

**Approved Minutes  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

13 October 2020

(10.00 am - 12.25 pm)

The meeting was held remotely and live streamed

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Chair: Cllr G A Roughead

Councillors: A Lower, G Stewart, P Earley, S Graham, M Hall, R Shatwell and L Dunn

**66 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. An update was given on the membership of the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Cllr Stephen Fairlie, previously a substitute member, is now a formal Member of the Scrutiny Committee representing Newcastle City Council, and Cllr Trevor Cessford is now a substitute Member of the Scrutiny Committee for Northumberland County Council, replacing Cllr Richard Dodds. Cllr Dodds and Cllr Glen Sanderson are now Members of the Cabinet.

Members introduced themselves.

**67 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Wright, Cllr Dungworth and Cllr Fairlie.

**68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**69 AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record and 'signed' by the Chair via email after the meeting.

In relation to minute 62, the Chair clarified that the position of Deputy Mayor at the Combined Authority was not held on a rotational basis like the Civic Chair/or Mayor in local authorities

H Kippin agreed to provided updated information in respect of a) the Covid Recovery Fund and where the funding was allocated; b) more detail on the 180 jobs referred to in the Mayoral Update and c) the £25m funding made available to the North of Tyne for housing delivery on brown field sites.

## 70 **COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PROPOSALS**

Report of the Director of Economic Growth (previously circulate and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

H Kippin introduced the report which outlined the role NTCA is playing in supporting Covid response and recovery in the region. The report was accompanied by an Appendix which sets out key facts of the recovery 'deal' that has been submitted to Government in advance of the anticipated Comprehensive Spending Review. It also briefly described the ways in which NTCA has responded to issues within the education and skills sector – which are also addressed at length within separate papers on the devolution of the Adult Education Budget and Education Improvement.

Members received a presentation covering the following points:

- **A changing covid picture**
- **An evolving economic context**
- **Ongoing risks of 'concurrence'**
- **Opportunities for positive change**

The presentation significantly addressed the recovery proposals submitted to government.

Specific actions included an economic recovery plan for the North of Tyne; supporting NE-wide plans for recovery and transport connectivity – including playing an active role in the NE-wide submission to CSR, and the development of an integrated transport connectivity plan for the region; maximising Covid response funding; bringing forward funding to address digital divide in education & vulnerable settings; augmenting national funding streams to maximise local benefit; scoping potential for NTCA investment fund support for further post-Covid adaptation and innovation.

A changing Covid picture – constant guidance to local and national regulations and the suggested government proposal to implement a 3-tier system of regulations requiring collaboration across the region.

An evolving economic context – with the end of the furlough scheme nearing the Combined Authority needs a clear understanding of the unemployment effect, understanding the degree of resources needed and matching skills to jobs.

Ongoing risks of ‘concurrency – authorities across the region are aware of and understand the risks associated with a second wave.

Opportunities for positive change – use the crisis to push forward Cabinet priorities in terms of key component areas ensuring that actions taken by the North of Tyne now are relevant for the future.

Committee were advised on the proposed recovery proposals, calling for a cleaner, more inclusive recovery with the scale of investment and devolution to match the North of Tyne ambitions. The North of Tyne proposition includes proposals for approximately 1.1m schemes of investment for the region.

The most vulnerable and disadvantaged have been hardest hit and there are substantially more people unemployed since March, 15,000 (up by 60%); the number of people across the region furloughed is markedly higher than the rest of the UK – 29%; the young are particularly vulnerable with disproportionately furloughed apprenticeships and training schemes down

The North of Tyne is confident about recovery and the basis for a sustainable and inclusive economy; focussing investment on job creation, a green economy and vibrant communities.

The Recovery Plan sets out five areas where it is thought that investment is critical; each area sets out proposals and schemes: jobs, skills and livelihoods; the future economy; supporting businesses, high streets and places; innovation, health and prevention and transport, infrastructure and connectivity.

The North of Tyne will continue to source funding to invest in Covid recovery in areas such as offshore, digital, culture and tourism. Officers will continue working with colleagues in respect of the Spending Review, the government white paper and the budget.

H Kippin responded to comment/questions from Members which included:

- A member asked if all partners are working well together and referred to working with colleagues in the wider north east area, including the Tees Valley Combined Authority. More joint working can lead to more employment opportunities. In response H Kippin advised that officers utilise all opportunities to bring resources into the region, this includes collaboration with a wide set of partners such as the seven regional local authorities, the CBI and universities. He referred to the presentation and the work achieved through working together with partners, dialogue with Cabinet is positive and, Cabinet demonstrates collective leadership. H Kippin provided an example of the Joint Transport Committee, working across regions on transport connectivity, reflecting collaboration particularly during the current pandemic crisis.

- A further question was asked as to whether the Combined Authority has a high profile and if any steps can be taken to further promote the work of the North of Tyne. In response H Kippin advised that the Authority is recognised as playing a substantial role in responding to the pandemic.
- A Member referred to a) the submission to government requesting support to boost a recovery package for the people and communities of the north of Tyne and whether authorities south of the Tyne have a similar vision, and b) given that circumstances are changing on a daily basis, is there scope to amend the submission. H Kippin explained that there are two documents, both which represent the recovery proposals and submission, and have been developed to incorporate the wider region. The two documents are aligned and colleagues in the south of Tyne authorities have had the opportunity to submit their own views to government. The submission is flexible and can be amended to accommodate the short-term stricter measures/guidance recently imposed by government.
- Reference was made to the impact assessment statements detailed in all Combined Authority reports, for example, Climate Change. Given that the majority of the geographical North of Tyne area is classed by government as rural, is it possible to incorporate a rural impact assessment where applicable. H Kippin advised that this can be taken forward and will discuss with other officers.
- A member referred to the Digital Inclusion and Education Strategy and queried whether all funding had been allocated and, if digital devices had been allocated to children. H Kippin advised that local authority partners had received the funding. A response as to whether digital devices have been allocated will be provided in writing.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 71 **ADULT EDUCATION BUDGET UPDATE**

Cllr McCarty had previously provided a briefing note, a copy of which was circulated and attached to the Official Minutes.

Cllr McCarty provided a verbal update on his portfolio highlighting the following points:

A significant benefit is the ability to control and monitor the Adult Education Budget (AEB) spend. The first performance monitoring review will be undertaken in November 2020.

Prior to devolution Adult Education was managed centrally with funding allocated to numerous providers in the region to deliver support services. Local authorities were not provided with any data as to the quality of the work provided or the benefits of the investment.

Devolution enables the Combined Authority to be more responsive, providing support on a place-based approach.

The fund has been structured to provide better outcomes for residents.

The authority has carried out a significant piece of work to ensure that there is a greater awareness of the skills required by businesses both today and in the future.

Since the initial funding of £23m, the authority has received further funding of £959,064 to fund the sector-based Work Academy programmes and High Value courses announced by the Chancellor to support young people into work and in response to the COVID19 crisis.

Over the year numerous engagement sessions have taken place with providers and the organisation has strived to maintain stability in the sector.

The current pandemic provides an opportunity to monitor provision.

There is a small budget underspend which can be used to address any needs which may arise.

Partners on the Inclusive Economy Board have received a briefing on the AEB.

Cllr McCarty responded to comment/questions from Members which included:

- A Member commented that devolution of the AEB had enabled the authority to address the skills gap and was optimistic that businesses would also realise the benefits. Cllr McCarty agreed with the comment adding that performance monitoring will help to identify the good and bad providers.
- A Member asked if the authority has taken into consideration the skills needed in the green and new energy sectors, identifying opportunities that may arise. Cllr McCarty explained that it is the role of the Investment Panel to ensure that people have the skills and support necessary to access employment. Some of the skills/training were taken into account when the authority was first given control of the AEB. H Kippin reinforced the points made by Cllr McCarty adding that skills are an important element of all decisions taken by the authority. Cabinet have headlined some investment to areas aligned in the Economic Vision such as offshore investment. Each headline investment is dedicated to skills provision.
- Reference was made to online training during the pandemic. As the North of Tyne covers a very diverse area and access to rural areas can be difficult and expensive, does the authority make provision for transport or contribute towards travel costs. Cllr McCarty confirmed that access issues were included in the initial decision-making process, ensuring that providers contribute towards travel costs. Also, the Digital Inclusion funding is used to supply devices to schools and, those seeking employment.

When asked by the Chair Cllr McCarty confirmed that she would attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a future update as required.

The Chair thanked Cllr McCarty for attending and addressing the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 72 **SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION UPDATE**

Submitted: Report of the Strategic Lead, Education Challenge (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

Paul Hanson, the Interim Head of Paid Service and Lead Chief Executive for Education presented the report the purpose of which was to provide an update on the progress of two significant projects from the Education Improvement portfolio.

P Hanson began by setting the context and policy framework as set out in section 1.3 of the report.

The Devolution Deal for the Combined Authority included:

- An opportunity to seek Government support to implement an Education Challenge.
- A commitment from the constituent authorities and the Combined Authority to work together to develop a unified approach to school improvement through the preparation of a Joint School Improvement Strategy, to collectively learn from and replicate good practice. In April 2019 Cabinet approved its priorities for the Joint School Improvement Strategy and final approval was given at Cabinet on 28 July 2020.

Committee heard that a lot of work with Head Teachers began before the Devolution Deal was agreed, to understand collectively the educational priorities for children and young people.

