

COUNCIL

30 September 2021

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2021/22

2. We received the quarter 1 information in relation to the capital resource and commitment position of the Council's capital programme. The Council Project Position Statement currently has 45 live projects being managed with an overall projected outturn value of £134.570 million.
3. The majority of the Council's projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations and, following questions by Members, we were reassured that regular monitoring was being undertaken given the current pressures on resources and materials in the construction sector nationally.
4. We have also received a presentation on the Council's new electronic capital project reporting system Project in a Box, which is currently being rolled out and which will provide improved monitoring information in the future, including information showing any financial adjustments throughout the project against the original approved budget.

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2020/21

5. We considered the Annual report which was also considered by Cabinet in relation to the number of complaints, compliments and comments which had been received by the Authority during 2020/21.
6. The Council constantly strives to ensure an organisational structure in which complaints and accepted, owned and resolved as quickly as possible and one in which learning from complaints is used to improve services. There is also a statutory requirement for the Council to produce annual reports in respect of representations received under the Adult Social Care, the Children's Social Care and the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedures.
7. We were advised that, during 2020/21, 628 complaints had been received, a decrease from the previous year, 309 compliments had been received, again an increase from the previous year and that there had been an increase in the number of comments which had been received from 168 to 178.
8. It is important for the Authority to analyse the complaints to determine whether there are any concerns in any particular areas and we were given some examples of where organisational learning resulting from complaints had been implemented.

9. We were advised that at the beginning of the pandemic, a decision had been taken not to prioritise complaints to enable staff focus to be targeted on protecting the most vulnerable and work is now being undertaken to clear the backlog of complaints that have arisen as a result of that, with the focus being on those complaints which had gone beyond the six month timescale.

Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman

10. We have also considered a report which was considered by Cabinet outlining the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) during 2020/21, together with the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2021, which contains information on the Council's performance in relation to complaints.
11. During the period 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, eleven cases were the subject of decision by the LGSCO, one case was the subject of decision by the HO.
12. We have asked that future reports include the historic position in relation to the number of maladministration injustice decisions over the previous five years for comparative purposes.

Investment Fund Update

13. Scrutiny considered a report again which was considered by Cabinet in relation to the progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.
14. The Investment Fund was established by the Council in November 2016 for the Council to use for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the returns on investments. The original investment was increased to £50 million in November 2018.
15. We were advised that the £50 million was being used as envisaged to include Joint Venture (JV) vehicles and economic regeneration initiatives, with returns on the JV's anticipated to be over £6 million. Two of the JV schemes (Eastbourne and Heighington) have now been completed and the investment fund fully repaid to the Council.
16. Once the life of an investment comes to an end and is repaid the funds are recycled back into the fund for further utilisation, subject to a full detailed business case and approval by Cabinet.
17. We particularly discussed the funding given to Markets Asset Management (MAM) and the current position in relation to the return on that investment and the continuous and regular monitoring which was taking place to ensure that the funding was being utilised for the three separate refurbishment phases to undertake improvements to the indoor market.
18. The agreed investment fund has a commitment against it of £37.64 million, leaving a balance of £12.36 million uncommitted and Officers are actively looking at schemes which could be agreed, subject to approval, to utilise the fund to for wider economic benefits.

Work Programme

19. We have considered the annual work programme report and will be looking at establishing a task and finish review to look at the spend across the Strengthening Families Programme and will be involved with a joint piece of work being undertaken by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to look at what services and funding were allocated to children's services by the Tees Valley.

20. We have also requested that information on the footfall figures in the Town Centre be provided to us and whether this information could be obtained for the Indoor market. Officers are going to respond to us on this

Councillor Mike Renton
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee