

North East Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 July 2015

(2.00 - 3.50 pm)

Meeting held Sunderland Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7SN

Present:

Councillor: Wright (Chair)

Councillors: Armstrong, Crute, Dillon, Eagle, Flux, Lower, Meling, Pearson, Pidcock, Snowdon and Wright

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Graham and Ginton (North Tyneside) and Councillor Maxwell (South Tyneside).

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were made.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22 JUNE 2015

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 June 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- i. **LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) Annual Report (Minute 53)** - A response had not yet been received from the LEP in relation to the four items listed at the end of Minute 53, a reminder would be sent. A Member commented that it was important to receive a reply as the information provided at the meeting seemed to be contrary to economic arguments expressed by the Industrial Communities Alliance.

Members suggested that it would be useful if a list of the relevant key plans and strategy documents in use could be provided, with a link to each of the published documents. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to provide a list.

- ii. **Forward Plan and Work Programme (Minute 56)** – In response to Members' comments it was agreed that, in addition to the Terms of Reference of the Committee referred to in the minute, details of the Membership of the Committees of the Combined Authority and a diagram

indicating the structure of Committees would be distributed to Members for information.

4 **TRANSPORT RELATED BARRIERS TO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING - LSTF (LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND) DELIVERY ACROSS THE NECA AREA**

Submitted: Report of the Monitoring Officer (previously circulated copy attached to official minutes) the purpose of which was to provide evidence for the policy review of transport related barriers to education, employment and training. The review would contribute to the North East Transport Plan. The evidence related to projects funded through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and covered the whole of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) area.

The Chair invited officers who were in attendance to present individual reports (Appendices 1-3) which had been prepared to inform the activities across the NECA area.

Ian Jobling, Travel, Planning and Information Officer, Durham County Council gave a brief overview of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) which was a competitive bidding process established in 2010 by the Department for Transport (DfT) with two main objectives: to grow the economy and to cut carbon emissions. Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and Durham areas had all succeeded in being awarded funding. The programme had initially been due to end in March 2015, however, further funding had subsequently been made available for 2015/16, with each area being successful in receiving additional monies.

Northumberland Go Smarter Programme

Sarah Rowell, Senior Projects Officer (Transport), Northumberland County Council introduced the information relating to Northumberland Council's LSTF projects which had initially only related to SE Northumberland area but had been extended in the subsequent 2015/16 project award to rural areas of Northumberland.

Durham LSTF – Local Motion to Work project

Ian Jobling introduced the information relating to the Durham projects. These had originally focussed on the South Durham area and on cross-boundary journeys to Darlington. The additional funding awarded for 2015/16 had enable the project to be expanded to the Durham City area and had therefore included three additional communities.

Members' Questions and Comments

- The Chair welcomed the detail on the range of schemes which had been provided but expressed concerns at the lack of future funding and therefore the sustainability of the schemes developed.
- In response it was explained, that, in relation to schools projects, a legacy of information had been developed. Going forward the level of support provided to schools would be reduced. Each new intake of pupils meant that the messages had to be repeated, encouraging a change in culture required making contact with children at an early stage in their development. Work

would continue with schools but not at the higher level developed during the project.

- Whilst the schemes described appeared to have been successful in engaging with the public, Members were concerned at the lack of availability of future funding which would be crucial to ongoing successes.
- In response to a question on outcomes and whether changes in lifestyle had been achieved, officers indicated that the DfT had specifically excluded using funding to monitor outcomes. Research through 'demonstration towns'; evidence of equipment loans provided, for example, the number of cycle loans (900); anecdotal evidence; information provided in annual reports as well as six monthly 'hands-up surveys all contributed to an understanding of the success of the schemes. Hands-up surveys generally demonstrated an increase/improvement in pupils walking/cycling to school following the engagement work but this was also shown to slip back after the passage of time. Workplace schemes were more difficult to evidence improvements or changes in behaviour because of the relatively small numbers involved (10 employers).
- Further concerns at the lack of monitoring evidence in view of the level of spend on the projects were also responded to. Data was available for the extension to the Go North East Service between Ashington and Cramlington which provided access to Cobalt Business Park and other destinations and had demonstrated a better than average usage. This was expected to result in the service being adopted on a commercial basis. A further example was the use of the Durham annual survey of households, although this provided limited scope to demonstrate 'making a difference on investment' as it involved a relatively small sample of 1000 homes.
- A Member expressed disappointment at the lack of sustainability demonstrated by the 'tail-off' of uptake by school children. He suggested that this would also be likely to apply to the use made of cycle ways during poor weather conditions.
- Investment in Park and Ride schemes, with free parking, was suggested as a more sustainable option.
- The impact of parental choice of schools and the subsequent increased road usage because of the need to transport children to different sites was highlighted as an issue for consideration.
- An officer indicated whilst there would be a reduced resource available to the schools there was expected to be a continuous presence, if a somewhat 'lighter-touch'. Some schools would be better than others at embedding the work undertaken into the culture of the school going forward.
- The Chair indicated that such information would be useful whilst undertaking the review of transport.
- In response to questions relating to the numbers of scooters available, publicity for constituents and efficiency savings generated for the LA7 area. It was confirmed that 30 scooters were available in the wider rural Northumberland scheme. Publicity campaigns and branding had been provided jointly for Tyne and Wear and Northumberland and had included the development of the Go Smarter website and journey planner. Such alignment had generated efficiencies Whilst Durham hadn't developed a scooter loan project there were aspirations to develop a scheme in the Chester-le-Street area and knowledge gained from implementing the Northumberland scheme, (putting in place arrangements for managing the scheme, CRB checking etc)

would be used to support the development of a business case to access funding.

Tyne and Wear Go Smarter Programme 2015/16

Liz Prudhoe, Manager, Adapt North East was in attendance as a contributor to the Tyne and Wear Go-Smarter programme and outlined the projects which had been developed for the Tyne and Wear area. She highlighted that a scooter fund had recently been established for the Hexham area, initially it had only been implemented for rural Gateshead; Go Smarter had for the last 12 months been applied across all of Tyne and Wear; 240 referrals had been received from Job Centre plus or training agencies; work was being done to ensure that where training opportunities were being provided, those individuals offered work were in a position to take up the offer without being restricted by 'access to transport' issues.

Members' Questions and Comments

- In relation to a comment about evidence, the Chair reminded Members that this was the early stages of what would be a year-long review and that there would be further opportunities for evidence gathering, collating of evidence and seeking to achieve a regional view. There was no doubt much to be learned.
- In response to a Member's comment challenging the potential for local authorities to subsidise employers to enable their employees get to work. It was pointed out that the aim was to provide support to those who were furthest away from sources of employment.

The Chair reiterated that the aim of the review related to removal of barriers in relation to getting people into work. She expressed thanks to the officers and Members for their contributions.

5

DEVELOPING A DEVOLUTION PROSPECTUS FOR THE NORTH EAST COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Submitted: Report of the Interim Head of Paid Service (previously circulated copy attached to official minutes) which summarised the key messages which had emerged from the feedback received during consultation on the outline proposals set by the Leadership Board earlier in the year as the basis for engagement with government ministers and other stakeholders to secure greater devolution of funding, powers and responsibilities to the region.

Vince Taylor, Head of Strategy and Performance at Sunderland and a Member of the NECA Economic Development Officers Group was in attendance to introduce the report and update the Committee on developments since the initial proposals had been agreed for wider consultation. This Committee, at its meeting on 24 March 2015, had expressed broad agreement for the initial proposals and strong support for the overall principle of devolution. The consultation exercise had generated a significant level of interest and overall the feedback had also demonstrated strong support with suggestions for an overarching vision, for an ambitious ask of the Government, clarity on governance and a demonstration of the North East's ability to deliver.

He highlighted the progress of the Manchester Devolution Bill, the Communities and Local Government Bill which had been included the Queen's speech and recent discussions when the Leaders had met with Ministers at the Local Government Conference. He also referred to the content of a letter from the Leaders and Elected Mayor which had been sent to Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to confirm the wish to begin detailed devolution negotiations. The letter had also confirmed that they would, alongside these negotiations, consider appropriate models of governance including an elected mayor.

Members' Questions and Comments

- It was hoped that consultation with the electorate would be undertaken on any proposed model.
- The model adopted shouldn't be forced by the Government but decided on the basis of what was best for the region.
- The deal must come first, with funding being devolved with powers, followed by governance arrangements.
- Negotiations with government should focus on devolution with elected representatives listening to the views of local people.
- The views of Scrutiny on this issue should be forwarded to the Leadership Board rather than merely a noting of the report as recommended.
- The Chair responded to comments indicating that although this was very much a party political issue, the scrutiny role should remain 'a-political'. There was no doubt that the Committee had previously shown and would continue to show its strength in dealing with Leadership Board if required.
- In response to a question it was noted that the initial response from government to the letter from the Leaders had been positive. No fixed timetable had been agreed for the negotiations, although they were expected to be conducted early in the life of the current parliament.
- The support of this committee in expressing reservations at the possibility of an elected mayor may be welcomed by the Leadership Board.
- Whilst supporting devolution, a member stressed the need for NECA to be proactive in highlighting the needs and wants of the North East and also expressed reservations at the possibility of having a directly elected mayor in view of the complexities of managing such a large and diverse region.
- Reference was made to the process during the NE Regional Assembly debate which had seen the establishment of a constitutional convention to look at proposals around the form an assembly might take and how it would be funded.
- The need to hold a referendum on the issue of an elected mayor was suggested as a requirement.

The Chair made reference to the 12 main proposals which had been put forward for devolution. If devolution were to progress it needed to be full devolution with autonomy and accountability. She asked whether at this stage there was enough

evidence available to deliver on the model proposed and whether the region would be ready to meet the challenges and responsibilities, particularly in relation to tackling poverty and inequality.

In response, Vince Taylor commented that work had been ongoing since January in relation to building evidence. Work was continuing to refine the 12 key 'asks' of government, the next version was expected to be much simpler. The needs of the people were at the forefront, to increase the access to more and better jobs; access to the availability of longer term funding (Currently funding was unknown after 2016); improvements were needed to better reflect our regional position as a successful trading region. In response to a question concerning the role of the LEP he confirmed that there were no details contained in the Bill which would impact on the powers of the LEP.

In relation to a question on Public Health and Social care integration, consideration would be given to the possibilities across all areas of public service. The relationship between physical and mental wellbeing in relation to long-term unemployment were well recognised and would be taken on board, for example in working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to tackling the barriers to employment, overcoming those barriers and moving people forward.

Following the discussion it was agreed that position of the Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee was as follows:-

- The Devolution Deal should take precedence in negotiation with Government and issues of Governance within the LA7 should follow;
- The Deal must reflect the views of the public across the LA7, with the expectation of a referendum being held if this is dependent upon an elected mayor role;
- If an elected mayor role is part of the Deal, the north east region should be able to determine the extent of the role; and

that a letter would be sent to the Leadership Board setting out the position of the Scrutiny Committee as above.

6 **FINANCIAL MONITORING UPDATE - OUTTURN 2014/15**

Submitted: Report of the Chief Finance Officer (previously circulated copy attached to official minutes) which provided information about the Combined Authority's 2014/15 financial outturn, a summary of the financial monitoring information for 2015/16 and an update on the budget process for 2016/17.

The Chair indicated that the Chief Finance Officer was unable to attend the meeting, however, any questions Members wished to raise could be submitted to Paul Woods for a response to be made by him.

Following a discussion on the merits of deferring the item, the suggestion to defer the report was not supported.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

7 FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted: Report of the Monitoring Officer (previously circulated copy attached to official minutes) which incorporated a copy of the NECA Forward Plan and the updated Scrutiny Annual Work Programme for 2015/16. It provided Members with an opportunity to consider the items for the current 28day period and to review the work programme.

A Member made reference to the issues around child poverty and the growing impact of inequalities. She suggested giving consideration to the findings of the North East Child Poverty Commission later in the year, particularly in relation to general health and wellbeing.

A Member also welcomed the information as to ongoing reviews of constituent Authorities as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan and updated work plan be received and noted and a report to the Committee be invited in due course from the North East Child Poverty Commission.

8 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

2.00pm on 8 September 2015 - Gateshead

9 REPORT TEMPLATE

The Chair suggested and it was agreed that all reports submitted to the Committee should in future include a glossary of terms.