

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 July 2025

(10.00am)

Meeting held in: Stephenson/Armstrong Room, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne

Minutes

Present:

- Councillor Colin Ferguson (Chair)
- Councillor Dot Burnett
- Councillor Steve Cox
- Councillor Richard Dodd
- Councillor Tracy Dodds
- Councillor Steve Fairlie
- Councillor David Francis
- Councillor Jim Montague
- Councillor Tom Redmond
- Councillor John Usher

OSC1/7/25 Apologies for Absence and Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Nick Brown (Councillor Tom Redmond was present as his substitute)
Councillor Adrian Schulman
Councillor Linda Wright (Councillor Steve Fairlie was present as her substitute)
Councillor John McCabe and his substitute, Councillor Fay Cunningham
Councillor Claire Rowntree (Councillor John Usher was present as her substitute)

OSC2/7/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC3/7/25 Minutes

Resolved that:

1. the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 February 2025 be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
2. the notes of the meetings of members of the Committee held on 4 March 2025 and 15 April 2025 be noted.

OSC4/7/25 Appointment of Vice Chair

Resolved that Councillor David Francis be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2025/26.

OSC5/7/25 Delivering for the North East: Year One Delivery and Priorities for Year Two

The Committee met with Henry Kippin, Chief Executive, who was accompanied by Alan Reiss, Director of Operations, and Tobyn Hughes, Director of Transport. They presented an overview of the North East CA's key achievements since its establishment and the election of the North East Mayor in May 2024 and they outlined the Authority's priorities for 2025/26 as set out in its Corporate Plan. The Chair highlighted how this information could help guide the Committee in determining its work programme and in preparing lines of enquiry for future meetings with the Mayor and Cabinet members.

During questioning members explored a range of topics in more detail including:

- a) the means by which the Authority could demonstrate it was having a positive impact, including the development of performance management arrangements;
- b) the impact of shorter term revenue funded programmes such as the Mayor's Opportunity Fund, the establishment of a Child Poverty Reduction Unit and the Bus Fares Cap which could be referenced in demonstrating the immediate benefits of devolution in the North East;
- c) the carbon impact of the Authority's £500m investment portfolio and whether there were carbon budgets or environmental performance indicators attached to each programme;
- d) how the Authority's work in relation to job creation and house building could best be delivered to benefit those already living and working in the region;
- e) the distribution of the Authority's projects and programmes across the seven constituent council areas. If necessary, officers offered to present further information to the Committee on the geographical spread of the Authority's work;
- f) the challenges and opportunities associated with the need to install more electric vehicle charging points;
- g) the opportunities to work collaboratively with local universities to develop and retain talent in the region. It was suggested that the Committee may wish to explore this topic in more detail with representatives of the business and education sectors as part of its future work programme;
- h) the limits of the Authority's powers and influence particularly in relation to Education and Health Care Plans and national rail fares;
- i) the support the Authority could provide for the development of the quayside and town centre areas of Gateshead; and
- j) how the shift towards long term continuous transport funding settlements would enable the Authority to co-design and deliver strategies to improve the safety of ensure the transport system recognised that women, girls and other vulnerable groups must feel safe if the network was to be truly accessible.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and for answering members' questions. He reflected on a number of key themes to emerge from the discussion and suggested that he, the Vice Chair and Scrutiny Officer give further consideration to how the following topics might be incorporated into the Committee's future work programme:

- a) the Education Improvement Programme;
- b) installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure;
- c) assessing the impact of the Authority's work in all parts of the region's geography;
- d) the retention of skills in the region;
- e) delivery of large regional infrastructure projects, such as the development of Gateshead Quays
- f) assessing the overall impact of the Authority's programmes and projects on the environment and reducing carbon emissions; and
- g) delivery of the Authority's equality, diversity and inclusion objectives and in particular the safety and security of women, girls and other vulnerable groups.

It was **agreed** that:

1. the North East CA's key achievements since its establishment in May 2024 and its priorities for the next year as set out in its Corporate Plan be noted; and
2. the Chair, Vice Chair and Scrutiny Officer give further consideration to the key themes to emerge from the discussion as set out above and how these might be incorporated into the Committee's future work programme.

OSC6/7/25 The Regional Approach to Fulfil Ambitions for the North East Visitor Economy

The Committee met with Henry Kippin, Chief Executive, to examine proposals to redesign and reconfigure NewcastleGateshead Initiative Ltd (NGI) as a new regional body for the delivery of regional visitor economy activity. At its meetings in March and June 2025, the Cabinet had agreed high-level principles underpinning a new regional approach to fulfil its ambitions for the North East visitor economy. The Cabinet had agreed to evolve NGI into a new regional tourism organisation with £1.55m of funding from the Investment Fund to support its transition to a new regional body delivering regional visitor economy activity. Cabinet would receive a further report later this year regarding the outcome of organisational development work to develop an operating model appropriate for the efficient and effective delivery of its functions, proposed next steps and implications for further future investment. The Committee were invited to examine the proposals and to provide comments and observations which may help inform and shape the development of a regional visitor economy body.

During questioning it was noted that further legislation would be required to allow the Authority to introduce a 'tourist tax' and further work would need to be undertaken to obtain the evidence necessary for Cabinet to make an informed decision. It was suggested the Committee could assist in developing policy in this area.

Officers confirmed that the reconfigured body would be re-branded with a different name and launched in the Autumn of 2025.

Members highlighted a number of opportunities for the development of the regional visitor economy including:

- a) the value of a regional body bringing different agencies and partners together to formulate a single consolidated offer of bookable content for visitors;
- b) developing a local visitor offer for crew working on cruise ships visiting the Tyne;
- c) encouraging and directing visitors who may have arrived in the region for one purpose to explore and experience other additional attractions and activities;
- d) encouraging travellers passing through the region to spend time in the region and increase inbound tourism; and
- e) promoting the internal visitor economy ensuring local residents were connected with, and have access to, what is on offer.

The Committee indicated that as the new approach to developing the regional visitor economy began to be delivered it would be interested to examine in more detail the functions and operating model of the new body. It was suggested that such an exercise be undertaken in the Autumn 2025.

It was **agreed** that:

1. the Committee's comments be referred to the Chief Executive to be taken into account as part of the development of a regional visitor economy body and strategy; and
2. the Committee consider undertaking a further scrutiny exercise to examine the functions and operating model of the new regional tourism organisation in the Autumn 2025.

OSC7/7/25 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Committee were presented with an outline work programme for consideration and comment and to identify any other priorities for inclusion in the programme. The outline programme had been prepared in consultation with the Chair of the Committee who in turn had sought advice from the Authority's senior officers. The outline programme was based on:

- a) the Committee holding seven public formal meetings during the year;
- b) each Cabinet Member attending the Committee during the year to present and discuss progress on specific priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and falling within their portfolios;
- c) providing the Committee with opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny so that members may help shape and influence policy development before Cabinet makes its decisions;
- d) those scrutiny exercises previously agreed by the Committee; and
- e) making provision for further additional scrutiny activity which may be undertaken during informal briefings, task and finish groups and standing sub-groups.

The programme would need to remain robust and flexible enough so that the Committee could react to changes within the Authority and so scrutiny can be undertaken on policy development as it evolves. It was therefore proposed that programme be presented to each meeting to provide members with a regular opportunity to review and revise it as necessary and the Chair and Vice Chair be authorised to review and revise the programme between meetings so that the Committee may react and respond to changing circumstances.

It was **agreed** that:

1. the outline Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2025/26 be approved;
2. the work programme be presented to each meeting to provide members with a regular opportunity to review and revise the programme as necessary; and
3. the Chair and Vice Chair be authorised to review and revise the programme as necessary between meetings so that the Committee's may react and respond to changing circumstances

OSC8/7/25 Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting would be held on Tuesday 2 September 2025 at 10.00am in County Hall, Durham.