

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 June 2025

PRESENT – Councillors , Coe, Dillon, Durham, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baker, Haszeldine and McEwan,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Resources)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER152 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER153 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 3 APRIL 2025

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 April 2025 be approved as a correct record.

ER154 TO CONSIDER THE DATES AND TIMES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/2026

RESOLVED – It was agreed that for the Municipal Year 2025/26, meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held at 10.00 a.m. on the dates agreed in the Calendar of Meetings.

ER155 COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND RENT 2024-25

The Assistant Director of Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 and consider the write-off debts over £1,000 that are irrecoverable before approval by Cabinet on the 8 July 2025.

The report explained that the Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 had continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, the report explained that despite the challenges a total of £143.45m had been collected for 2024-25, £79.19m of Council Tax, £33.78m of Business Rates and £30.48m of Council rents.

The report stated that approval is to be sought to write-off a total of £1,226,320 of debts in respect to individual cases exceeding £1,000 for the financial year 2024-25. The report explained that it had become apparent that no further steps can be taken to recover the following sums, £386,385 of Council Tax, £331,368 of Business Rates, £174,791 of former Council tenant arrears, £86,253 of Housing Benefit overpayments, £247,523 of sundry debts.

Members asked what the percentages would be for what we did and did not collect and how

the statistics for Darlington Borough Council compare to other authorities.

Conversation ensued around how the Council differentiates individuals who can pay but will not and individuals who can not afford to pay. Members asked if the council has a good working relationship with Citizens Advice.

Members asked if it would be possible to look into the sundry debts further when the report next attends the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED - That Members noted the report and the forward submission to Cabinet.

ER156 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - OUTTURN 2024/25

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance and the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position in relation to the delivery of the Council's Capital Programme, the financial outturn positions as 31 March 2025 and the proposed financing of the 2024/25 capital expenditure, together with an update on the current status of all construction projects being undertaken by the Council.

It was reported that there had been significant enhancements made to the Council's assets in three major programme areas of schools, housing and transport which used mainly external funding as well as several other largescale schemes in the Borough. The investments delivered a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and most importantly to Council services. This included refurbishments of Council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel.

The report detailed the total capital expenditure for 2024/25 was £51.712m. The report also included that the Council currently had 22 live projects with an overall project outturn value of £132.748m. Most projects have been running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Discussion ensued around the Skinnergate project, Members wanted to know the current status of the project and if there had been any impacts to businesses on Skinnergate.

Conversation then moved onto Hopetown project and Members asked for further information on the legal advice that had been sought around the areas of dispute. Members also asked for clarification around the overspend budget position.

Members questioned the increase of unsupported borrowing from last year to this year and the reason behind this. Other queries Members raised were in relation to the Home Upgrade Grants and the Revenue contribution into the Capital Expenditure.

RESOLVED – That the report be approved.

ER157 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2024/25

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated), which was being considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 8th July 2025, requesting Members to consider the 2024/25 revenue outturn.

It was reported that the Councils General Fund reserves position at the 31 March 2025 is £12.607m, which is an increase of £0.264m on the planned balances in the 2024-28 MTFP. This improvement related to the £1.321m underspend in the Councils 2023/24 financial results, £0.777m projected departmental overspends in the 2024/25 financial year and a £0.280m decrease in corporate resources. The report included a number of carry forward requests which will assist with projected slippage and pressures in the coming year.

Discussion ensued around the savings in relation to staffing in social care, members asked for further information behind this. Members asked for the overall running costs for the Hopetown Project and whether Hopetown has its own accounts.

RESOLVED - That Members be approved.

ER158 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme for this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

Various items were previously added to the work programme through the Annual Briefing of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee which took place on the 28th May 2025.

Members also discussed items such as Procurement and the Nature Restoration Plan to be added to the Work Programme for the next Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be approved.