P Hanson provided a brief summary of the Cabinet priorities based on the evidence and engagement undertaken, this included:

Ensuring that every young person in the North of Tyne area is ready for school - Evidence suggests that as an area the Combined Authority performs well, however a small percentage do not reach a good level of development at foundation stage.

Equalities and Standards – Cabinet felt that equalities and standards are important for everyone and all children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be given the opportunity to gain significantly from the Improvement Strategy.

Inclusive Economy - The Improvement Strategy will ensure that career pathways are in place providing opportunities to develop the skills gaps in areas such as the new and emerging jobs identified in green energy and sustainable development. Particular reference was made to the Investment Panel and the skills needed to allow children and young people to gain employment whilst taking advantage of those sectors that the Combined Authority can invest in.

Leadership – In discussions with educational leaders and viewing national data the Cabinet have requested that the Leadership Team focus on recruitment, retention

and planning ensuring that recruitment and retention of staff across the North of Tyne area is a main priority for the Combined Authority.

In developing the Education Challenge officers have looked at the work undertaken in London and Manchester, allowing Cabinet to further develop priorities.

- Money and support to ensure that children are ready for school and enabling early years work.
- Educational Achievement for All.
- Leadership, Recruitment and Retention.

Cabinet were of the view that the above priorities should be included within the policy context of ambition for all education related work, ensuring that all schools in the Combined Authority area are good or outstanding, every young person is ready for school, ensure that no child is left to struggle and fall behind, a universal mental health officer in all schools, the creation of a leadership deal.

In summer 2019 education workshops were organised with partners and education leaders. Discussions focussed on the priorities, data and barriers.

Referring to Covid-19 recovery P Hanson explained that the Improvement Strategy enables the North of Tyne to demonstrate to government that there is confidence to work with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE to align national activity funding towards some of the priority actions.

It was emphasised that the Improvement Strategy is an important collaboration between the Combined Authority and the constituent authorities to work together to provide educational achievement for all children and young people.

Committee noted the work undertaken with the Newcastle United Foundation and the Kielder Observatory, providing opportunities to add to education output.

P Hanson responded to comments/questions from Members.

- Referring to the Covid and mental health issues, P Hanson was asked if any there had been any impact on priorities as a result of the pandemic. In response P Hanson advised that problems in terms of connectivity have arisen for young people in respect of virtual learning and the Authority wanted to make a practical difference and had. In relation to mental health, a lot of work is ongoing, and discussions are held with NHS mental health teams across the Combined Authority area. Officers are also working to ensure that children and young people return to a safe environment.
- Reference was made to the Education Improvement Board and the proposal that the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holder, finalises the terms of reference for and appointments to the Education Improvement Board. P Hanson advised that discussions have been held with the Mayor and Cabinet and the terms of reference will be reported back in due course.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the work and progress made in establishing a Joint School Improvement Strategy and the continued work with government to negotiate long term funding for a North of Tyne Education Challenge.

### 73 **NORTH EAST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

Submitted: Report of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Chief Executive (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report which updated Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work and decisions of the North East LEP with a focus on Project Funding Decisions related to the Programmes managed by the North East LEP for which NTCA is the accountable body. It provided summary information about the LGF, EZ, and NEIF programmes including decisions related to £5m COVID-19 rapid response fund established using uncommitted North East LEP resources. In addition, it provided information about the appointment of the new Chair of the North East North East LEP Board.

J Gillespie advised members that the North East LEP had agreed to providing regular updates to Cabinet in respect of funding awards.

Committee were advised to submit any questions in writing to the Chief Finance Officer.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

### 74 **NORTH OF TYNE COMMUNICATIONS**

Submitted: Report of the Head of Communications, Engagement and Organisational Development (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

S Tarbuck introduced the report which provided an overview of how communications and engagement activity will develop. The report outlined a framework for discussion, laying the groundwork for strong communications and outlined several key initial areas of activity.

Members received a presentation covering the following points:

- **The context** - Working in partnership, Engagement and communications, Digital first, Real stories
- **The themes to the approach** – Getting the basics right, telling our story, Engaging with residents
- **Next steps**

Referring to the context, committee heard that engagement is an important issue but is part of the wider process. The report set out the approach to engagement; a collaboration with partners across the region and at a national level. The North of Tyne is committed to strengthening relationships with all partners. Many organisations simply broadcast in one direction, but the Combined Authority are committed to a wider approach, ensuring that partners and audiences feel included.

Engagement - S Tarbuck gave an example of the current development of 'Crowdfund – North of Tyne', developed in partnership with Spacehive and the voluntary and community sector, to deliver a platform that will bring people together to help raise funds for local projects.

