

North of Tyne Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 December 2023

(1.00pm - 2.40 pm)

Meeting held: Chamber 0.02, North Tyneside Council, Quadrant, The Silverlink North, Cobalt Business Park, North Tyneside, NE27 0BY

Minutes

Present:

Chair: B Flux

Councillors S Fairlie, J Harrison, L Marshall, J Montague, C Seymour, G Stone and L Wright

20 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for introductions.

21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caroline Ball.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

23 AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

24 ADULT EDUCATION BUDGET

Submitted: Report of Head of Inclusive Growth (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

L Mills (Head of Inclusive Growth) presented the report which provided an update on the performance of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in the academic year 2022-23. The report outlined the adult education opportunities created and the plan to devolve the AEB to NEMCA for the 2024-25 academic year.

In presenting the report L Mills highlighted the following key points:

- 44% of enrolments were in the top 10% of deprived wards across NTCA.
- 53% of enrolments were undertaken by residents with no or low qualifications.
- 72% of enrolments were undertaken by unemployed residents.
- Areas to build on were identified as;
 - improving analysis of Community Learning, focusing on positive outcomes and value for money;
 - improving analysis of learner destinations and progression;
 - monitoring demand for ESOL provision, working with providers to maximise opportunities for residents.
- Enrolment opportunities were increased by 2,491 on the previous academic year, with 35,200 enrolment opportunities undertaken during the year. Of those undertaken, 91% were completed and of that figure, 96% were achieved.
- The pandemic and cost of living crisis shifted priorities and a number of flexibilities were introduced to target where it was needed most. For example, the requirement for employed residents to contribute 50% towards the cost of their learning was removed.
- Stakeholder engagement events had been held in preparation for the delivery of NEMCA's devolved AEB. Grant fundings agreements had been endorsed and remaining funds would be commissioned through a competitive procurement process open to all providers.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. There was ring-fenced funding for community learning and further analysis work was underway to identify where it was taking place and what value it was adding.
- ii. Learning support funding had enabled providers to offer things such as bus fares and childcare in order to support learners and improve accessibility.
- iii. Work with grant providers is undertaken when delivery plans are submitted around the locations and specific venues the provision will be provided from. The team therefore has oversight on all delivery plans in order to monitor. Data showed it was reaching communities and as well as online opportunities the whole geographical area was covered although it was acknowledged that there is always more that could be done.
- iv. During the pandemic there was a significant volume of online learning. However, for some residents that would not be suitable and it was noted that there is more outreach learning underway. Through business plans the service would ask for specific information regarding the balance between online and in-person learning.
- v. Vocational level 3 qualifications, equivalent to A-Levels were available in key growth sectors. It was noted that many of which were recognised by universities. Progression opportunities continued to be built on, although primarily it was targeted at residents at the lower level of progression to get them into jobs.

- vi. Progression data was patchy and further work was underway to improve upon that this year. Going forward providers would be asked to deliver data regarding their learners employment. During 2024/25 the DfE would be looking at earnings data and providers would be asked to confirm if learners progressed into a job within the same sector as their qualification.
- vii. Ward data will be brought back in future updates.
- viii. Overall enrolments have increased year on year. There were 35,000 learning opportunities undertaken in 2022/23, 91% were completed and of those completed 96% were achieved.
- ix. Within the contracts with providers, the Authority set out its expectations in terms of marketing the courses offered and encouraging take up.
- x. In response to a question regarding value for money, it was noted that there was the same amount of money as there was in 2017/18, however enrolments had increased and therefore the number of residents able to access courses had increased, which demonstrated that value for money had increased. It was noted that specific value for money details would be a focus for 2024/25 work.
- xi. In terms of learners who complete courses but do not achieve the accreditation, there was the chance for assessments to be re-taken, however this would potentially fall into the following academic years data.
- xii. Further information would be provided at a future date regarding; how many learners moved to employment, type of employment, increased job capacity or first time jobs as well as earnings data. In addition, figures around deprivation would also be provided.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

- i. Noted the performance of NTCAs devolved AEB in AY 2022-23
- ii. Endorsed the approach to managing NTCAs devolved AEB in AY 2023-24
- iii. That Committee members comments be noted to help shape the policy planning for NEMCAs devolved AEB in preparation for delivery from AY 2024-25 onwards.

25 **CHILD POVERTY PREVENTION PROGRAMME**

Submitted: Report of Senior Programme Manager, Child Poverty Prevention (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Unthank (Senior Programme Manager, Child Poverty Prevention) presented the report to Committee on the impact and development of the Child Poverty Prevention Programme (CPPP) for the North of Tyne.

In presenting the report J Unthank highlighted the following key points:

- Child poverty remained a barrier to an inclusive economy in the area. Most recent estimates showed a worsening picture of child poverty.
- A significant proportion of children living below the poverty line were from working households, therefore part of the work of the programme was focussed on employment.
- Following consultations, the programme was developed around three pillars of work; poverty interventions in schools, welfare support through the school gate and working with employers to tackle child poverty.

- Pilot interventions were taken up by 96 schools across the combined authority. Schools could choose the most appropriate interventions for their pupils and community.
- 15 schools benefited from a poverty proofing audit and school uniform support was delivered in two schools, which impacted on over 800 pupils and families.
- 1340 pupils benefitted from after school clubs, 650 participants engaged in family learning courses and grant funded projects were delivered in 23 schools.
- Access to welfare guidance was brought to 33 schools and supported over 600 families, which resulted in over £500,000 benefit gains.
- Work was undertaken with 25 organisations in the combined authority area to support them to implement strategies to help alleviate in-work poverty of staff. This work covered an employee community of 14,203 employees, of which 9,770 lived within the NTCA.
- Further funding was secured for another year to build on the pilot phase of work undertaken in the 2022/23 academic year.
- Delivery of phase 2 began in September 2023 and the programme was expanded to include a further pillar; the critical 1,001 days. The aim of this was to reduce the disadvantage on babies and children from conception to school age. Through this pillar, the regional Baby Box pilot was planned to be expanded.
- Engagement work would continue with schools, partners and public health teams and evaluations from last year would be used to inform work going forward.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. Mapping of schools and participating employers would be shared with the Committee. Work to target schools was done with local authority officers who knew where targeted work was required.
- ii. When the pilot was developed it was anticipated that a significant number of schools would take up the school uniform support. However, there was only a small uptake due to the DfE review of statutory guidance regarding school uniforms which meant a requirement for schools to provide second hand uniforms.
- iii. The Baby Box was introduced by the Children's Foundation and was a take on the Scottish Baby Box. It was noted that the large box doubled as a sleeping space and included a plethora of engagement items to promote positive parenting behaviour and bonding in early days. 750 boxes have been funded for targeted intervention for new parents on the vulnerable parent pathways.
- iv. In response to a question regarding engagement beyond mainstream school, it was noted that delivery of the programme was focussed on schools but that within schools they monitored needs in terms of SEN and health for example. It was also noted that within the scope of pillar 3, this would provide support to a wide range of children.
- v. Just under a quarter of schools were undertaking CPPP initiatives, however work was underway towards a cross fertilisation between the Education Improvement Partnership and the CPPP, where there is engagement in over 75% of schools across the North of Tyne area. Work was underway to develop relationships with those schools although it was acknowledged that schools cannot be forced to participate. It was also recognised that school leaders would be challenged in terms of monitoring those children in poverty and the CPPP would work towards lessening the burden on schools as far as possible.

- vi. Pillar four of phase two was a gentle step away from schools and evidence showed that children in households with under 5's were most affected by child poverty.
- vii. In response to a question regarding the targeting of the programme it was noted that, in order to ensure work was not being duplicated, a detailed mapping exercise was undertaken as some settings were already being supported by Local Authority teams. Therefore, resources and support were mapped out and initiatives targeted to where would have the most impact. Further information on the mapping of schools would be provided to the Committee.
- viii. Evaluation of the Baby Box had started in relation to its roll out in Newcastle and Gateshead and information would be drawn out from that in terms of rolling out across the combined authority.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee examined the progress made in delivering the programme and that Committee members reflections be noted.

26 **POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION**

Submitted: Report of Senior Programme Manager, NTCA (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Unthank, Senior Programme Manager, presented a report on progress towards NTCA's Poverty Truth Commission (PTC). The report provided an update on key achievements since the last update in November 2022.

In presenting the report J Unthank highlighted the following key points:

- The North of Tyne PTC was the first Commission to occur on a Combined Authority footprint. Children North East was appointed to deliver the PTC over two years.
- Since the last update, progress continued through the four stages and the commission was extended by six months to January 2024, due to the initial Covid-related delay in recruitment.
- Over the last year working groups were established around the three themes; food/fuel poverty, caring responsibilities and health. It was noted that monthly meetings continued to be held and projects were underway in each thematic group.
- Children North East (CNE) had completed the third 'Experiment' stage and projects were close to completion. Following completion, CNE would produce a final report.
- NTCA officers will be evaluating the methodology and implementation of the PTC between November and January. There would be an opportunity to develop a direct relationship between PTC commissioners and NTCA.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. In response to a question around whether the project had been successful, J Unthank stated that the ambition was to develop the NTCA's workstreams, to link with communities and allow opportunities for them to influence policy. It was acknowledged that work had not yet completed and was somewhat at

arms-length, however there were examples of where lived experience had influenced policy. It was noted that there was a huge amount of learning to be taken from this work.

