

North of Tyne Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 March 2022

(10.30 am - 12.30 pm)

Meeting held: Collingwood Suite, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QH

Minutes

Present:

Chair: C Seymour

Councillors Les Bowman, L Wright, S Fairlie and G Stone

12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and brief introductions were provided.

13 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Hall, North Tyneside Council and Cllr Hunter, North Tyneside Council.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

15 AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

16 AGREE THE ACTION POINTS OF THE INQUORATE MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2022

RESOLVED: That the action points from the meeting held on 7 December 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

17 HOUSING, LAND AND DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO UPDATE

Committee received a report from Mayor Redfearn, Cabinet Member for Housing, Land and Development, which provided an update on the work and plans for the portfolio area.

Mayor Redfearn introduced the report commenting on: portfolio achievements, including the award of £12.5m funding to unlock 1340 new homes and creation of apprenticeships, despite the challenges created by Covid; how collaboration had delivered new opportunities and had accelerated progress and capacity; the importance of ensuring quality and affordable housing; and the support provided for business case development to bring forward new developments. Mayor Redfearn welcomed the support that committee members could give to this area of the Combined Authority's work by identifying brownfield sites which might be suitable for redevelopment.

Mayor Redfearn went onto discuss the agreed Joint Infrastructure Plan as a means of unlocking housing sites through transport investment and discussed the High Street Fund which would support the reinvigoration of town centres.

Reference was made to the connection between the housing programme and skills, with the education skills programme providing opportunities to support residents into work.

Mayor Redfearn, H Kippin, Managing Director and Vicky Cuthbertson, Housing and Land Manager, then responded to questions/comments received from members and the following points were noted:

- The Combined Authority would seek to influence private developers on proposals for new housing developments to ensure the quality appropriateness of new developments. Whitley Bay seafront was highlighted as a good example of a development that had brought in new businesses and improved footfall in the area.
- In 2021, the Combined Authority had published a call for new housing sites and a further £20m of schemes had been identified. This overprogramming would help to manage the risks associated with schemes that were experiencing challenges to delivery. Additional funding had also been provided to support site investigation to identify constraints and improve deliverability.

The deadline for delivery of all schemes was March 2025. External appraisals were carried out on all schemes at an initial stage to ensure they could meet the criteria.

- The role of the Combined Authority was to support the acceleration of site developments, including providing analysis on the need to support affordable housing and creating an evidence base for challenging areas such as retrofitting. The authority had no statutory powers and worked closely with local authorities to add value to their work.

Added value was provided in relation to increasing the pace of delivery by supporting earlier site development. It was anticipated that further opportunities

would be provided in the Levelling-Up White paper, in respect of support for social housing stock replacement.

- A member referred to a recent TV documentary that highlighted the value of council housing as an asset to the community and highlighted good practice by local authorities who had redeveloped derelict social housing into desirable new homes with a community feel. It was suggested that the Combined Authority may wish to speak to the presenter, George Clarke.
- The Combined Authority had identified several opportunities for housing development along the re-opening Northumberland train line – these were not greenfield sites and proposals would be sympathetic to existing communities and local infrastructure.
- A member commented on the importance of affordable housing that provided a mix of tenure and recognised that families living together were often now multigenerational.
- The Combined Authority did not have compulsory purchase powers to deal with landlords who had boarded up vacant high street premises. This had been explored by other combined authorities, however evidence suggested there was greater value in working collaboratively to create a shared vision for a high street. Other powers, such as those through selective licensing schemes, were also held by local authorities.

A member suggested that the term ‘high street’ may pre-determine areas that would be supported through the fund, with many communities not identifying small community-based shopping areas as a high street.

- The combined authority had commissioned a piece of work to review the scale of need for affordable and supported housing and where funding may be available to bring forward opportunities. Work was also taking place with local authorities and Homes England on a Memorandum of Understanding in respect of collaboration on strategic planning. H Kippin offered to report back on this at a meeting in Autumn.
- The Brownfield Housing Fund would focus on accelerating brownfield land development, whilst this was not affordable housing it would include a mix of schemes. This mix would be defined in collaboration with local authorities and the private sector but would contribute to increasing the number of affordable homes. The combined authority was waiting for the outcome of an application for additional funding that would focus on affordable housing.

The Chair brought the discussion to a close thanking Mayor Redfearn and officers for attending.

RESVOLED: that –

- i. The report be noted.
- ii. A report be brought to committee in Autumn 2022 on the outcome of commissioned work to review the scale of affordable and supporting housing and on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the local

authorities and Homes England in respect of collaboration on strategic planning.

18 **LEVELLING-UP WHITE PAPER**

Committee received a presentation from H Kippin, Managing Director, which provided an overview of the Levelling Up White Paper and implications for the North of Tyne.

H Kippin, Managing Director, then responded to questions/comments received from members and the following points were noted:

- The combined authority provided capacity support to the Inward Investment team and financial support to encourage businesses to move to the area. The unique selling point of the area was the provision of affordable high-end office space alongside a location that provided access to a mix of city, coast and countryside.

The potential to build on the areas historical and cultural assets was also acknowledged, and – although it was difficult to quantify - support for recent events had highlighted the benefit in increasing visitor numbers and the contribution to the local economy.

- It was anticipated that the offshore wind, clean energy and the supply chain for energy and offshore, digital and service sector would be areas that would provide future competitive advantage and job opportunities.
- Changes to the region over the past forty years had come from a mix of public and private investment, and the ability of the combined authority to leverage private sector investment was an important aspect of future development. At this stage it would be important to understand the government's response to the region's proposed recovery deal before any governance discussions would take place.

The Chair highlighted the opportunity for the committee to understand any proposed changes to the devolution deal.

- A member raised a concern about the levelling-up agenda and the extent to which it would benefit the North of Tyne area following years of public sector austerity and the demise of industry in the area. It was suggested that the region could build on technology, its universities and its port to build on the potential of the green economy.
- The combined authority maintained a risk register and reported on this to Audit and Standards Committee. This took into account strategic risks related to Covid and the international landscape.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

19 **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT AND ANNUAL REVIEW**

Committee received a report from E Kerr, Principal Governance and Scrutiny Manager, which presented the committee's Annual Report for submission to Cabinet and confirmed that no urgent decisions or call-in requests had been made during the 2021/22 year.

E Kerr introduced the report, thanking members for their engagement and welcoming proposals for the 2022/23 work programme, noting that extraordinary meetings or workshops could be held where required. Responding to questions/comments received from members the following points were noted:

- The call-in process required four members from two constituent local authorities. Information on the power of call-in was provided in the scrutiny handbook and provided as part of the induction programme.

In discussion, E Kerr agreed to review how information on key decisions taken by Cabinet or a Cabinet Member was shared with scrutiny members

- A member highlighted the potential to include a further discussion on the Levelling-Up White paper on the committee's work programme.

RESOLVED: that –

- i. The Annual Report be approved for submission to Cabinet.
- ii. The work programme for 2022/23 to include a further discussion on the Levelling-Up White paper.

20 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

To be confirmed.

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