Theatre Town, Railway Heritage and the 2025 City of Culture.
8. Further engagement with key stakeholders, the wider community, business community and the wider public is to be undertaken so that the ambitions of the

Council for its communities might be refined and available public and private sector resources can be aligned enabling practical and realistic first steps towards the longer term goals.

9. A Town Centre Conference is scheduled for March 2017 with a focus to review the Town Centre Action Plan in the light of this work, the Local Plan and opportunities in the Digital High Street concept being promoted by Digital City.
10. Members noted that if the attractiveness of the Town can be increased to leisure visitors then it is estimated that further spending could amount to £26m in the local economy and provide around 500 employment opportunities.

### **Darlington Local Plan 2016-2036**

11. Members received a brief report outlining the progress, governance, key tasks and milestones and risks in delivery of the Local Plan. It was also noted that a Government White Paper was expected in January outlining changes to the formation of a Local Plan and a new National Planning Policy Framework was expected in May.
12. A new set of data sets were also expected due to the revised methodology of the OAHN (Objectively Assessed Housing Need) resulting in the delay of the Local Plan for several months.

### **Creative Darlington Board**

13. We received the notes of the Creative Board Meeting held on 19 September 2016 which provided updates on various topics including Experience Darlington; Developing Darlington's Culture Strategy; Great Places Opportunity; Jabberwocky Market; IncludFEST Tees Valley Forward Plans; and a Tailored Review of the Arts Council.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

14. Scrutiny held a special meeting to give consideration to the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2017/18 to 2020/21. We were advised there were no major new proposals contained within the proposed Plan and that Cabinet was consulting on a proposed Council Tax increase of 1.99 per cent, with a two per cent levy agreed by the Government to fund Adult Social Care for 2017/18 and subsequent years; the current schedule of charges; and the use of capital receipts to assist in funding the MTFP as a one off measure to relieve pressure on the revenue account.
15. We were advised that, although work was still on-going to implement the proposals contained within the 2016/17 Plan, on the whole, the savings which had been identified would be achieved, with the exception of the Library, which, at the time of our meeting, and, again as Members will be aware, had been deferred by Cabinet.
16. Delivery of the MTFP is still a challenge and there are a number of significant on-going pressures which have been identified over the next four years. Additional pressures of £3.9 million over the life of the MTFP have been identified, together

with a proposal by Cabinet to use capital receipts to off-set these.

17. Scrutiny was also updated on a recent decision by the Government to allow Council's the flexibility to increase its Adult Social Care precept by an additional one per cent in 2017/18 and 2018/19 (from two per cent to three per cent) on the condition that the total increase to 2019/20 did not exceed six per cent and we were advised that Cabinet would be further considering this.
18. We discussed the pressures on the Council relevant to Place Scrutiny Committee including reduced income from Car Parking Charges; loss of building cleaning in schools due to Academy conversions; and the current savings shortfall of £0.397 million due to the delay on relocation of the Library Service.
19. We were reminded that many charges are statutory and/or ring-fenced and that the Council can only charge what the service costs e.g. Licensing and Environmental Health Services.
20. Whilst we considered the increased charges to Eastbourne Sports Complex facilities the Dolphin Centre charges were to be confirmed and would be considered by Cabinet in February.
21. We also sought assurances that any income from the Library would be retained if the service were to relocate to the Dolphin Centre.
22. Members of the public also attended our meeting and sought clarification on increased pensions contributions and available contingencies should a judicial review on Crown Street Library occur.
23. It was confirmed that the pension contribution calculations are based on a conservative update of actuarial information. Any unforeseen costs are covered by the risk reserve.

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