

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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.

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25-2027/28**

2. The Committee received a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28 and give any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.
3. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation. Members were informed that a special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, would consider the view of all Scrutiny Committees. We were informed that that Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.
4. Members also explored the reasons around the reduction in income from the services provided by the crematorium and sought clarification on the overall year-on-year savings within the MTFP.
5. There was a discussion around the costs relating to the provision of the Council's statutory and non-statutory services. Members question's explored whether there were any further savings to be achieved in terms of how the Council provided its statutory functions.
6. The Committee recognised the need for further savings to be made in 2025/26, and urged Officers to start the process of identifying savings as early as possible, to allow time for meaningful consultations to take place. Members received assurances that the process of identifying savings was an ongoing piece of work throughout the year and that relevant papers would be brought to the Committee when they were available.
7. The associated costs of applying for additional funding was also highlighted, and balanced alongside the costs associated with any failed bids for grants or funding.

**2025 Celebrations**

8. The Bicentennial Festival Director provided the Committee with a presentation on the plans in place for the 2025 events which will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The presentation covered the aims of the festival ('S&DR200'), which included aims on developing both national and international partnerships, a focus on a youth driven approach, and a celebration of community achievements.

9. The Festival Director informed Members that there would be a number of workshops and programmes that would target cultural and heritage enthusiasts, families, multi-generational groups and otherwise hard to reach socio-economic groups. Members were informed that there would be a substantial education and learning programme.
10. It was pleasing to note that there was already interest in the Festival in Germany, France, the USA, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.
11. We heard that S&DR200 would be a nine-month celebratory festival, from March 2025 to November 2025, and that there would also be activity throughout 2024 in the lead up to the festival period. We were pleased to learn that the festival would include experiences utilising museums and libraries in Darlington and that there would be a three-day celebration in September 2025 around the inaugural journey.

### **Heritage Action Zone**

12. The Heritage Action Zone Project Manager provided the Committee with a presentation on the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Members were advised that Heritage Action Zones were historic places that had the potential to become focal points for regeneration, areas with untapped potential, rich in industrial, rural, cultural or faith heritage, or areas that may be undervalued and underused, or under significant pressure.
13. The Committee was informed of the aims of the S&DR Heritage Action Zone 2018-2023, with the progress against the agreed programme outputs developed in 2018 being reported on. The progress made against the overarching HAZ programme was also highlighted. It was pleasing to see the amount of work that had been undertaken.
14. The Committee entered into discussion on the work that could be undertaken to protect the Arnold Road bridge and we were keen to learn more around how the promotion of Hopetown would be woven into the communications for the S&DR200 Festival. We were also keen to ensure that there was sufficient funding available to cover the S&DR200 Festival and related activity.
15. Members held an interesting discussion around the future intentions in relation to linking the entire length of the original S&DR line, however, were disappointed to note two key gaps for which funding has yet to be secured.

### **Performance Indicators Quarter 2 – 2023/24**

16. The Committee welcomed a report which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2023/24, as at the end of September 2023 (Quarter 2). As Members will be aware, performance information is provided in line with an indicator set and Scrutiny Committee distribution agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. This Committee receive 35 indicators, of which 25 are reported six monthly.
17. 24 of the 25 indicators reported had Quarter 2 data which could be compared with Quarter 2 data from 2022/23. We were informed that when taking into consideration what is best performance for each indicator 12 of the 24 indicators had increased when

compared to the same period as last year, and 12 of the 24 indicators had decreased when compared to the same period as last year.

18. Members entered into discussion on the income streams for Hullabaloo theatre and the challenge around using the space following the Covid pandemic. Members were informed that it was anticipated that the theatre space would be utilised more over the upcoming 12 month period.
19. Clarification was sought in relation to the Street Champions performance indicators, as the indicator shows number of Street Champions who were signed up to the scheme not those who were regularly active within their communities.
20. The Committee also examined the response times in relation to fly-tipping. Members were informed that and the services and resources required to meet the additional housing developments in the Borough.
21. A useful discussion was also held around the value of the Performance Indicators used, and whether there was any value in refreshing the Performance Indicators submitted to this Scrutiny Committee.

### **Stronger Communities Fund**

22. A report was submitted which presented Members with information on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund to date, and invited the Committee to give consideration as to whether the scheme should continue in the following financial year.
23. It was noted that the fund enabled Councillors to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities.
24. The report set out the spend against the £50,000, to date, together with information on what has been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis. It was noted that all of the funding must be given to the grant recipient by 31 March 2024, and that some Members had not yet allocated the full amount of available funding.
25. The Committee held a positive discussion on the merits of the Fund and how best that the scheme could be utilised to ensure that it provided the greatest impact for residents within the restraints of the proposed MTFP.
26. Members explored options around the allocation of one central fund compared to the existing format where each Councillor was allocated a grant to support individuals and groups, or enhance local areas to the benefit of the local community.

**Councillor James McGill**  
**Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee**