

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

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.

Consultation on a Homes Strategy for the Borough

2. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report for us to consider the Homes Strategy for the Borough which was agreed for consultation at Cabinet on 8 July 2025.
3. It was explained that the draft Homes Strategy 2025-2030 would provide a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regards to housing. The report also stated that the main focus of the strategy is to provide high quality homes across all tenures, to meet local needs and to address the borough's housing challenges. The strategy was designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of the council's approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.
4. The report stated that the strategy sets out high level vision and explained the three key objectives focused around building new homes, improving standards, meeting the needs of the ageing population and to support people to live independently. The report also included a number of associated outcomes and actions which are aimed to be achieved over the next five years.
5. We discussed the data sets that were included in the strategy, how the data collected was from 2021 and whether any new data had been collected and if there is any comparison.
6. We asked how promoting modern methods of construction will be carried out as part of the objectives for the strategy and how important affordable housing is for residents of Darlington and how do developers support this.
7. We touched on the difference between a commercial site and a brownfield site, and how many brownfield sites are left to be utilised.

Climate Change and Nature Strategy

8. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report to present the draft Climate Change and Nature Strategy to us.
9. The report explained that in May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it within the Council's existing climate change emergency. It stated the need to create wider variety of habitats in Darlington which would increase the resilience of our wildlife to Climate Change, human pressures and natural threats.

10. The report detailed how the target of a net zero Council by 2040 will remain and separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be explained to provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
11. We questioned how much nature has been lost that now needs to be restored, other queries included if swift and bat boxes could be included in developers plans and whether Darlington Borough Council would follow other local authority's reduction in climate change.

Performance Indicators Quarter 4 2024/2025

12. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, Head of Culture, Assistant Director Law and Governance, Assistant Director Housing and Revenues, and Assistant Director Resources submitted a report providing us with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 4 2024/25.
13. It was reported that of the 22 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 18 were reported six monthly.
14. The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 22 indicators, of which 11 had increased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported, whilst 10 had decreased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported.
15. We questioned the reason behind the increase in staff sickness within the Human Resources indicators

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2024/2025

16. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report to provide us with the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comment annual reports for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health.
17. The submitted report stated that in 2024/25 a total number of 747 complaints had been received, an increase from 746 in 2023/24, 219 compliments had been received, a decrease from 231 in 2023/24; and 45 comments had been received, a decrease from 77 in 2023/24.

Complaints Made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and The Housing Ombudsman Service

18. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report providing 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).
19. The submitted report set out in abbreviated form the decisions reached by the LGSCO and the HOS between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 and outlined the actions taken as a result of those complaints.

Project Position Statement and Capital Monitoring Quarter 1 2025/26

20. The Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services and Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report for us to consider the project position statement and capital programme monitoring Q1 2025/26 report.
21. The submitted report stated that the projected outturn of the current Capital Programme was £354.868m against an approved programme of £354.982m; the investment was delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and services; the programme, including commitments, remained affordable within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/2 to 2028/29; the Council had 19 live projects, with an overall projected outturn value of £131.234m, the majority of which were running to time, cost and quality expectations, but were being monitored given the current pressures on resources in the construction sector nationally; and that the projects were managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by Consultants source via an open/OJEU tender process.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26 Report Quarter 1

22. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report to provide an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.
23. The submitted report stated that it was the first revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2025/26 and that the latest projections showed an overall decline of £2.166m on the 2025/29 Medium Term Financial Plan, which was due to £3.489m of departmental pressures and a decline in corporate resources of £0.166m, offset by £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 outturn.

Investment Fund Update Report

24. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report for us to consider the progress against the agreed investments through the investment fund.
25. The submitted report stated that in November 2016 the Council established an Investment Fund to be used for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the low returns on investment; the fund provision of £50m was being utilised as envisaged facilitating wide economic benefits as well as a direct impact on the Council's financial position; the £50m fund had a commitment against it of £35.81m leaving a balance of £14.19m uncommitted; the Investment Fund had been used for 17 schemes to date, six of which had been recycled back into the fund; and that returns on JV's were anticipated to be over £8.4m.
26. We questioned if any payments had been made in relation to the Market Asset Management and what the current position was with relation to the land at Coniscliffe Road.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee