

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 5 September 2024

PRESENT – Councillors , Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baker, Dillon and Coe,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Porter

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER103 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER104 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 27 JUNE 2024

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 27 June 2024 be approved as a correct record.

ER105 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 4 2023/24

The Assistant Director Community Services, Assistant Director Economic Growth, Assistant Director Law and Governance, Assistant Director Housing and Revenues, and Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 4 2023/24.

It was reported that of the 22 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 18 were reported six monthly.

The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 22 indicators, of which 15 had increased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported, whilst 7 had decreased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported.

Members wanted to understand why the footfall numbers in the Town Centre have decreased and what plans are in place to help improve this. Conversation ensued onto whether any work had been done around understanding where the public spend their time after purchasing a parking ticket.

Members discussed the sickness improvement and asked whether there was any correlation between sickness and agile working. Discussion was carried out around the average income levels for Darlington and how we compare with the North East.

Members wanted to congratulate the Housing Team for their efforts and hoped that the work continues as it is.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.

ER106 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 - QUARTER 1

The Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an early forecast of the 2024/25 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be presented at 10 September Cabinet.

Members were provided with the early forecast of the 2024/25 financial position which included current over / underspends in specific departments, MTFP projections and council-wide budget information including upcoming pay increases.

The report included the Council's projects revenue reserves at the end of 2024/25 are £10.967m, £1.376m lower than the initial 2024-28 MTFP position. The position related to the £2.542m of departmental pressures and a contribution of £0.155m from general reserves, offset by £1.321m of additional balances following the 2023/24 outturn.

Members discussed the overspend in Leisure and Cultural Services due to security costs, Members asked if the Police had any special facilities in the Town Centre to help with this issue. Members discussed reviewing this with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Members scrutinised the cemeteries and crematorium services pressures, Members wanted to understand how this could be resolved. Conversation ensued around the electricity costs for street lighting and car parks, Members asked what rate we pay under the NEPO framework and the overall utility cost changes.

The Committee discussed the MTFP (Medium-Term Financial Plan) process and if there is to be a review prior to the usual MTFP timetable. Members were advised that Officers and Cabinet Members are continuously reviewing the budget.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the report.

ER107 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INVESTMENT FUND - UPDATE

The Assistant Director Resources provided an update on progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund to be presented at 10 September Cabinet.

Details provided included, a summary of the purpose of the Investment Fund which currently has 10 funded schemes, progress updates on those schemes and projected returns from joint ventures.

Members queried whether it would be possible to quote the profits after tax rather than pre-taxation. Officers advised that due to unverified tax rates it would be appropriate to quote profits pre-tax.

RESOLVED – Members noted the report.

ER108 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 1 2024/25

The Assistant Director Highways & Capital Projects presented the report which is to be presented at 10 September Cabinet.

Members considered the report which provides information on the delivery of the Council's capital programme and a summary of current construction projects. The report included the projected outturn of the Capital Programme is £330.867m against an approved programme of £331.530m.

Members discussed the progression of demolition in Skinnergate and whether residents are kept informed. Clarification was given that the Victoria Road Façade Improvement project is a Towns Fund project to improve shop frontages and is not linked to the Darlington Station project.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER109 COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN AND THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

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) to be presented 10 September Cabinet.

Members received an explanation of the report and its purpose to provide insight into services with 28 complaints registered for Darlington Borough Council. A summary of each upheld case was provided, and the LGSCO were satisfied that the Council had successfully implemented 100% of their recommendations.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER110 COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2023 2024

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 to be presented at 10 September Cabinet.

The report included that the Council received a total of 746 complaints, 231 compliments and 77 comments during 2023/24.

Members wanted to understand the difference between Stage 1 and Stage 2.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

ER111 WORK PROGRAMME

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

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be approved.