

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 April 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Baker (Chair), Coe, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ray

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Porter

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Andrew Perkin (Business Growth and Investment Manager), Christopher Mains (Towns Fund Programme Manager), Lynne Davies (Strategy and Policy Manager), Michael Conway (Mayoral and Democratic Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER90 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER91 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 1 February 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of 1 February 2024 of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be approved as a correct record.

ER92 DARLINGTON TOWNS FUND

The Town's Fund Programme Manager submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the progress and current position of the Town's Fund Programme within Darlington.

The report detailed the submission of the Town Investment Plan to Government in July 2020 which 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.

The report included 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. The remainder of the fund will be provided within 2024/25.

Members were informed of the fundings notable successes 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.

The report stated 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. The fund was aimed at developing interventions which are initiated through grass roots involvement and focussed on projects driven by the community.

The report covered the £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.

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 evaluation price of the building and the asking price from the current owners.

Members expressed their concerns for the Northgate area, with regard to the new Hopetown attraction and wanted to understand the Towns Boards input on this.

Members asked about the long-term plan for the Towns Fund, how much is left to spend over this financial year and the deadline for this.

RESOLVED: Members noted the update of information provided in relation to the Towns Fund.

ER93 COUNCIL PLAN

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to introduce the draft Council Plan to the Committee.

The Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities of the Council to deliver over the next three years.

The submitted draft plan stated strategic direction to the Council, Council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery. The draft plan gave clarity to residents, businesses, and stakeholders on the Councils values and what is important and what they will do.

The public consultation for the draft plan has been opened and will run till the 25 April. The plan stated that the Council was seeking views from residents, businesses, charities, and key stakeholders. The Council Plan once finalised goes to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption.

The draft Council Plan expressed three core values which fed into the plan: addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient an effective us of resources.

The six priorities of the draft Council Plan show equal importance: Economy, Homes, Living Well, Children and Young People, Communities and Environment.

The report stated the political accountability for the priorities and core values for the draft plan, how it will be collaborative with a Cabinet Member leading each priority, core value and working with relevant portfolio leads to deliver.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and shared with networks to encourage people to complete the survey.

ER94 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme for this Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that the work programme for the next Municipal Year would be considered at the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 27 June 2024.

Members discussed the procurement process and which scrutiny committee that it would come under, it was also agreed that the office demand study item be brought to the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.