

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 31 October 2024

PRESENT – Councillors , Coe, Baker, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall and McGill

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ray and Mrs Scott,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor McEwan

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Luke Swinhoe (Assistant Director Law and Governance), Margaret Enstone (Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER112 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER113 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

ER114 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 - QUARTER 2

The Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an early forecast of the 2024/25 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be presented at 5 November Cabinet.

Members were provided with the second revenue budget management report 2024/25 which included financial records to August and managers projections for the remainder of the year. Assumptions had been made concerning the future demand for services, in particular Social Care.

The report included the Council's projects revenue reserves position at the end of 31 March 2025 are £10.979m, £1.364m lower than the initial 2024-28 MTFP position. The position related to the £2.519m of departmental pressures and a decline of £0.166m from corporate resources, offset by £1.321m of additional balances following the 2023/24 outturn.

Members discussed the figures in the report and what the predicted outcome would be for next year. Members discussed the waste management and Housing and Revenue figures further.

Members scrutinised the overspend figures in crematoriums due to the additional running costs and reduced projected numbers of cremations, Members wanted to know if this would be reflected on the set budget for next year.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.

ER115 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 2 2024/25

The Assistant Director Highways & Capital Projects presented the report which is to be presented at 5 November Cabinet.

Members considered the report which provides information on the delivery of the Council's capital programme and a summary of current construction projects. The report included the projected outturn of the Capital Programme is £331.717m against an approved programme of £332.202m.

Members entered discussion around 156 Northgate and noted that the tender was to be issued in September, Members wanted to understand if this had been completed.

Conversation ensued around the Skinnergate demolition works, Members wanted to understand what stages had been completed so far and when the next phase was due to start.

In appendix 1, Members wanted to understand what the reasons behind the reduction of the approved budget for the Home Upgrade Grant were from £6.2m to £1.8m.

RESOLVED – That Members note the report.

ER116 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - SCHEME APPROVAL 2025-26

The Assistant Director Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided an overview to Members on the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2025-26.

The report included the key features of Darlington's CTS scheme is that working aged people can only receive a maximum of 80% support towards their Council Tax. From April 2023, care leavers under the age of 25 were made exempt from Council Tax under discretionary powers. The report stated that pensioners are protected under a national set of regulations.

The report stated that there were no other changes recommended for the 2025-26 CTS scheme however Members should have noted the following change: The amounts in Table 1 and non- dependant deductions in Table 2 were amounts applied to the 2024-25 CTS scheme and would be uprated for 2025-26. The uprated amounts would be calculated with reference to amended Prescribed Requirement regulations. The regulations would be published in January 2025 and the CTS scheme for 2025-26 with amendments before publication. Members should have also noted that any other changes to the Prescribed Requirements regulations 2025 would also be incorporated into the CTS scheme for 2025-26 before publication. The changes were for reference only and do not represent a change to the local CTS scheme.

Members entered discussion around the grants paid to local authorities to fund the CTS, but

wanted to understand what was missing when the overall amount does not meet the actual expenditure levels.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the contents of the report and approve the onward submission to Cabinet.

ER117 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the Council's net zero target. The report included that following the Council elections in 2023, the Climate Change Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040.

The report included the Councils' reduction trajectory had been amended 50% reduction every 5 years. The emissions for 2023/24 were 6,190 t/ CO₂, the emissions were made up of the energy used in Council buildings, business mileage, fleet emissions, streetlighting and signs. The carbon emissions for 2023/24 had reduced by almost 53% compared to the baseline emissions of 2010/11.

The report included the 109 actions reported at the end of 2023/24, 91 of those were on track and 5 had been completed.

Members discussed how progress had been made with regards to the Dolphin Centre but the target would likely be missed. Officers advised that a review on this had been received so there might require updating.

Conversation ensued around value for money with regards to Climate Change, Members wanted to understand further if were on track for the target, Officers explained we were halfway to achieving the target.

Members wanted to understand why there had been limited progress made on the Governance action, what were the delays upholding the Cabinet and Scrutiny reports including a Climate Change impact assessment.

Members scrutinised the E05 and E06 actions on appendix 1, how there had been limited or no progress made. Members were concerned about the potential of retrofit becoming difficult.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.

ER118 CONSTITUTION UPDATE

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with the changes to the Constitution.

The report included how the process for reviewing the constitution started in the beginning of the year, it included a few proposed amendments which were described as general housekeeping.

The updates and amendments detailed in the report, ensured the constitution will remain up to date and fit for purpose.

Members entered discussion around the rights and responsibilities of the public, that members of the public may film, record and blog meetings if it does not disrupt the meeting. Members discussed that whoever is recorded would know where the film had been uploaded too and that posters would be put up to declare that the meeting would be recorded.

Members entered conversation around all councillors would be required to have a basic Disclosure and Barring Check, if Members already had an Enhanced DBS check you cannot acquire a basic one.

Members touched on if during the recordings of committees, the public should have occupiers' insurance in place for the filming equipment.

Members discussed deadlines for committees, that the Planning Applications Committee should have a forward plan, so that the public and other Members know when an item is attending a meeting.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.

ER119 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

Members discussed the Economic Strategy further and what this report would entail and that if Members require more detail to specific Fees and Charges when the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) attends in a future meeting, to let officers know beforehand.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.