- ii. It was difficult to quantify outputs but further information was requested to come back to the Committee once the evaluation had been completed.
- iii. In terms of the phases outlined, it was anticipated that elements would be embedded by January but that there would be more to come thereafter.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and agreed that a further update be brought back to a future meeting.

27 **NORTH EAST COMBINED AUTHORITY INITIAL BUDGET PROPOSALS AND CORPORATE PLAN**

Submitted: Report of Senior Governance Officer and Scrutiny Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Gillespie, Director of Finance, introduced the report which set out the initial budget proposals for the proposed North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA).

In presenting the report J Gillespie highlighted the following key points:

- Areas outstanding that were being worked on were around the pension fund contributions and what they would look like. Also, a prudent assumption was taken on staff turnover.
- Work has been undertaken to set out the overarching objectives in terms of the approach to developing an overall investment strategy for NEMCA.
- In terms of the draft overall investment fund, indications of those known revenue and capital streams of funding until 2029 were provided and a breakdown of different funds and North of Tyne commitments.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. In response to a question regarding the deliverability around transport it was confirmed that there were current clear indications for future years, however they had not been built in yet until transport funding levels had been confirmed.
- ii. Initial budget proposals for NEMCA had been taken to NTCA Cabinet and NECA Leadership Board for approval as the existing governance arrangements. Further consideration of the budget proposals would be taken by the first meeting of the new NEMCA Cabinet, expected to be in June 2024.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Examined and considered the North East Mayoral Combined Authority 2025-2029 Initial Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Proposals, which were submitted to and approved by NTCA's Cabinet and the NECA Leadership Board on 28 November 2023.
- b) Referred its comments to the Director of Finance in relation to the initial proposals to be taken into account in formulating the final proposals.
- c) Agreed to convene a budget workshop to be held on 16 January 2024 to enable members of the Committee to examine in more detail the final budget proposals.

- d) Invited members of the North East Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Transport Committee's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to attend the workshop.
- e) Authorised the Chair and/or Vice Chair of the Committee, to formulate the wording of any observations and/or recommendations arising from the workshop for submission to the NTCA Cabinet to be held on 30 January 2024.

28 **Q2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

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

J Gillespie (Director of Finance) presented the report to inform Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 2023/24 NTCA second quarter budget position. The report highlighted the forecast financial position for the Corporate, Investment Fund, Brownfield Housing Fund and Adult Education Budget.

In presenting the report J Gillespie highlighted the following key points:

- The main variations in relation to the corporate budget were due to additional staffing budget, funded through additional grant income.
- Investment Fund at the end of September showed the total committed programmes and allocated funds was just over £154m. The period end spend was £55m, with the ambition to spend £100m by this financial year end. It was acknowledged that there were a lot of projects now in full delivery so there was confidence the level of spend would be achieved.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report on the 2023/24 Q2 NTCA Budget Monitor Report and appended Mid-Year Treasury Management Report which was presented to Cabinet on 28 November 2023.

29 **SCRUTINY PROTOCOL FOR ENGLISH INSTITUTIONS WITH DEVOLVED POWERS**

Submitted: Report of Senior Governance Officer and Scrutiny Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

M Robson introduced the report which set out details of the Scrutiny Protocol for English Institutions with Devolved Powers ('the Scrutiny Protocol') and how the guidance might be adopted locally.

In presenting the report M Robson highlighted the following key points:

- The protocol set out the government's expectations of scrutiny in combined authorities and included 18 key principles of good scrutiny.
- The protocol was not statutory guidance but government would expect that combined authorities and scrutiny committees would be adhering to the principles.
- The protocol provided an opportunity for early consideration and comment and there would be further opportunities to look at it during the workshop in January.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. Members were keen to see effective scrutiny arrangements built into NEMCA and welcomed the protocol.
- ii. Best practice was highlighted in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire and therefore it was suggested that examples from those areas be shared at the workshop.
- iii. There were potential difficulties in terms of ensuring a geographical balanced membership and concerns were also raised around ensuring the most appropriate representatives were part of the new scrutiny arrangements in NEMCA.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the guidance set out in the Scrutiny Protocol and commented on how the principles might be adopted locally by the NEMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

30 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 1pm in Conference Rooms 1 and 2, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF.