

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23 March 2021

(10.00 am - 12.20 pm)

The meeting was held remotely and live streamed.

Approved Minutes

Present:

Chair:	Cllr G A Roughead
Vice Chair:	Cllr L Wright
Councillors	S Fairlie, A Lower, L Dunn, P Earley, S Graham, M Hall, G Stewart

103 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

It was noted that Cllr Liz Dunn, Northumberland County Council had replaced Cllr Dungworth as the appointed committee member. Cllr Dungworth was now the substitute member.

104 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence

105 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

106 AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2021 FOR APPROVAL

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair via email.

107 CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE**(a) Place and Productivity**

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

Cllr Sanderson provided a verbal update on the Culture, Creative and Tourism element of the Place and Productivity portfolio highlighting the following points:

In January 2020, Cabinet agreed an allocation of £6m up to 2023 for a culture and creative programme and an indicative ten-year Tourism and Events programme allocation of £15m, with an initial budget of £3.5m for the first phase up to 2023.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the sector has been extreme and has highlighted the need to stabilise the sector before it is realistic to expect growth opportunities. The purpose of the Culture and Creative Programme is to support and stabilise the sector during recovery as the Culture and Creative and Tourism sectors in the North of Tyne area are important to support recovery and growth.

Cllr Sanderson highlighted forthcoming events such as the Rugby World Cup Culture wrap around, the North of Tyne Fringe Festival, The Lindisfarne Gospels and the Hadrian's Wall 1900th anniversary.

Cllr Sanderson referred to the concerns shared within local communities, particularly rural Northumberland, where tourism is welcomed but issues still remain, such as, adequate parking and public roads, which are mainly narrow and not suitable for large numbers of traffic.

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

- A member welcomed the events programme and emphasised the social and mental health benefits to the local community as well as visitors and asked how events can be promoted locally as well as regionally and nationally. Referring to the anniversary celebration for Hadrian's Wall in 2022, it was stated that planning for events should ensure that all communities along the Wall will be involved. In responding Cllr Sanderson confirmed that all communities will be involved. H Kippin advised that the North of Tyne recognises the economic benefits and the boost in creativity. He drew attention to the three types of events; major large scale events with international status which attract large audiences; signature events which raise the national profile and attract visitors and anchor events, home grown and community led.
- Responding to a question regarding support for communities and businesses, H Kippin advised that support for events will be developed with local authority partners and will be developed using a phased approach. Members were directed to section 2.1.8 of the report, where details of the sequence of events could be found. H Kippin also advised that restart and regrowth will be carried out in accordance with the national road map. and more details can be shared when plans are confirmed.

- Reference was made to the objectives which it was felt were aspirational rather than real targets. Residents want to be informed of the steps that will regenerate communities. The Lindisfarne Gospels were cited as an event that will probably be exhibited in Durham and Newcastle but will not be available to those who live in towns such as Berwick. There will be many who do not have the means to travel to the two cities.
- A member welcomed the programme and agreed with the comments to create a viable cultural programme that has the power to improve people's lives. It was suggested that instead of holding events over weekends they be spread out across seven days making them more accessible for all. Cllr Sanderson agreed that health and wellbeing is important and opportunities should be provided to allow as many people as possible to attend events.
- A comment was made about the costs of tickets for large theatres which are not affordable for many people. This could be compensated by involving as many residents as possible to grass roots local events. Cllr Sanderson agreed that this is an important issue and hopefully some events can be organised that involve no costs such as the North Tyneside Fringe Festival. There is also provision in the Culture and Creativity Fund to target local culture and creative infrastructure and support recovery at the grass roots level.
- Reference was made to spontaneous ways in which communities came together after the first lock down ended. Members were invited to come forward with suggestions.
- Cllr Sanderson was asked if the three Culture and Creative Zones will be spread across the three local authority areas or be more localised, given that there are diverse differences in each area, all with their own cultural events. Reference was also made about the status of the Combined Authority being recognised as the rural champion for England and, whether there is any likelihood of arranging a tour of the Lindisfarne Gospels, creating more opportunities for the viewing public. In response Cllr Sanderson explained that due to the condition of the gospels, national importance and security issues, a tour is not possible. He also advised that the three local authorities work very well together and collectively promote the Combined Authority area, investing considerable funding. Also, in attending today's meeting, Cllr Sanderson recognised the importance of involving local members. H Kippin responded with information on the Culture Creative Zones, which are sector and place based, explaining that each local authority will better understand the geographic diverse cultures and have the knowledge and experience of how to involve local communities. Referring to the status of the Combined Authority as a rural champion for England, H Kippin advised that further information can be provided to the committee in respect of other components of the Place and Productivity portfolio, such as the off shore clean growth and the rural exemplar elements.

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

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

108 EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

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

Cllr Dodd gave a brief update on the progress of two significant projects within the Education Improvement portfolio; the Joint School Improvement Strategy and preparations for a North of Tyne Education Challenge.

The key points of the report were:

Despite school disruption due to the coronavirus pandemic progress has been made with the Joint School Improvement Strategy, including supporting schools and blended learning, helping young people to access apprenticeships information, good engagement with STEM and digital projects and continued work on the Newcastle United Futures project. Education Directors meet on a regular basis to share best practice. Officers of the North of Tyne Combined Authority met with the Regional Schools Commissioner and her team to discuss a collaborative approach to supporting our schools, alongside conversations around funding the Education Challenge. Following the meeting an opportunity was identified to develop a shared workplan which will align the strategy with incoming initiatives from the Department for Education. This shared workplan (incorporating input from LA lead education officers) is currently being drafted. Work will continue with government to negotiate the overall funding package to improve education with schools.

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

- A member asked for an update if available, on career pathways, apprenticeships and Combined Authority support for blended learning, in particular for those children who are sent home because of COVID-19 outbreaks and need to access on-line learning. A Dougherty, Strategic Lead Education Challenge, responded to the two questions. With regards to apprenticeships the North of Tyne have been closely working with constituent authorities. Work has taken place on the website landing page with updated information about all apprenticeships and was now live. In terms of blended learning, Committee were advised that this will continue for some time. Officers are keen to ensure that best practice is followed through. There is an event in April for school leaders aimed at sharing best practice and capitalising on good work.
- A Dougherty responded to a further question about the landing page for the Apprenticeship Hub and advised that he will collate the relevant information and share with members
- A Member asked how education can be improved to enable clearer pathways for those students wishing to access higher education especially as there are so many independent providers. Reference was also made to the national shortage of physics and maths teachers. A Dougherty gave a brief update on recruitment problems that may have existed pre COVID-19 which is why

recruitment and retention has been identified within the Joint School Improvement Strategy, and the work undertaken by the Department for Education who are looking at support for early careers maths teachers.

- Reference was made to young people Not in Education, Employment or Training and the fact that COVID-19 has significantly increased this problem and whether there is any targeting to try and re-engage the young people, such as, enabling access to training and skills. Cllr Dodd explained that there is a big backlog in providing opportunities for young people Not in Education, Employment or Training which is further exacerbated by the numbers of businesses that are still closed and staff furloughed. H Kippin explained that there is an Education Improvement Strategy outlined in the report with a distinct element to continue dialogue with the Department for Education and the government to secure funding to improve education. He also referred to the various work programmes to support young people such as Kick Start and youth hubs which are ongoing. The North of Tyne have received additional funding for Level 3 courses. A follow up question was asked regarding the core group of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training due to COVID-19, who may feel disenfranchised. How will they be contacted to encourage and support a return to education or training. P Hanson presented a graph of 16/17 year olds currently Not in Education, Employment or Training, detailing the slight increase during the current academic year. The Combined Authority are working to opening communications with young men through the use of football, basketball and other activities and interaction with employers to provide opportunities for young people. Committee heard that the end of furlough will have a disproportionate impact on young people.
- Referring to the Joint Improvement Strategy, a member asked if there has been any communication with other Combined Authorities to look at and/or share best practice and implement in the North of Tyne area. A Dougherty explained that with respect to the Education Challenge, Officers had looked at similar initiatives such as the London Challenge and similar work undertaken in Manchester.
- Reference was made to engagement with stakeholders. Cllr Dodd was asked if the 250 education professionals consulted on the strategy was a fair percentage reflection of stakeholders across the North of Tyne, including the rural areas. P Hanson confirmed that officers have engaged with stakeholders across the geographic North of Tyne area.

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

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

109 COVID-19 NTCA RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PLANS

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

H Kippin gave a presentation on Covid-19 Response and Recovery, outlining the national road map to ease out of lock down and work undertaken to support COVID-19 response and recovery in the region, including the delivery of projects; the vaccination programme; the resumption of trading; a regional road map; and additional announcements specific to the wider North East such as devolution of Whitehall departments, new funding streams, Re-Statement of Intent on Transport; post budget and a re-cap of North of Tyne programmes and major investments.

The following key comments and questions were then raised in discussion:-

- A Member referred to the creation of a Freeport in the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Treasury North which will be relocated to Darlington and asked if there were any other major inward investments in the pipeline. In response H Kippin explained that some decisions were disappointing especially as Leeds and Newcastle were announced as possible locations. Officers are actively negotiating with government on the Comprehensive Spending Review submitted last year for £1.1b worth of initiatives for the North of Tyne.
- A Member commented that the North of Tyne is a resilient authority and asked if the Combined Authority has small projects that can be implemented immediately as and when funding is available. In response H Kippin confirmed that the Combined Authority are building a pipeline of investment projects such as clean energy, green growth and off shore, in readiness for accelerated government funding. He also explained that the North of Tyne wanted to ensure that there were enough incentives to attract investment in the region such as the Ports of Blyth and Newcastle and the airport. Members heard that active enquiries have been received in respect of inward investment for the sites and the region is well placed to follow through on incentives within the port scheme.
- A Member referred to the COP 26 Conference (the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference) and asked if there were any plans to showcase the North of Tyne Climate Change agenda at the conference, providing an opportunity to promote the region and attract inward investment. H Kippin gave a summary of what the North of Tyne are doing at the conference fringe events. Officers will be working with colleagues to collectively showcase the Combined Authority region. Members heard that the Mayor of the North of Tyne is working with other Mayoral Combined Authorities and Core Cities to agree a joint approach. The conference provides a great opportunity. Officers are in negotiation with partners to showcase a climate summit supported by statement of intent on subjects such as clean energy and green growth.

