

North East Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 September 2014

(2.00 - 3.00pm)

Meeting held Council Chamber, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead

Present:

Councillors: Wright (Chair), Armstrong, Eagle, Glindon, A Lower, Maxwell, Meling, Pearson, Snowdon, Stradling and Tyler

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Daley, Dillon and Graham.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

17 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 30 JULY 2014

The minutes of the last meeting held on 30 July were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising

Minute No 11 – Work Programme – members commented that although the Overview and Scrutiny Committee understood that it could not oblige lead members to attend, it should be emphasised that it was important for the committee to meet with those responsible for the themes and that they should attend wherever possible.

Committee was informed that Councillor Davey was unable attend this meeting but the Head of Policy and Research from Northumberland County Council, Janice Rose, was in attendance to lead on the briefing session (following the meeting).

18 THE APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS TO THE COMMITTEES, JOINT COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Submitted: Report of the Monitoring Officer regarding the Appointment of Substitute Members to the Committees, Joint Committee and Sub-Committees of the Combined Authority (previously circulated and copy attached to official minutes).

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which provided information to enable the Committee to consider whether there was a need for substitute members to the Committees. Consideration of the report would also enable appropriate recommendations to be submitted to the Leadership Board when considering future changes to the constitution of the NECA.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the approach taken so far with regard to the Combined Authority was that substitute members had not been identified for subcommittees in accordance with the view taken that the Authority should be streamlined and efficient; at the moment only the Leadership Board had appointed substitutes as required by the Order creating the Authority. The introduction of substitutes would require changes to the Constitution which would require a decision by the Leadership Board. Should such changes be sought by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a report could be submitted to the Leadership Board explaining why the Committee considered substitutes to be necessary when the constitution was reviewed in October/November.

Members had briefly considered this at the last meeting and went on to have a detailed discussion. Member comments and suggestions with regard to possible substitutes were made as follows:-

- Although one member had not been present at the last meeting, he stressed that it was vitally important the Combined Authority had substitutes, especially considering all the other meetings he attended had substitute members.
- It was considered that although substitutes would be favourable, it could be useful to see how the committee worked going forward. This would provide for further consideration of what was going to be scrutinised and build up trust whilst retaining the current structure.
- It was pointed out that this was only the second meeting of the committee and that it would be prudent to leave it as it was established; the issue could be readdressed later if there were problems going forward rather than altering the constitution now.
- The quorum for the committee was tight at 10:14 and this could be an issue in the future. It was proposed that each local authority had only one substitute member and that this should be written into the constitution now – there was no requirement for 14 substitutes.
- As the committee would have a complex agenda it was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny may not be suitable for substitutes. Appointed members were responsible for more than making up the voting numbers.
- Another member was in favour of substitutes and liked the idea of one per authority. Substitutes could be briefed and up to date at short notice.
- Nominated substitutes were considered to be very helpful for continuity reasons.
- The Chair commented that on major decisions a vote could be required and that the original constitution may not have fully considered the substitute issue.

It was proposed and seconded that the issue of committee substitutes should not be pursued at this time but should be kept under review

An alternative proposal was made that steps were taken to go ahead with one substitute per authority however this was not seconded and therefore did not proceed further.

Following a vote, the proposal was carried on a majority and it was:-

RESOLVED – That:-

- No action be taken in relation to seeking substitutes and putting an amendment to the Leadership Board in the short term; and
- This should be revisited in the future during the annual review of the constitution.

19 **DEVELOPING THE WORK PROGRAMME**

Submitted: Report of Scrutiny Officer to provide members with the opportunity to implement a work programme for the Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15 (previously circulated and copy attached to official minutes).

The work programme would allow the committee to have an overview of all performance, decision-taking and developments within the NECA, as well as being focused and flexible to allow for new issues emerging through the year.

The NECA Scrutiny Committee would obtain work programme items from the following sources:

1. Topics submitted by Members (as below):-
 - Transport
 - Employment and Transport
 - Rationalisation of ticketing arrangements on public transport
 - Taxi harmonisation
 - Pothole project: making our roads better
 - Best practice
2. The Budget and Policy Framework
3. The Forward Plan
4. The Three Thematic Leads

Briefing sessions would be held on each theme and each lead member would be invited to attend the relevant session.

Topics selected could be for a review or scrutiny and the former should support the NECA in meeting its strategic priorities. Final recommendations would be made with a view to improving services and influencing strategic decisions.

The current meeting schedule was set out in the report, although it was acknowledged that further meetings and evidence gathering sessions were likely to be necessary. Accordingly, and because of the budget timeline, a further meeting of the Committee would now be held at 2:00pm on Wednesday 15 October, to meet the requirements of the consultation to feed back to the Leadership Board.

It was recommended that the Scrutiny Committee consider the proposed topics to be included in the work programme for 2014/15 and endorse the programme, subject to new and emerging issues arising throughout the year.

Members discussed possible topics for inclusion in the work programme and comment as follow:-

- That the pothole project could benefit all seven local authorities and it was possible that there could be financial advantages by working together.

Moving on to the proposed topic of taxi harmonisation:-

- This was a topic that should be looked at strategically with a view to coming up with a sub-regional approach to harmonisation of procedures and building on the experience of Durham.
- Councillor Lott (Chair of the Tyne and Wear Sub-committee) had proposed the harmonisation of procedures as a topic for the Work Programme..
- It was understood that the government was going to rationalise the system and caution was needed to ensure all work was aligned.
- It was suggested that the Leadership Board should push for a national scheme as there were strict limitations to what could be done locally.
- There were conflicting views about waiting until the new legislation came out, as it was argued that harmonisation could give more control and have a significant impact on the public.
- Some members considered that that the topic areas of taxi harmonisation and the pothole project would be better explored after the Transport Briefing Session in December.
- It was also considered that subjects should not be ignored because they were too big or contentious.

The Scrutiny Officer was asked about advantages of undertaking a harmonisation review. She suggested that it would be useful to see what legislation came forward and said that that often complex topic areas were referred to scrutiny because of their nature and also that the topic not may fulfil the transport brief of the Leadership Board.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposed topics to be included in the work programme for 2014/15 in principle, subject to new and emerging issues arising throughout the year.

Councillor Lower asked that the minutes reflect that she was against this decision.

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DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

2:00pm, Wednesday 15 October 2014 - Sunderland Civic Centre

2:00pm, Tuesday 9 December 2014 – Newcastle Civic Centre