

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth on Monday, 8 January 2018 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Castle, G.
Grimshaw, L.
Ledger, D.

Parry, K.
Robinson, M.
Roughead, G.
Wilson, T.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Oliver, N.
Wearmouth, R.

Corporate Services and Cabinet Secretary
Economic Development

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

D. Lally
A. Elsdon
S. McNaughton
S. Nicholson

Chief Executive
Service Director: Finance
Strategic Transport Policy Manager
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

33. MEMBERSHIP

Members were advised that Councillor John Beynon has been appointed to the Committee to replace Councillor Jeff Watson.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Swinburn.

35. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman:

- (a) 23 November 2017, and
- (b) 4 December 2017.

36. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Ledger advised the Committee that he had recently spoken to some of the managers of the service to be considered under item 5 (2) on the agenda, but had not discussed the contents of the confidential appendices listed at item 11 on the agenda.

37. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee were advised that the Cabinet would consider the following reports on 9 January 2018. Members were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the reports. Those comments would then be presented to the Cabinet by the Chairman.

(1) Gilsland Station

The purpose of this report was to provide Cabinet with an overview of progress to date in relation to the proposed reopening of Gilsland Station and seek member resolution as to the future support for this project. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

Although members expressed the hope that the rolling stock used on the rail line would be updated to improve journey times, they welcomed the proposal to reopen the station at Gilsland.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee support the recommendations in the report.

(2) Proposal on Shared Services

The purpose of this report was to seek Cabinet approval to establish a shared service with Newcastle City Council for a range of transactional financial services which are currently provided by both councils. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The Committee made the following comments:

- Councillor Ledger acknowledged that the process was commenced by the previous Administration following an approach to the Council from Newcastle City. This was followed by further discussions by the respective Council

Leaders and Chief Executives, together with trade unions. He reported that the Revenues and Benefits staff had previously provided assistance and advice to other local authorities, including a number of London Boroughs. It was anticipated that the proposal to share services with Newcastle would build on those previous experiences. However, he was concerned that following the decision by the current Administration not to go ahead with the move to new headquarters in Ashington and this proposal to relocate Revenues and Benefits staff away from the town, an economic impact assessment had not been undertaken in respect of the effect this would have on Ashington. He requested that a recommendation requiring such an assessment be made to Cabinet and that the Committee receive an update on this issue in due course.

- Members noted that they had received quarterly reports on the work of the Revenues and Benefits section and had regularly congratulated managers on their performance. They were assured that staff would be fully consulted as the proposals were progressed.
- The proposal would not affect the Council's Customer Service offices throughout the county, which would continue to operate as they do now.
- As the roll-out of Universal Credit in Northumberland was anticipated later in 2018, members noted that a shared service would benefit Northumberland County Council staff, as the experience gathered by their Newcastle counterparts would be spread across the service. They were assured however, that this would not discriminate against Northumberland staff in any future restructure of posts, as NCC staff were highly experienced in other areas, as recognised by the Committee in their earlier comments.

The Committee then sought to discuss the confidential appendices to the report under item 11 on the agenda and therefore **RESOLVED** that

- (a) under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the Agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item	Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A
11	3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). 4 - Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because the report contains financial and contractual information which may impact on future negotiations by contracted parties.

The Committee discussed accommodation issues arising from the proposals. Members also suggested changes to the governance arrangements of the Joint Committee to be established to oversee and regulate the shared service:

- the Joint Committee consist of three members from each authority. This would enable a better geographical balance.
- the Chair and Vice Chair should be appointed annually. The Committee noted that elections to both Councils occurred in different years, so this would allow a new administration in either authority to nominate their own Chair or Vice Chair as appropriate. Each authority would still hold the positions for a period of two years.
- the Joint Committee meet at the offices where the shared service is located.

The Committee then **RESOLVED** to return to item 6 (2) on the agenda and conduct the remainder of the meeting in public.

RESOLVED that the Chairman advise the Cabinet of the Committee's comments regarding the proposals and that Cabinet be requested to approve the following recommendations:

- (a) the substantive recommendation be amended as follows:

"It is recommended that the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend that Cabinet, subject to due diligence and appropriate consultation, including consultation with staff, and the completion of an economic impact assessment of the proposals:

- (b) The outcome of the economic impact assessment be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (c) The draft Joint Agreement (Appendix 3) be amended at paragraph 7.1, to state that each authority appoint three members to the Joint Committee and that it will meet at the offices of the shared service.
- (d) The draft Joint Agreement (Appendix 3) be amended at paragraph 8.2, to state that the Chair and Vice Chair should be appointed annually.

38. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

39. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee's Work Programme and Monitoring Report. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

40. INFORMATION REPORT - POLICY DIGEST

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Policy Digest gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members. The report could be accessed through the service finder element of County Council's website at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____