

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 19 January 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Durham (Chair), Boddy, Crudass, Harker, L Hughes, McEwan, Paley, Renton and Tait

APOLOGIES –

ABSENT – Councillors Bartch and Mrs D Jones

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Johnson, Curry and C L B Hughes

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources) and Shirley Wright (Democratic Manager)

ER17 INTRODUCTIONS/ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

ER18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER19 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE TO CABINET ON THE PLAN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS OF ALL OF THIS COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEES -

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Council's Scrutiny Committees which had been held to discuss the proposals contained within the draft Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2021/22 to 2024/25, which were within their remits.

Members noted that the other four Scrutiny Committees had made no comment on the proposed schedule of fees and charges for those services within their individual remits, had supported the Council Tax increase of 1.99 per cent, plus the 3.00 per cent Adult Social Care precept for the next financial year and had supported the Futures Fund continuation into 2024/25.

Each of the Scrutiny Chairs who were present at the meeting, presented and gave commentary on the outcomes of their Scrutiny Committees.

In relation to the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee, the Chair reported that following questions which had been raised at that Scrutiny Committee in relation to additional bins across the Town and the cost of fly tipping and clearance, he had subsequently received further information to advise that a ten per cent increase in bins across the Town would cost £25,000 and be a £15,00 per year service cost and also that the cost of fly tipping clearance in 2019/20 was £292,628.

The Chair of that Scrutiny Committee reported that he would forward the information he had received to all Members of the Council for information and that further information would be sought on the cost of fly tipping clearance in the three financial years previous to 2019/20 to enable a better comparison to be made and on the total

number of fines for fly tipping in 2019/20.

It was reported that the costs associated with fly tipping clearance would already be built into the MTFP.

In relation to the Children and Young People, the Chair outlined the discussion which had taken place at that Scrutiny Committee and reported that the main questions had been in relation to the yearly increase in costs for Children's Services and the reasons for that. She reported that there was an increase in the number of children coming into care and that there were currently 302 children in the care of the Local Authority which was a high number, however, discussions were taking place with other local authorities areas of best practice.

The Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee referred to the project being undertaken with Leeds City Council and the £1.2 million which was in the budget for that and, following a question by a Member, the Assistant Director Resources reported that she would update Members on the amount of funding which was remaining for that project, however it was all committed funding and was mainly for staffing costs.

There was also a discussion on investing to save and the need to look at how children in care who had been placed outside of the area for appropriate care could be brought back into the area, which would cost money and was recognised in the increase in the budget. Reference was made to two new facilities for children at Red Hall School and Rise Carr which would enable children to come back into the area for education and would reduce the burden of school transport costs

The Scrutiny Committee had also considered the implications of the no increase in spending for voluntary sector youth offending anti-social behaviour and Members were advised that funding would be received from central government in relation to activities for young people and although it was not clear how this would be rolled out in Darlington and there was an indication that the Council would be spending less there would be ways of these needs being met within communities.

In relation to the Adults Scrutiny Committee it was reported that the main area of discussion was in relation to the Reablement Unit and the reduction in funding for that service, however, the Committee were assured that the Unit was providing a good service and that the needs of those adults who required support and assistance would continue to be met.

In relation to the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, reference was made to the continued use of reserves to balance the MTFP; the reasons for that and the risk and difficulties faced by the authority because of the delay in the Fair Funding Review and it was reported that reserves were being used, however, due to a number of reasons, including creativity and growth in economic development, it had been possible to roll forward the MTFP for another year without using additional reserves and that at the end of year 4 there would continue to be approximately £3.5 million of usable reserves above the risk level.

Discussion also ensued on the level of charges and the rationale for the background to the decisions not to increase the majority of those charges, mainly due to market

conditions and, following a question at the last meeting of this Scrutiny Committee in relation to the proposal to increase the cost of a junior swim and concessions, the Chair reported that as the overall effect of the proposed increase would only result in an increase in revenue of about £4,000 he would be proposing to recommend to Cabinet not to increase those fees.

Reference was also made to the work being undertaken in relation to climate change and it was highlighted that although there was a lot of work being undertaken, there was limited reference to it within the minutes and the MTFP, as well as limited reference to the Health, wealth and happiness agenda. Officers confirmed that funding for climate change would be included within the MTFP going forward.

Further discussion also took place on the proposals within the MTFP which had been proposed and agreed by Cabinet as a document for consultation; the impact different levels of increase in Council Tax would have on the budget; whether any consultation had previously been undertaken with residents on the proposed increases; and to the need, perhaps in 2021, for Cabinet to re-review its services and what residents expectations and demands from the Council might be.

RESOLVED – That Cabinet be advised that, having considered the proposed Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 and all of this Council's Scrutiny Committees comments and decisions thereon :-

(a) the majority view of this Scrutiny Committee is to :-

- (i) support the proposed Council Tax increase of 1.99 per cent for the next financial year, plus the three per cent adult social care precept to fund social care for 2021/22;
- (ii) with the exception of the proposed increase in the level of fees for Junior swimming and concessions which this Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet should remain the same, support the proposed fees and charges; and
- (iii) support the continuation of the Futures Fund into 2024/25; and

(b) the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee is to :-

- (i) support the proposed Council Tax increase of 1.99 per cent for the next financial year, plus the three per cent adult social care precept to fund social care for 2021/22, however, in doing so, requests Cabinet to note that this increase of nearly five per cent is necessary as the Council is underfunded in Adult Social Care and not to apply this levy would have an impact on some of the most vulnerable in our community;