

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 19 December 2019

PRESENT – Councillors Durham (Chair), Allen, Bartch, Harker, Mrs D Jones, Keir, McEwan and Renton

APOLOGIES – Councillors K Nicholson and Paley

ABSENT – Councillor L Hughes

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Mrs Culley and Snedker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Luke Swinhoe (Assistant Director Law and Governance), Jane Kochanowski (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Anthony Sandys (Head of Housing and Revenues) and Shirley Wright (Democratic Manager)

ER19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER20 MINUTES

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2019.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

ER21 CHILDREN'S SERVICES - MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - UPDATE ON CURRENT POSITION

To help the Scrutiny Committee to better understand the current financial position of the Children's Services budget, The Assistant Director, Children's Services gave a presentation on the number of cases of children and young people open to the Council's social services at the end of quarter 2 2019/20.

It was reported that, at the end of that quarter, there were 278 children looked after by the Council and that the numbers in Darlington had increased by 83 per cent between April 2006 and September 2019, with a particular spike in 2018 which was difficult to attribute to any one particular factor.

Particular reference was made to the on-going work within Children's Services to safely manage those children to leave care together with the preventative work being undertaken; statistical benchmarking information; and the areas of spend within the various placement categories.

RESOLVED – (a) That the presentation be noted.

(b) That it be noted that a further session on the project being undertaken in

conjunction with Leeds City Council and the DfE will be held in January 2020.

(c) That, if Members wish to undertake any further work in relation to the Children's Service budget, a quad of aims be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

ER22 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 2019/20

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position in relation to the quarter 2 2019/20 performance against those performance indicators within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that, following agreement by Council on 5 December, 2019 to align the Scrutiny Committee remits to the updated Cabinet Portfolios, there were now 22 performance indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee within the three areas of Economy and Environmental Health, governance and revenue collection, seventeen of which were reported on a six-monthly basis and five annually.

Particular reference was made to the indicator in relation to Town Centre Footfall which indicated that, despite the indications that more people were visiting Darlington, the town centre footfall appeared to be lower than last year. Officers reported that this could be due to issues with the accuracy and location of the current footfall counters and that Officers were currently looking at purchasing an alternative system which would enable much more accurate comparisons to be made year-on-year.

Discussion also ensued on the sickness absence levels which were slightly higher than the same period last year, with stress remaining the highest absence reason and the current position in relation to the amount of housing benefit overpayments which had reduced from £2.6 million in 2018/19 to £2.4 million in 2019/20.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

ER23 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Committee and to give consideration to any additional areas Members felt should be added to the work programme.

It was reported that the work programme had been amended to include a number of items which had previously been on the work programme of the Place Scrutiny Committee, following the decision of Council, at its meeting held on 5 December, 2019, to include the scrutiny of the Economy Portfolio within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee. The amended version was circulated at the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.