

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

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.

Darlington Towns Fund

2. We welcomed the Town's Fund Programme Manager who provided a report to update us with the progress and the current position of the Town's Fund Programme within Darlington.
3. We were informed that the submission of the Town Investment Plan to Government in July 2020 secured a £22.3M Town Deal allocation in October 2020 with another £1M Forward Funding has provided a total £23.3M capital and revenue Towns Fund for Darlington. Victoria Road, Northgate Gateways, and the Town Centre were the three key areas of focus.
4. It was highlighted that to date the Council had received £18,851,251 Capital Funding from the Government towards projects to revitalise and improve the town, along with £438,965 revenue to fund programme development. It was also mentioned that the remainder of the fund will be provided within 2024/25.
5. We were informed of the fundings notable success to date; T-Levels facility, Skinnergate and The Yards, Hopetown visitor attraction in Northgate, the acquisition of properties and land to enable further intervention projects including the Northern Echo Building, 156 Northgate, the land at Garden Street and a property forming part of the historic Edward Pease House in Northgate.
6. It was highlighted that the Towns Board will continue to review and manage the Towns Fund projects, as part of the budget statement in March 2024, it was announced that Darlington would be included in the second tranche of places to benefit from funding, from the Long-Term Plan for Towns. We were informed that the fund was aimed at developing interventions which are initiated through grass roots involvement and focussed on projects driven by the community.
7. We were informed that £20m allocation is to be spent over a 10- year period, 25% revenue and 75% capital. The three main themes are High Street and Town Centre, Local Connectivity, Safety and Security.
8. Members discussed the funding around the properties in Northgate including Northgate House and Edward Pease House. Members scrutinised the timescale on purchasing the Northgate Property and what position the Council is in for an offer to be accepted. Members wanted to understand the difference between the valuation price of the building and the asking price from the current owners.

9. Discussion ensued around the concerns for the Northgate area with regard to the new Hopetown attraction, members wanted to understand the Town Boards input on this. We discussed the Long-term plan for the Towns Fund and how much is left to spend over this financial year and the deadline for this.
10. We noted the update on the Towns Fund.

Council Plan

11. We received the draft Council Plan to consider the long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities of the Council to deliver over the next three years, the strategic direction to the Council, Council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery. We were also informed that the draft plan would give clarity to residents, businesses, and stakeholders on the Councils values, what is important and what they will do.
12. We were notified that the draft plan has been opened for consultation until the 25 April, to seek views from residents, businesses, charities and key stakeholders. Once finalised the plan will go to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption.
13. We were advised of the draft Council Plan three core values, addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient and effective use of resources. We were informed of the six priorities which show equal importance: Economy, Homes, Living Well, Children and Young People, Communities and Environment.
14. The political accountability was stated for the priorities and core values for the draft plan, how it will be collaborative with a Cabinet Member leading each priority, core values and working with relevant portfolio leads to deliver.
15. Councillor Mandy Porter explained the priorities regarding the Economy and Resources areas, this included the Medium-Term Financial Plan, Governance Practices, Capital Projects, Employees, Key sites in Businesses and Investments and Digital Assets.
16. Members wanted to know how many responses had been received from the public, officers explained there has been 161 responses yet and how this is an improvement compared to previous consultations.
17. Members mentioned how the draft Council Plan would solve the current problems and how they would be addressed going forward. Members wanted to understand if the draft plan is included in the current budget.
18. Members expressed the appreciation around the core values of the draft Council Plan, they also expressed the concerns around the wording and format of the plan.
19. Members wanted to understand the impact of the draft Council Plan would have on Climate Change, and how the draft plan would tackle this issue.
20. We noted the draft Council Plan and will share with networks to encourage people to complete the survey.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee