

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 2 January 2025

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Coe, Mrs Culley, Keir, Mahmud, M Nicholson, Snedker, Walters and Dr. Riley

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom (Cabinet Member for Local Services) and Garner (Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

CLS10 INTRODUCTIONS/ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

CLS11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS12 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report (previously circulated), which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29, and forward any views.

The submitted report stated that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 3 December 2024 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 20 January 2024, for consideration. It was reported that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 11 December 2024 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2025/26.

Members recognised that the MTFP was subject to change due to the confirmation of the Central Government Funding, further clarification was sought around the Council's estimated income for the period of this plan and whether estimates would be updated and circulated.

Discussion ensued around Adult Social Care pressures and the increased overall packages costs. Members wanted to understand whether the expenditure in Children's services would deteriorate going forward and if this would be monitored.

Members discussed the increased demand in homelessness, it was stated that Durham County Council have developed a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 to 2029. Members wanted to know whether this had been considered for Darlington Borough Council.

Members recognised that the Council would receive payment for Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging, further clarification was sought around whether this would benefit Street Scene area. It was explained that this grant funding was not included in the draft MTFP as the allocations had not been confirmed at the time of publishing.

Members requested more information in relation to the costs around the provision of the Council's statutory and non-statutory services and explored whether there were any further savings to be achieved in terms of how the Council provided its statutory functions.

Members scrutinised the additional pressures around the crematorium and whether this had been looked at to reflect in the MTFP and how frequently this is reviewed.

RESOLVED – (a) that the Scrutiny Committee accepts the Draft MTFP.

(b) That the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee is that it could not support the MTFP in its current form due to the increase of Council Tax and the choices that had been made.

(b) That the report be noted, and that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, in order to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, scheduled to be held on 20 January 2025.

CLS13 STRONGER COMMUNITY FUND

The Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with information on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund to date, and invited consideration as to whether the scheme should continue in the following financial year.

The submitted report stated that Cabinet, at its meeting held on 6 February 2024, agreed to the continuation of the Stronger Communities Fund for the 2024/25 financial year as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25. It was noted that the fund enabled Councillors to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities. Each Councillor had been allocated £1,000 with the aim of supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health

and well-being outcomes, and/or invest in environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.

The submitted report also stated that there is no provision for the Stronger Community Fund in the current MTFP proposals and that members should consider this.

The submitted 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 2025, and that some Members had not, as yet, allocated any funding.

Discussion ensued around the format of the Stronger Community Fund and how it could have been daunting for Councillors to complete the necessary paperwork. It was suggested that if an example of the paperwork could have been given it may encourage Members to utilise their funds.

Members discussed that the Stronger Community Fund had helped Councillors to understand and support their wards through the funding. Members expressed that they could see that the funding helped within their wards and would like it to continue.

RESOLVED - (a) That the current spend against the £50,000 be noted; and

(b) That the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that the view of this Committee is that the scheme should continue in the 2025/26 financial year, in its current format.