

COUNCIL
30 JANUARY 2020

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.

Children's Services – Update on Current Position

2. The Assistant Director Children's Services gave a presentation on the number of cases of the children and young people open to the Council's social services as at the end of quarter 2 2019/20.
3. At the end of quarter 2, there were 278 children looked after by the Council. This number has increased by 83 per cent between April 2006 and September 2019 and, although the numbers have now plateaued, we were advised that there was a particular spike in 2018, which was hard to attribute to any one factor. Officers continue to work to safely manage those children to leave care.
4. We were also advised of the number of children who became looked after year on year together with information on those who ceased to be looked after and, at the end of quarter 2 2019/20, more children ceased to be in care compared to the same quarter in 2018/19.
5. We looked at the areas of spend within the placement categories and discussed the need to increase the internal fostering provision.
6. We are receiving an update on a project which is being undertaken in conjunction with Leeds City Council and the DfE in January 2020.

Performance Indicators – Quarter 2 – 2019/20

7. Information has been provided on the quarter 2 performance against those key performance indicators for 2019/20 within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee.
8. There are 22 performance indicators reported within the three areas of economy and environmental health, governance and revenue collection, seventeen of which are on a six-monthly basis and five annually.
9. Each of the Officers gave us an overview of the indicators within their areas, however, we particularly highlighted CUL 080 – Town Centre footfall. From the data, despite the indications that more people are visiting Darlington, town centre footfall appears to be lower than last year. It was suggested that this could be due to issues with the accuracy and location of the current footfall counters and Officers are currently looking at purchasing an alternative system which will enable much more accurate comparisons to be made year-on-year.
10. Sickness absence is slightly higher than the same period last year, with stress remaining the highest absence reason. Proactive work is being undertaken in this area and specific work is being undertaken in relation to raising awareness of

mental health. Alongside the mental health mentors, the Authority also has 14 mental health first aiders which will provide employees with a good level of support at an early stage and hopefully prevent and reduce absence cases. We did ask that Officers look specifically at ways to ensure that males are encouraged to be more open about their mental health.

11. The mental health staff training sessions are open to Members to attend and details have been sent out.
12. In relation to Housing Benefits, the amount of housing benefit overpayments has reduced from £2.6 million in 2018/19 to £2.4 million in 2019/20, which has impacted on the amount available to recover. The majority of overpayments are due to the fact that people do not advise the authority when they have a change in circumstances. Since the introduction of Universal Credit, there are less people now claiming Housing Benefit. A training session on the implications of the introduction of Universal Credit is being arranged for Members.

Work Programme

13. We have considered and updated our work programme following the decision of Council to re-align the Scrutiny Committee remits to the Cabinet Portfolios.
14. As Members will be aware we now have the responsibility to scrutinise areas of work which are under the Economy Portfolio and we have included on our work programme a number of items which were on the Place Scrutiny Committee work programme.
15. We will continue to monitor the Children's Services budget and the work that Department is doing to manage the increasing costs of care within that area and I have asked the Chair of the Climate Change Working Group to attend a future meeting to update us on its on-going work.
16. The work programme will be reviewed and refreshed as and when required.

Councillor Scott Durham
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee