

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Friday, 10 January 2020

PRESENT – Councillors B Jones (Chair), Mrs Culley, Cossins, Donoghue, Howarth, McCollom and Tait

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bartch, Boddy, Durham and Wallis

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Paul Wildsmith (Managing Director), Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

CLS27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS28 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 January, 2020 in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2020/21 to 2023/24, including setting a budget and council tax increase for 2020/21.

The submitted report outlined details of the core offer budget, which had been agreed following a significant consultation exercise in 2016 and allowed reduced expenditure and services to a risk based minimum level with a small investment fund (The Futures Fund) of £2.5 million per year. It was noted that in subsequent MTFP's unallocated balances of £4.7m were invested in five areas, namely Community Safety, maintaining an attractive street scene, maintaining a vibrant town centre, developing an attractive visitor economy and neighbourhood renewal.

The submitted report highlighted areas of saving within the plan and areas of pressure, in particular those associated with increased demand for additional refuse rounds and waste disposal, concessionary fares, library service shortfall and reduced income from parking fines; and Members noted the projected expenditure for 2020/21 of just under £90 million.

Reference was made to projected income, including core grant funding to Local Government, additional funding announced in the Spending Review and increase in the Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (NDR), all of which would provide an increase in income over the period of the MTFP. Members noted the projected income of £90 million for 2020/21.

The Assistant Director Resources highlighted that by 2023/24 the projected general fund balance was £6.075 million however this relied on building 430 houses per year, no significant overspending, assumptions of additional income in the spending review materialising, a Council Tax increase of 2.00% and an adult social care precept of 2.00% giving an overall increased to Council tax of 4.00%.

Reference was made to the Future Funds allocation, with £4.7 million allocated in

2018/19; to date £2.081 million had been committed to the futures fund themes with a balance of £1.019 million remaining; and Members noted that in order to stimulate growth and invest in our communities over the period of the plan, Cabinet had agreed that the Futures Fund themes be bolstered by £1.8 million, in particular £0.600 million to Street Scene and £0.200 million to Community Safety for ongoing commitments and £0.350 million to the one-off Community Safety fund, £0.500 million to the Town Centre Fund and £0.150 million to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Following a question Members were advised that should the decision be made by Cabinet to continue with the current parking offer then funding would need to be identified.

Concern was raised in respect of the proposed Council Tax increase and the adult social care precept in light of the reliance on food banks by residents in the borough. The Managing Director advised Members that the Council had a Council Tax support scheme to support lower income residents; the proposed increase in Council tax was necessary to balance the MTFP and that without this, discretionary services would need to be cut. It was confirmed that the proposed increase was lower than the previous year and Darlington had the second lowest Council tax rates in the North East.

RESOLVED – That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the proposed schedule of fees and charges for those services within its remit and supports the Council Tax increase of 2.00 per cent plus the 2.00 per cent adult social care precept for the next financial year and Futures Fund investment of £1.8 million.

CLS29 COUNCIL PLAN 2020/23

Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 January, 2020 in relation to the Council Plan 2020-2023.

It was reported that the Council Plan set out a proposed vision for the Council and key actions the Council would take to achieve that vision; supported the key aims of the Community Strategy – One Darlington Perfectly Placed, building on the work undertaken in previous years; and progress against the plan would be reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees on a 6 monthly basis.

Discussion ensued on the refurbishment of the indoor market and Members were assured that the Council continued to work with Market Asset Management to deliver the redevelopment scheme.

RESOLVED - That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the Council Plan 2020-2023.