

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 6 February 2020

PRESENT – Councillors Durham (Chair), Allen, Bartch, Harker, Mrs D Jones, McEwan, Paley and Renton

APOLOGIES – Councillors Keir and K Nicholson

ABSENT – Councillor L Hughes

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Johnson, Lee, Marshall and Snedker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Dave Winstanley (Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects) and Shirley Wright (Democratic Manager)

ER29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harker declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute ER35 below as a Governor of George Dent and Borough Road Nursery Schools. There were no other declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER30 MINUTES

Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2019 and 9 and 23 January, 2020.

REOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

ER31 CLIMATE CHANGE CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chair of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group attended the meeting to advise the Committee of the work, to date, of the Cross Party Working Group which had been established by Council to identify ways to reduce carbon emissions and achieve a carbon neutral status for the Borough.

It was reported that the majority of the work to date had been fact finding, however the Group had recognised that one of the first areas to look at was the Council's operations and behavioural change and it had been pleased to note that several members of staff within the authority had volunteered to be climate change champions to try and identify ways to reduce carbon emissions across their own work areas.

The Chair also reported that the Group had met with the Council's Senior Arboricultural Officer to discuss the tree planting scheme within the Borough, the Assistant Director Housing and Building Services to provide an overview in respect of the local authority housing, Planning and Building Control Officers on how legislation and regulations could impact on house building specifications and Councillor Snedker on the benefits of encouraging walking and cycling and implementing a 20 MPH

restriction in the urban area.

It was reported that although Darlington had seen a 34 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions from 2005 to 2017, there was still further reductions to be made and a lot more work to be done. The Chair of the Working Group outlined some of the work which the Group intended to undertake going forward and requested that all Members promote and support initiatives within their own wards to reduce the figures.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee asked a number of questions of the Chair on his presentation and particular reference was made to whether the group had looked at the Council's existing vehicle fleet and replacement programme and it was reported that there was a programme in place to move to electric vehicles as part of that replacement programme which was being looked at by Officers.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

ER32 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The Managing Director and the Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 4 February 2020, giving a summary of the latest capital resource and commitment position to inform monitoring of the affordability and funding of the Council's capital programme, together with an update on the current status of all construction projects which were currently being managed by the Council.

It was reported that the Council had a substantial annual construction programme of work which was delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically to Council services and that there were currently 35 live projects currently being managed by the Council, with the majority of those projects running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Particular reference was made to the slight slippage in the drainage element of the Ingenium Park Masterplan and Infrastructure project due to ecological reasons, however, it was reported that works would commence in November 2020, once the ecological window re-opened.

Particular reference was also made to the re-development of West Cemetery and it was confirmed that the through-road across the allotment site to Pondfield Close had now been removed and a number of passing points had been included within the site where possible, the current position in relation to the enabling infrastructure at Ingenium Park; the expected completion of Feethams House in April 2020, the current situation in relation to the Stockton and Darlington trackbed; and the need to include information regarding the carbon impact of projects within the report.

Members also raised questions in relation to the Summer works 2019/20 project and made reference to the Central Park Network rail accessway which had been deferred due to poor ground conditions.

Following questions by Members, it was reported that the new project management system 'Project in a Box' which Members had previously received information on would be implemented during 2020.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER33 DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

The Assistant Director Economic Growth gave a presentation on the Town Centre Strategy 2019-30 and outlined how the Council was working together with its partners to deliver positive change to the Town Centre, placing it at the heart of the community for years to come. It was reported that the aim of the Strategy was to create a choice of high quality town centre residential accommodation which would improve the look and feel of the town centre and which would contribute to housing provision, economic growth and the evening economy.

It was reported that, going forward, there were some challenges within the town centre which needed to be addressed, however, there were also a number of positives to build on.

Reference was made to the footfall within the Town Centre, which indicated the, despite the indications being that more people were visiting Darlington, the town centre footfall appeared to lower than previously and it was suggested that this could be due to issues with the accuracy and location of the current footfall counters. Members were advised that replacement counters were being purchased which would be re-positioned to give much better data recording. It was also reported that the current Performance Indicators which were being reported were being reviewed to enable more pertinent issues to be recorded such as shop turnover and footfall numbers when events were being held in the Town Centre and that these would be reported to future meetings of this Scrutiny Committee.

Discussion ensued on the proposed redevelopment of an area of Skinnergate; which would involve the creation of a number of smaller retail kiosks at ground floor level with quality accommodation above and to the rear, which would be Council accommodation and be retained by the Council; public realm improvements, including lighting and shop fronts along Post House Wynd, and the acquisition of land in Commercial Street, East Street and Crown Street

The Assistant Director also advised Members that a business case had been submitted for £7 million of funding to contribute to a £26 million project to renew and re-shape the Town Centre, excluding retail improvements, and it was expected that a decision on the outcome was expected in the next couple of weeks.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director Economic Growth for his presentation.

ER34 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) together with the quarter 3 revenue budget outturn report (also previously circulated) which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 4 February, 2020.

It was reported that the Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2019/20 were £17.267 million, £0.545 million better than budget and £0.670 million higher than the quarter 2 reported position and that, of the £17.267 million, there was a risk reserve balance of £4.350 million and a commitment to use £11.212 million to support the 2019-23 MTFP, leaving £1.705 million one-off funding to further support the general fund moving forward.

Members were advised that the positive change was mainly as a result of improvements in Adult Social Care, due to increased contributions from Health partners towards the provision of joint health care packages and additional income from the Council's Joint Venture Investment returns. However, there had been a further decline in the Children's and Education budgets due to staffing requirements and school transport requirements.

Members asked questions in relation to the pressure in legal fees and the projected overspend in relation to the Indoor Bowling Centre at North Road and it was reported that more specific detailed information would be supplied.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER35 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Committee and to give consideration to any additional areas Members felt should be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.