

COUNCIL

26 March 2020 (This meeting is cancelled)

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.

Climate Change Cross Party Working Group

2. At our request, Councillor Lee, the Chair of the Cross Party Working Group on Climate Change attended our meeting to advise us of the work, to date, of the Group which, as Members will recall, was established by Council to identify ways to reduce carbon emissions and achieve a carbon neutral status for the Borough.
3. The majority of the work to date has been fact finding, however, the Group have recognised that one of the first areas to look at was the Council's operations and behavioural change and it is pleasing to report that several members of staff within the Authority have volunteered to be climate change champions to try and identify ways to reduce carbon emissions across their own work areas.
4. There is a further update elsewhere on this agenda this evening giving more detail on the work of the Group, however, as a Scrutiny Committee we are interested in receiving further information on the Council's existing vehicle fleet and replacement programme and the move to electric vehicles as part of that programme.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 3

5. We have received an update on the delivery of the Council's Capital Programme.
6. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work which is delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically to Council services. The current project position statement shows that there are currently 35 live projects currently being managed by the Council, with the majority of those projects running to time, cost and quality with no foreseeable issues.
7. Following questions by Members, Officers provided further information on the slight slippage in the drainage element of the Ingenium Park Masterplan and Infrastructure project due to ecological reasons and the removal of the through-road across the allotment site to Pondfield Close as part of the West Cemetery Project.
8. We were also advised that the new project management system 'Project in a Box' would be implemented during 2020.

Darlington Town Centre - Update

9. The Assistant Director Economic Growth gave a presentation on the Town Centre Strategy 2019-30 which aimed to create a choice of high quality town centre residential accommodation which would improve the look and feel of the Town Centre and which would contribute to housing provision, economic growth and the evening economy.
10. The presentation outlined how the Council is working with its partners to deliver positive change to the Town Centre; the challenges faced and the positives to build on and updates were given on the acquisition of the former Argos and Cash Convertors buildings in Skinnergate, the replacement of the current buildings with a residential scheme, the Council's Shop Front and Business Support Scheme, which is initially being focussed on Post House Wynd and the acquisition of land in Commercial Street, East Street and Crown Street.
11. We did discuss the current performance indicators which were being reported and we were advised that those indicators were being reviewed to enable more pertinent issues to be recorded such as shop turnover and footfall numbers when events were being held in the Town Centre. We will, as a Scrutiny Committee, continue to monitor these indicators.

Revenue Budget Monitoring – Quarter 3

12. In relation to the quarter 3 revenue budget outturn, it was reported that that the projected revenue reserves at the end of 2019/20 were £17.267 million, £0.545 million better than budget and £0.670 million higher than the quarter 2 reported position and that, of the £17.267 million, there was a risk reserve balance of £4.350 million and a commitment to use £11.212 million to support the 2019-23, leaving £1.705 million one-off funding to support the general fund moving forward.
13. The positive changes are mainly as a result of improvements in Adult Social Care, due to managing demand, increased contributions for Health partners towards the provision of joint health care packages and additional income from the Council's Joint Venture Investment returns. There has, however, been a further decline in the Children's and education budgets due to staffing requirements and school transport requirements.

Department for Education Strengthening Families Programme - Update

14. A briefing was held between our Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 10 February 2020 to receive information on a project currently being undertaken with Leeds City Council and the DfE to reduce the numbers of children coming into care, following a successful innovative project in Leeds. This work should impact positively on associated budgets.

Councillor Scott Durham
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee