

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 2 September 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Renton (Chair), Boddy, Crudass, Harker, McEwan and Wright

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bartch, L Hughes and Paley

ABSENT – Councillor Mrs D Jones

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Lee Downey (Complaints and Information Governance Manager), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects) and Shirley Wright (Democratic Manager)

ER13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER14 MINUTES

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June and 1 July, 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

ER15 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER ONE 2021/22

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 7 September 2021 giving a summary of the latest capital resource and commitment position to inform monitoring of the affordability and funding of the Council's capital programme, together with an update on the current status of all construction projects which were currently being managed by the Council.

It was reported that the Council had a substantial annual construction programme of work which was delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically to Council services and that there were currently 45 live projects being managed with an overall projected outturn value of £134.570 million and that the majority of the Council's projects were running to time, cost and quality expectations.

Following questions by Members in relation to any additional costs to projects following delays due to the pandemic, it was reported that regular monitoring was being undertaken given the current pressures on resources and materials in the construction sector nationally to ensure that any cost increases had been forecasted and that the Council's new electronic capital project reporting system Project in a Box would enable information to be provided

showing any financial adjustments throughout the project against the original approved budget..

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee has no further comments to make on the submitted report.

ER16 COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2020/21

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 7 September 2021 in relation to the 2020/21 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports (also previously circulated)

It was reported that the Council constantly strived to ensure an organisational culture in which complaints were accepted, owned and resolved as quickly as possible and one in which learning from complaints was used to improve services. It was 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.

The submitted report set out the number of complaints, compliments and comments which had been received during 2020/21 and it was reported that 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. Information giving some examples of organisational learning resulting from complaints was also included in the submitted report.

Particular reference was made to the recommendation set out in the Adult Social Care and Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual report that work should now be undertaken to clear the backlog of complaints that had arisen during the early part of the pandemic following the decision, by the Assistant Director Law and Governance, not to prioritise complaints during that time to enable staff focus to be targeted on protecting the most vulnerable and Officers reported that this work was now being undertaken with the focus being on those complaints which had gone beyond the six month timescale.

Discussion also ensued on the publicity and notification undertaken at the time to ensure that complainants were aware of that delay and the reasons for it; and the response of the public to that decision to delay consideration of their complaints and whether that had compounded the number of complaints which had been received.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee has no further comments to make on the submitted report.

ER17 REVIEW OF OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS MADE TO OMBUDSMAN

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated together with a report (also previously circulated) which was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 7 September 2021 in relation to the outcome of complaints which had been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing

Ombudsman (HO).

It was reported that during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2021, eleven cases had been the subject of decision by the LGSCO and one case had been the subject of the HO.

Further details of the cases and outcomes were included in the submitted report and Members requested that future reports include the historic position in relation to the number of maladministration injustice decisions over the previous five years to enable comparative information to be considered.

The LGSCO's Annual Review Letter which contained information on the Council's performance in relation to complaints was also contained within the submitted report.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee has no further comments to make on the submitted report.

ER18 INVESTMENT FUND UPDATE

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 7 September, 2021 outlining the progress against the agreed investments which were being funded through the Investment Fund.

It was reported that the Investment Fund had been established by the Council in November 2016 to use for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the returns on investments and that the total amount of the Fund had been increased in 2018 to £50 million.

The submitted report outlined the background to the establishment of the Fund and it was reported that the funding 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.

Following questions by Members, it was reported that two of the JV schemes (Eastbourne and Heighington) had now been completed and that the investment fund fully repaid to the Council. Particular reference was also made to the funding given to Markets Asset Management and to the current position in relation to the repayment of that funding 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.

The Assistant Director Resources reported that the agreed investment Fund had a commitment against it of £37.64 million, leaving a balance of £12.36 million uncommitted and that Officers were actively looking at schemes which could be agreed, subject to approval, to utilise the fund for wider economic benefits.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny has no further comments to make on the submitted report.

ER19 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that further consideration be given to the work programme of this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

It was reported that a Task and Finish Review Group was to be established to look at the spend across the Strengthening Families Programme and that a joint piece of work was to be undertaken with the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee into what services and funding were allocated to children's services by the Tees Valley.

It was also requested that further information be supplied to Members in relation to the footfall figures in the Town Centre and to whether this information could be obtained for the indoor market to enable its success to be monitored.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That nominations be sought from Members of this Scrutiny Committee to participate in the Strengthening Families Programme Task and Finish Review and that Councillor Crudass be requested to prepare a draft Terms of Reference for consideration.

(c) That the Chair and Councillor Crudass be requested to prepare a draft Terms of Reference for the joint piece of work with Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee into the funding allocation to Children's Services from the Tees Valley.

(d) That further information be forwarded to Members of this Scrutiny Committee on the Town Centre footfall figures following the relocation of the counters and that the Assistant Director Economic Growth be requested to contact Market Asset Management to ascertain if footfall counters are available at the entrances to the Indoor Market to monitor footfall.