Members showed their appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by the Director of Economic Growth in promoting the region.

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

110 POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

Submitted: Report of the Director of Policy and Performance (previously submitted and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

R Redfern introduced the report the purpose of which was to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee members with an update on the North of Tyne Combined Authority's Poverty Truth Commission project as requested at its December meeting. The report provided an overview of the model and next steps in its development, as well as an update on supporting commitments from regional and national funders. Key points highlighted were:

The reasons for undertaking the commission and some of the consequences of the pandemic. During a recent survey the majority of those interviewed believed that the pandemic has increased social inequality, 79% believe that there is now a large gap between different social classes across the country, 8 million households are in debt, 6 million are being pursued for payments, 2 million now rely on foodbanks and twice as many children now rely on foodbanks than a year ago. Poverty is increasing in the region as well as across the country.

At the November 2020 meeting of Cabinet, Members agreed to undertake the commission to look at how the Combined Authority can help to reduce the levels of poverty. The commission will provide the opportunity to hear directly from residents and communities about this issue and enable the authority to build the capacity necessary to help people improve their lives. The Combined Authority will commission organisations to manage the commission and Community Foundation for Tyne, Wear and Northumberland offered match funding for the project. The Combined Authority has also been invited by Joseph Rowntree Foundation to provide a proposal for some further supporting funding. Members noted that the North of Tyne is the first Combined Authority to undertake a Poverty Truth Commission.

Poverty Truth Commissions run on average for two years, recruit from a wide range of communities of place and interest, prioritising the voices of groups which are rarely heard in traditional methods of engagement, and secure funding from a mix of public, civic and/or business sources to support collaboration. When talking to families it will be necessary to build a level of trust which will hopefully encourage discussions about what it is like to live in poverty.

R Redfern responded to comment/questions from Members which included:

- A Member welcomed the commission and commented that the COVID-19 Pandemic has plunged families into poverty who have never before endured high levels of poverty. It was suggested that those involved in discussions also speak to the volunteers who work in the foodbanks and deliver food parcels, who have a vast knowledge of those families, vulnerable people in communities and the elderly who now require help and support. The input from Bishop Christine Hardman was also welcomed. A request was also made for Members to be sent a copy of the brief for the commission when available. R Redfern agreed with the comments made.
- A Member spoke of activities in one of the Newcastle Wards highlighting the number of people coming forward for help. Volunteers supply packed lunches for children as well as cereal and milk for breakfasts. A local supermarket also donates any leftover fresh food which is then used to provide cooked

meals. It was also pointed out that poverty is not something linked to those who are in receipt of benefits but includes those just above the benefits line and cannot claim state support, often referred to as hidden poverty. R Redfern acknowledged the phenomenal amount of work carried out by volunteers.

- A Member asked how people who are living in poverty can be involved in the commission. R Redfern gave a summary of how the commission will work. Those involved in discussions with residents will need to be respectful and remember that some people will be embarrassed and disturbed to talk about how the COVID-19 Pandemic has affected their lives and their reliance on community support. Members heard how Gateshead Council have engaged the Arts and Culture as a way to engage whilst others have used a coaching approach. There are a variety of methods that can be used which is why the Combined Authority have accepted the offer of support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- A Member commented that a strong emphasis is needed in respect of hidden poverty. Those involved in discussions will need to be approachable whether it is in a group situation or a 1-to-1 telephone conversation. The process must be open and inclusive.

RESOLVED – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report. and will be kept informed of progress.

111 ANNUAL REPORT AND REVIEW

Submitted: Report of the Governance and Scrutiny Manager (previously circulated and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

Members considered the Committee's Annual Report for submission to Cabinet at its AGM in June. Details were also provided of the decisions taken under any of the urgency provisions this year and the use of Call-In. Members were invited to submit any views on the content of the annual report or the process regarding urgent decisions and Call-In.

The Governance and Scrutiny Manager gave a brief account of urgent decisions taken during the year, including one taken after the publication of the report in the agenda.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee –

- 1) Noted the report.
- 2) Agreed that the draft Annual Report be submitted to the Annual Meeting of Cabinet in June 2021.

112 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

29 June 2021 (to be confirmed)