

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 January 2020

PRESENT – Councillor Curry (in the chair); Councillors Mrs Culley, Curry, Holroyd, Layton and M Nicholson.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bell, Clarke, Crumbie, Preston, Renton and A J Scott.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Mills.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Paul Wildsmith (Managing Director), Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director – Resources), James Stroyan (Assistant Director Adult Social Care) and Paul Dalton (Elections Officer).

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

28 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) which proposed a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2020/21 to 2023/24, and which also included setting a budget and council tax increase for 2020/21, for consultation. It was reported that the submitted report had previously been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 January 2020.

The submitted report stated that the Council had faced significant challenges over the last decade following the economic downturn and reduction in public sector spending and noted that the Council had been successful in responding to these challenges to date, though cautioned that there were still financial pressures to be faced.

The submitted report referenced the Core Offer Budget, which had been agreed following an in-depth and detailed review of all services and a significant consultation exercise in 2016, and which had allowed for the creation of a small Futures Fund, allocated to discretionary services. It was also noted that in subsequent MTFPs, Members had agreed to use unallocated balances of £4.7m to invest in five areas identified as having great value to the community, and that the above considerations provided the basis for the proposed MTFP.

In introducing the submitted report, the Assistant Director - Resources highlighted a number of pressures (summarised at Paragraph 15, and within Appendix 2, of the submitted report), and noted a projected expenditure for 2020/21 of £89.609m.

The Assistant Director – Resources subsequently outlined projected income and savings, which included income from the Revenue Support Grant, the New Homes Bonus, additional Social Care funding, Council Tax income, and National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR), and cited savings made as part of the Adults Services Transformation Programme and a reduction in pension scheme contributions, which in itself yielded a return circa £7m. It was stated that the projected income for 2020/21 was £90.116m, and therefore balanced for the next year, however it was noted that in Year 4 there would be a reliance on £6m of reserves.

Reference was made to the Futures Fund, with £2.081m of the original £4.7m allocation committed to Futures Fund themes to date, with a balance of £1.019m remaining, and Members were advised that Cabinet had agreed to bolster the Futures Fund by a further £1.8m from unallocated balances to replenish priority funding and support the Council's ongoing priorities for a further two years to 2023/24.

It was noted that particular pressures in the Adults remit were in terms of the costs of domiciliary packages, and the increase in the living wage, though it was stated that savings made would offset these costs, and that much work had already been undertaken.

Members entered into discussion on invest to save schemes, and the costs associated with extra homes.

RESOLVED - That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the proposed schedule of fees and charges for those services within its remit, supports the Council Tax increase of two per cent and the two per cent Adult Social Care precept for the next financial year, and endorses the Futures Fund investment of £1.8m.

29 THE COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2023

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) which outlined a proposed Council Plan, which in turn set out a vision for the Council and the key actions the Council would take to achieve that vision. It was reported that the submitted report had previously been considered by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 7 January 2020, and it had been agreed that the proposed Council Plan 2020-2023 be circulated for consultation.

In introducing the submitted report, the Managing Director stated that the Plan which set out the vision and priorities of the Council had been reviewed to reflect the vision and priorities of the new Council administration, however it continued to support the key aims of the Community Strategy – 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed' - and continued to build on the work undertaken in previous years.

RESOLVED - That Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee has no comments on the draft Council Plan 2020-23.