

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4 September 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Baker (Chair), Coe, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall and Ray

APOLOGIES – Councillors McGill and Mrs Scott,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor McEwan, Porter and M Nicholson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Brian Robson (Head of Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Lee Downey (Complaints and Information Governance Manager), (Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing), David Hand (Head of Plan Policy, Economy Strategy and Environment), Fiona McCall (Planning Officer), (Margaret Enstone (Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer), Lauren Gibson (Ecologist) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER159 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER160 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 26 JUNE 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 26 June 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 26 June 2025 be approved as a correct record.

ER161 CONSULTATION ON A HOMES STRATEGY FOR THE BOROUGH

The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report (previously circulated) for Members to consider the Homes Strategy for the Borough which was agreed for consultation at Cabinet on 8 July 2025.

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.

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.

Conversation ensued around the data sets included in the strategy, Members queried how the strategy is based on data sets from 2021 and whether new data has been collected and if there is any comparison.

Members asked how promoting modern methods of construction will be carried out as part of the objectives for the strategy. Discussion ensued around affordable housing and how important that is for residents of Darlington and how do developers support this.

Members touched on the difference between a commercial site and a brownfield site, and how many brownfield sites are left to be utilised.

RESOLVED – That Members considered the draft homes strategy, and any comments made will be taken as part of the consultation process.

ER162 CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE STRATEGY

The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report (previously circulated) to present the draft Climate Change and Nature Strategy to Members.

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.

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.

Members 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.

RESOLVED – That's Members approve the joint strategy.

ER163 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 4 2024/2025

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 (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 4 2024/25.

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 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.

Members questioned the reason behind the increase in staff sickness within the Human Resources indicators.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the Performance Indicators.

ER164 COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2024/25

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide members with the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comment annual reports for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health.

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.

RESOLVED – That Members note the report.

ER165 COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN AND THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) 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).

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.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

ER166 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 1 2025/26

The Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services and Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) for Members to consider the project position statement and capital programme monitoring Q1 2025/26 report.

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.

RESOLVED – That Members note the contents of the report.

ER167 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26 REPORT - QUARTER 1

The Assistant Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.

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.

RESOLVED - That Members note the contents of the report.

ER168 INVESTMENT FUND UPDATE REPORT

The Assistant Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) for Members to consider the progress against the agreed investments through the investment fund.

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.

Members 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.

RESOLVED - That Members note the contents of this report.

ER169 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 noted.