

COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 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.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter 1

2. We received a report which provided an early forecast of the 2024/25 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be presented at 5 November Cabinet.
3. We were provided with the second revenue budget management report 2024/25 which included financial records to August and managers projections for the remainder of the year. Assumptions had been made concerning the future demand for services, in particular Social Care.
4. The report included the Council's projects revenue reserves position at the end of 31 March 2025 are £10.979m, £1.364m lower than the initial 2024-28 MTFP position. The position related to the £2.519m of departmental pressures and a decline of £0.166m from corporate resources, offset by £1.321m of additional balances following the 2023/24 outturn.
5. We discussed the figures in the report and what the predicted outcome would be for next year. Members discussed the waste management and Housing and Revenue figures further.
6. We scrutinised the overspend figures in crematoriums due to the additional running costs and reduced projected numbers of cremations, Members wanted to know if this would be reflected on the set budget for next year.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2024/25

7. We received the report which is to be presented at 5 November Cabinet.
8. We 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 £331.717m against an approved programme of £332.202m.
9. We entered discussion around 156 Northgate and noted that the tender was to be issued in September, Members wanted to understand if this had been completed.
10. Conversation ensued around the Skinnergate demolition works, we wanted to understand what stages had been completed so far and when the next phase was due to start.

11. In appendix 1, we wanted to understand what the reasons behind the reduction of the approved budget for the Home Upgrade Grant were from £6.2m to £1.8m.

Council Tax Support – Scheme Approval 2025-26

12. We received a report which provided an overview to us on the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2025-26.
13. The report included the key features of Darlington's CTS scheme which explained that working aged people can only receive a maximum of 80% support towards their Council Tax. From April 2023, care leavers under the age of 25 were made exempt from Council Tax under discretionary powers. The report stated that pensioners are protected under a national set of regulations.
14. The report stated that there were no other changes recommended for the 2025-26 CTS scheme however we should have noted the following change: The amounts in Table 1 and non- dependant deductions in Table 2 were amounts applied to the 2024-25 CTS scheme and would be uprated for 2025-26. The uprated amounts would be calculated with reference to amended Prescribed Requirement regulations. The regulations would be published in January 2025 and the CTS scheme for 2025-26 with amendments before publication. We should have also noted that any other changes to the Prescribed Requirements regulations 2025 would be incorporated into the CTS scheme for 2025-26 before publication. The changes were for reference only and do not represent a change to the local CTS scheme.
15. We entered discussion around the grants paid to local authorities to fund the CTS Scheme, but wanted to understand what was missing when the overall amount did not meet the actual expenditure levels.

Climate Change Update

16. We received a report which provided us with an update on the Council's net zero target. The report included that following the Council elections in 2023, the Climate Change Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040.
17. The report included the Councils' reduction trajectory had been amended 50% reduction every 5 years. The emissions for 2023/24 were 6,190 t/ CO₂, the emissions were made up of the energy used in Council buildings, business mileage, fleet emissions, streetlighting and signs. The carbon emissions for 2023/24 had reduced by almost 53% compared to the baseline emissions of 2010/11.
18. The report included the 109 actions reported at the end of 2023/24, 91 of those were on track and 5 had been completed.
19. We discussed how progress had been made with regards to the Dolphin Centre, but the target would likely be missed. Officers advised that a review on this had been received so this could require updating.

20. Conversation ensued around value for money with regards to Climate Change, we wanted to understand further if we were on track for the target, Officers explained we were halfway to achieving the target.
21. We wanted to understand why there had been limited progress made on the Governance action, what were the delays upholding the Cabinet and Scrutiny reports including a Climate Change impact assessment.
22. We scrutinised the E05 and E06 actions on appendix 1, how there had been limited or no progress made. Members were concerned about the potential of retrofit becoming difficult.

Constitution Update

23. We received a report which provided us with the proposed changes to the Constitution.
24. The report included details of how the process followed for reviewing the constitution and proposed amendments which were described as general housekeeping.
25. The updates and amendments detailed in the report, ensured the constitution will remain up to date and fit for purpose.
26. We entered discussion around the rights of the public to film, record and blog meetings subject to there being no disruption caused to the meeting because of this. We discussed whether the council could ask or require people filming to advise where the material obtained would be uploaded. We touched on whether the public should have insurance in place if bringing filming equipment on site to record meetings.
27. We entered conversation around all councillors having a basic Disclosure and Barring Check, as compared to an Enhanced DBS check.
28. The deadlines for committees was raised , whether a Committee such as the Planning Applications Committee should have a forward plan, so that the public and other Members can have early notice when an item is going to be considered at a meeting.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee