

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 31 August 2023

PRESENT – Councillors Baker (Chair), Dillon, Coe, Haszeldine, Henderson, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillors Durham and Marshall,

ABSENT – Councillors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Michael Conway (Mayoral and Democratic Officer), Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing) and Lee Downey (Complaints and Information Governance Manager)

ER54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER55 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 29 June 2023 be taken as read and approved as an accurate record

ER56 CUSTOMER SERVICES DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Presentation delivered by the Assistant Director Housing and Revenues and the Head of Housing updating members on the Customer Services and Digital Strategy Review 2023

Details were provided of current customer engagement procedures and options available to the public and the current vision covering the use of digital technology to help deliver a more effective service.

Statistics and graphs were provided to visualise the various aspects of the strategy and its impact thus far and the current roadmap for the next twelve months which included the introduction of online chat features and continual upgrades to the Council website.

The positive work and progress that has been made was noted by members and discussions were held which highlighted that in-person facilities are still available for those unable to utilise online facilities, clarifying that the online chat system will be manned rather than a wholly A.I. system and being assured that increased engagement in certain areas are still manageable.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted

ER57 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24 - QUARTER 1

The Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an early forecast of the 2023/24 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be presented at 5 September Cabinet.

Members were provided with the early forecast of the 2023/24 financial position which included current over / underspends in specific departments, MTFP projections and council-wide budget information including upcoming pay increases.

A £2.5m overspend in Children's Services was highlighted alongside a £500k underspend in Adult Services and a £1.2m clawback from savings (primarily energy savings) with an overall decline of £773k on the 2023-27 MTFP.

The report was discussed, and questions were asked regarding impact on MTFP with assurances provided that officers are doing their utmost to avoid negative outcomes and make positive adjustments. Further questions included ways in which extra income could be brought into the Council, the Assistant Director Resources informing members that he is willing to hear any suggestions or invest-to-save opportunities members may have going forward.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER58 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INVESTMENT FUND - UPDATE

Assistant Director Resources provided an update on progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund to be presented at 5 September Cabinet

Details provided including a summary of the purpose of the Investment Fund which has been used to fund 15 schemes in total, projected returns from current ventures and progress reports on joint ventures.

Questions included information on the rate of return on current investments taking into account inflationary concerns. Further discussion was held on the scope for the fund being used to develop office-space in the town for outside companies for which Economic Growth are looking into with a mind that any investments must stack up against returns and fit current criteria.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

ER59 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 1 2023/24

Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects presented the report which is to be presented at 5 September Council.

Members considered the report which provides information on the delivery of the Council's capital programme and a summary of current construction projects and were pleased to be informed that the majority of projects are running to time and as projected.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

ER60 WORK PROGRAMME

It was proposed that the Housing Service Climate Change Strategy be moved to the 4 January meeting which met no objections.

RESOVLED – That the work programme be updated to reflect proposals at this meeting.

ER61 SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS

Complaints Made to Local Ombudsman

The Complaints & Information Governance Manager attended to provide members with an update of the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) to be presented 5 September Cabinet

Members received an explanation of the report and its purpose to provide insight into services with 21 complaints registered for Darlington Borough Council. A summary of each case was provided, and members were pleased that 100% of recommendations have been implemented with a satisfactory remedy.

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2022 / 2023

We received the report of the Complaints & Information Governance Manager providing annual reports of Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health to be presented at 5 September Cabinet.

Members considered the reports and information was provided on comparison with previous years' statistics.

Members stated that the reports provided a valuable insight.

RESOLVED – That members considered and discussed the above reports.