

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 January 2025

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

APOLOGIES – Councillors Henderson and Ray,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor McEwan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy) and Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Resources)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER130 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER131 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 - 2028/29 - TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE TO CABINET ON THE PLAN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS OF THIS COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: -

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of all the meetings of the Scrutiny Committees which had been held to discuss the proposals contained within the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 – 2028/29.

The Assistant Director Resources attended and outlined the process and consultation period surrounding the MTFP for which he had attended the Council's individual scrutiny committees. It was clarified that the purpose of the Special meeting was to discuss and collate the feedback as presented by Chairs of the individual committees at this meeting and to form a combined response for onward submission.

The Chairs of the individual scrutiny committees were invited to relate any feedback to this committee.

- a) The Chair of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (CLS) provided a summary of the 2 January 2025 meeting held around the MTFP. This covered the areas which members scrutinised such as the Adult Social Care pressures, if the homelessness strategy would be implemented to Darlington Borough Council, payment around the Extended Producer Responsibility. It was highlighted that the majority view of this Scrutiny Committee could support the MTFP in its current form and that the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee could not support due to the increase in Council Tax and the choices that had been made.

The Chair of this meeting opened the room to discussion and questions with regards to the CLS meeting. Members asked the relevant chair if the budget for Hopetown and food waste had been covered at the meeting.

- b) The Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee provided a summary of the 6 January 2025 meeting, and the discussion held around the MTFP. It was highlighted that Members recognised the pressures in services and gave credit for the work done to reduce costs by bringing services in-house.

The Chair of this meeting opened the room to discussion and questions with regards to the Children and Young People meeting. Members asked the relevant chair if the Childcare Sufficiency work agreed in the current budget and how many looked after children the budget accounts for had been considered at the meeting.

- c) Due to the Chair and Vice Chair been unable to attend the meeting, the Chair of this meeting covered the main comments highlighted at the Adults Scrutiny Committee. The minority view of the committee could not support the MTFP in its current form due to the proposed use of all reserves prior to the end of the proposed MTFP.
- d) The Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee provided a summary of the 8 January 2025 meeting, and the discussion held around the MTFP. It was highlighted that Members had raised concerns regarding the ability to agree the MTFP following the draft settlement, the impact of National Insurance changes, discussed in house provision against external provision and the proposed increases to car parking charges. The committee did support the MTFP in its current form.

The Chair of this meeting opened up the room to questions and comments, Members asked if the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee had a clear understanding of what the Public Health grant would be spent on and asked regarding charges to the Housing Revenue Account. It was also stated that there was a minority view of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee that they could not support the MTFP in its current form until they had received the full details of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

- e) The chair of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee provided a summary of the 9 January 2025 meeting, and the discussion held around the MTFP. It was highlighted that the majority view of this committee could support the MTFP in its current form. The minority view could not support the MTFP due to the increase in parking charges and licensing costs.

RESOLVED – That, having considered the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29 and the comments of all the Council’s Scrutiny Committees, it be recommended to Cabinet that it notes and takes into account all those comments as part of the consultation.

ii) **STRONGER COMMUNITY FUND**

The Scrutiny Committee also considered a report (previously circulated) of the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities in relation to the Stronger Communities Fund.

It was reported that the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee on 2 January 2025 had also considered the report and recommended for the continuation of the scheme

for the 2025/26 financial year and had noted the scheme's current spend against the £50,000 allocated funding.

Members commented that the fund has benefited some individuals in the community. Members entered into discussion around the effective use of funds for this purpose, noting that the fund could be more efficiently spent internally on additional council services. Members discussed that due to the council's medium-term financial position, the scheme should not be funded going forward highlighting that in the previous Medium Term Financial Plan the scheme was scheduled to run until year-end 2024/25 only. Members discussed the paperwork of the scheme and how some councillors struggle to spend the full amount.

RESOLVED – That Cabinet be advised that, having considered the continuation of the Stronger Community Fund, it should note that the majority view of this Scrutiny Committee is for this scheme not to be continued in the 2025/26 financial year.

(b) That the minority view of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee is that the Stronger Community Fund should continue into the 2025/26 financial year.