Digital first – With a large range of partners, the North of Tyne are at the early stages of developing a range of appropriate clear channels of communication. The ongoing pandemic has seen a huge increase in the use of social media and video conferencing has now become the default way of engaging audiences 'face to face'. The authority has also developed a page on Facebook and have a set up a Twitter account as the main method used to inform residents. Members noted that Twitter reported an increase in users of 34% in the second quarter of 2020.

The Authority has included 'real stories' as an aim within Digital First, to bring people together to tell their own stories; case studies and using video is central to the North of Tyne's storytelling approach, to help bring to life our work and make real the impact we are having on communities. The work of Combined Authority is by its nature an 'investment led' approach, with impacts on residents often many months after initial Cabinet decisions have been taken. Communicating both the 'decision' and the 'real impact' of investment will be key to strong engagement.

Committee were advised that the three broad themes, set out in section 2 of the report have been discussed informally with Cabinet and with staff across the organisation.

A strong forward planning process is being develop, looking 3-6 months ahead. A communication forward plan is in place engaging all officers across all projects. It is felt that good planning will enable the Authority to focus and tell a stronger story about its work, at the right time.

The new website is now complete and is more appropriate and user friendly. The site has been designed for use on a smart phone or tablet as well as computers and is able to host video conferencing.

S Tarbuck informed Members that the authority has 200 members on Facebook and 3000 followers on Twitter.

By developing communications and engagement the organisation will be able to tell its own story about its vision and ambitions, moving towards a national reputation for effectiveness and to leverage funding into the region and publicise what has been achieved so far.

S Tarbuck responded to comments/questions from Members which included:

- A Member referred to real stories, important during the current pandemic, and the issues of public health messages and whether there is any update on the Citizens Assembly for Climate Change. S Tarbuck explained that the organisation will be working with partners to supplement the messages they are announcing. He referred to the recent 'Tier' restrictions to be imposed by government which include complicate messages, and for some, will be

difficult to understand. The organisation is in weekly contact with the constituent authorities and are able to offer help and support. In relation to the Citizens Assembly S Tarbuck advised that the next step is to establish a representative panel of people, this will be carried out digitally.

- Reference was made to working and collaborating with partners and other local authorities and to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority who have their own branded identity, whereas the North of Tyne is not easily identifiable. Residents are not aware that the authority comprises three local authorities working together on a devolution deal that will benefit the area and so doesn't get the credit for successful projects. Promoting the work of the North of Tyne and engaging with residents is the responsibility of everyone, the Mayor, all Members and Officers. In responding S Tarbuck explained that the communications report set out the basics of what is needed to communicate and engage. With this approach the North of Tyne can promote work already undertaken and what is proposed for the future. He was also of the view that as the organisation becomes more established, the identity will grow. S Tarbuck also welcomed any discussions with members outside of the committee process.
- A further comment was made in relation to a North of Tyne event which was well received and had attracted a large number of residents.

Committee welcomed the report and gave positive comments on the new website.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 75 **FINANCIAL PLANNING AND BUDGET SETTING PROCESS**

Submitted: Report of the Chief Finance Officer (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

J Gillespie introduced the report the purpose of which provided information on the 2021-25 Financial Planning and Budget Process report which was submitted and approved by Cabinet on the 29 September 2020.

The timetable set out the key decision milestones.

Key issues highlighted in included: The Recovery and Devolution Deal and the Comprehensive Spending Review and whether any further funding will be secured; continuation of the £20m revenue funding for the Adult Education Budget and the 5-year allocation towards brown field land. Members noted the Overview and Scrutiny Committee budget workshop scheduled for January 2021. Reference was also made to initiating community engagement to help develop the budget; although this will be undertaken remotely.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 76 **2019/20 NTCA OUTTURN (YEAR END)**

Submitted: Report of the Chief Finance Officer (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

J Gillespie introduced the report the purpose of which was to inform the Committee of the 2019/20 NTCA and North East LEP financial outturn, including the North East LEP 2020/21 budget and illustrations for 2021/22 and Invest North East England (INEE) 2019/20 outturn and 2020/21 budget.

The main features were detailed on page 132 of the report. Referring to the Investment Fund, members heard that this remains challenging to estimate the timing of actual spend. Improvements have been made to grant allocation. Reference was also made to staff appointments, business rates and grants.

There were no questions from members.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 77 **Q1 BUDGET MONITORING**

Submitted: Report of the Chief Finance Officer (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

Points highlighted during the presentation included; some variations on Service Level Agreements, the Investment Plan Budget, an underspend on the staffing budget due to a lower than anticipated pension contribution rate resulting from the transfer of the North East LEP into the Combined Authority and a small underspend on technical support.

**RESOLVED** – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 78 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

8 December 2020 at 10.00am