

COUNCIL
1 FEBRUARY 2022

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Bank Top Masterplan

2. Scrutiny welcomed a PowerPoint presentation from the Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects updating Members on the Bank Top Masterplan.
3. Members were advised of the project objectives to transform Darlington Train Station into a modern transport hub; to provide more frequent and faster local and national services and futureproof the station for future services; and to support and enhance the wider Darlington Regeneration initiatives.
4. We were provided with details of the key component parts of the project and the key features of Station East, Darlington Station and the Transport Interchange – Victoria Road. We were also informed of the delivery timescales.
5. The presentation provided Members with a number of graphics, including the station entrance, multi-storey car park and interchange. We also noted the details of the latest position of the project.
6. Scrutiny entered into a discussion on the toilet and changing facilities for the new station, the availability of bicycle parking, and following a question on the anticipated impact of timetable changes, we were advised that a net overall increase in footfall was predicted, with faster services and an increased number of trains per hour able to be accommodated, which would assist in futureproofing the station for future services.

Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2021/2022

7. We have received the information on the Quarter 2 performance against those key performance indicators for 2021/22 which are within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee.
8. Members noted that of the 25 indicators which are reported six monthly at quarter 2, seven are showing performance better than the same period in the previous year; one indicator is showing performance the same; four indicators are showing performance not as good as the same period in the previous year; and five indicators do not have comparative information from last year due to Coronavirus restrictions.
9. We discussed in particular fly tipping and the need for improved monitoring via cameras. Members were assured that whilst there are some resource constraints, a significant amount of work is being done to tackle fly tipping, this includes the use of covert and overt

cameras and the Back Lanes Project. Reference was made to the My Darlington App which can be used by residents to report fly tipping.

Work Programme 2021/22

10. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.
11. A request was received from a Member of Scrutiny that an item on the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis be included in the work programme. It was agreed that a Quad of Aims be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee for Members consideration.

Medium Term Financial Plan

12. As with all Scrutiny Committees, we have had the opportunity to respond to Cabinet, via the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, on the proposals in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2022/23.
13. We were provided with an update on the finance settlement which had been received subsequent to the draft MTFP. We were advised that the Council Tax and Precept levels remained as expected at 2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively; that the £1.5B additional funding announced in the Autumn Statement had been split into £822M Services Grant and £636M Social Care Grant and the Council would be receiving £1.579M from the Services Grant and £1.162M from the Social Care Grant, which was higher than the estimate included within the draft MTFP. We also noted that the Services Grant was a one-off payment whilst a further review of Local Government funding was conducted.
14. Members were also advised that the New Homes Bonus had been extended for a further year, and that this would net a further £1.4M above anticipated levels. We noted that there were also a number of deductions from initial draft figures, however overall there would be an additional £1.073M funding for 2022/23.
15. We discussed the provision for increasing staffing levels on the ground; the Futures Fund and impacts of this being mainstreamed into the budget from 2025/26 onwards; the anticipated allocation of the additional £1.073M from the settlement; and Members sought clarification in respect of the allocation of the £310M that the Tees Valley Combined Authority had been allocated from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.

Stronger Communities Fund

16. The Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder provided Members with an update on the spend to date against the Stronger Communities Fund and we gave consideration to continuation of the pilot scheme into the next financial year.
17. We were informed that the £1K should be spent before the end of the financial year and that any funding not spent by Members may be carried forward to the next financial year however Members individual budget would remain at £1K, should the scheme continue.

18. We provided feedback on the process which included clarity regarding deadlines and timescales and Members acknowledged the Credit Union and Democratic Services for their support with the process.
19. We discussed the possibility of training for Members to identify and access other funding opportunities to help local projects and community groups and were informed by the Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder that discussions were ongoing to identify how the Council could support not only Members but residents to access funding opportunities. Members suggested that an All Member briefing be arranged to help Councillors identify and access support for local communities.
20. Members of this Scrutiny Committee support the continuation of the scheme in the 2022/23 financial year.

Councillor Steven Tait
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee