

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 2023

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.

Customer Service Digital Strategy Update

2. We welcomed a presentation from the Assistant Director Housing and Revenues and the Head of Housing updating members on the Customer Services and Digital Strategy Review 2023
3. We were provided with details of current customer engagement procedures and options available to the public and the current vision covering the use of digital technology to help deliver a more effective service.
4. Statistics and graphs were provided to visualise the various aspects of the strategy and its impact thus far and the current roadmap for the next twelve months which included the introduction of online chat features and continual upgrades to the Council website.
5. We noted the positive work and progress that has been made and discussions were held which highlighted our appreciation that in-person facilities are still available for those unable to utilise online facilities, clarifying that the online chat system will be manned rather than a wholly A.I. system and being assured that increased engagement in certain areas are still manageable.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Quarter 1

6. We received a report from the Assistant Director Resources providing an early forecast of the 2023/24 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process, which was presented at 5 September Cabinet.
7. Members were provided with the early forecast of the 2023/24 financial position which included current projected over / underspends in departments, changes to budgets since the MTFP was approved and council-wide budget information, including the current pay offer.
8. Specific points of note were the £2.885m projected overspend in Children's Services, a £0.477m projected underspend in Adult Services and £1.2m resource returned to reserves (primarily from energy savings) with an overall decline of £0.773m on the 2023-27 MTFP.
9. We discussed the report and questions were asked regarding the impact on MTFP and ways in which extra income could be brought into the Council.

Annual Review of the Investment Fund

10. The Assistant Director Resources provided us with an update on progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund which was presented at 5 September Cabinet
11. Members were provided with details including a summary of the purpose of the Investment Fund which has been used to fund 15 schemes in total, progress reports from current funded schemes and projected returns on joint ventures.
12. Questions were fielded from Members which included information on the rate of return on current investments considering inflationary concerns. Further discussion was held on the scope for the fund being used to develop office space in the town for outside companies. Economic Growth are looking into this option, but any investments must be financially viable and fit the fund criteria.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2023/24

13. We welcomed the Assistant Director Highways & Capital Projects who presented the report which was presented at 5 September Cabinet.
14. Members considered the report which provides information on the delivery of the Council's capital programme and a summary of current construction projects and were pleased to be informed that the majority of projects are running to time and as projected.

Complaints Made to Local Ombudsman

15. The Complaints & Information Governance Manager attended to provide members with an update of the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) which was presented at 5 September Cabinet
16. Members received an explanation of the report and its purpose to provide insight into services with 21 complaints registered for Darlington Borough Council. A summary of each case was provided, and members were pleased that 100% of recommendations have been implemented with a satisfactory remedy.

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2022 / 2023

17. We received the report of the Complaints & Information Governance Manager providing annual reports of Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health which was presented at 5 September Cabinet.
18. Members considered the reports and information was provided on comparison with previous years' statistics.
19. Members stated that the reports provided a valuable insight.

Work Programme

20. The following alterations were suggested and confirmed for the Work Programme:

- (a) Housing Service and Climate Change Strategy – To be presented at 4 January meeting
- (b) Assistant Director Economic Growth to provide updates on Economic Strategy, Office Demand Study and Economic Impact of DEC – 2 November meeting

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee