

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 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Monday, 10 June 2019 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chairman in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Cessford, T.
Grimshaw, L.
Parry, K.
Robinson, M.

Roughead, G.
Seymour, C.
Simpson, E.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

OFFICERS

K. Angus

J. Rose
S. Nicholson

Executive Director of HR and OD
and Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Economy and Regeneration
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Press: 1

1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted the following membership and terms of reference which were agreed by Council on 1 May 2019.

Chairman: D. Bawn

Vice Chairman: L. Grimshaw

Quorum - 3

Beynon, J. Cessford, T. Parry, K. Robinson, M.	Roughead, G. Seymour, C. Simpson, E. Swithenbank, I.C.F.
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Terms of Reference

- (a) To maintain an overview of the Council's Annual Budget and Budgetary Management via the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- (b) To review the state of Northumberland and the County Council's activity in delivering its Corporate Plan.
- (c) To maintain an overview of the Council's performance management arrangements; highlighting areas of poor performance and monitoring recovery delivery plans.
- (d) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the Council and Arch (Northumberland Development Co).
- (e) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
 - Corporate Services: Organisational Development, Health and Safety, ICT Strategy, Corporate Governance, Financial Services, Procurement Strategy, Risk Strategy, Shared and Traded Services;
 - Partnership development co-ordination with local organisations;
 - Relationships with external bodies;
 - Regeneration and Economic Development;
 - Strategic Transport Network and Infrastructure;
 - Employability, Skills, and removing barriers to work;
 - Capital Programme and Asset Management, and
 - Support to VCS organisations and the Council's relationship with town and parish councils

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC held on 1 April 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Roughead referred to item 7 on the agenda: Devolution of the Adult Education Budget to the North of Tyne Combined Authority and advised the Committee that he had been appointed to the North of Tyne OSC.

4. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY CABINET DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee of forthcoming reports to be considered by the Cabinet. (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. 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. (Enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The following report would be considered by the Cabinet on 11 June 2019. The Committee were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the report.

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget to the North of Tyne Combined Authority

The Committee were advised that this report would outline to Cabinet the legal process to secure the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) for the academic year 2020/21 onwards. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Members were advised that this arrangement would ensure that, through collaboration with the other councils within the North of Tyne Combined Authority, the education budget was better targeted to extract the maximum benefit for learners in the area. There was also an expectation from the Committee that the North of Tyne Mayor would continue to lobby for more funding for education when the opportunity arose.

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

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

Annual Update Report for Workforce

The purpose of this report was to provide an annual position statement in relation to workforce related areas of assurance, workstreams/associated action plans and progress to date within key areas for Northumberland County Council for the full financial year of 2018/19; to provide members with an overview of the monitoring and actions taken during the period from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 in accordance with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy for employees, and to provide assurance to the Committee that there was provision and monitoring in place to achieve necessary Key Performance Indicators relating to the workforce on an ongoing basis. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The Committee discussed the actions being taken to deal with staff sickness absence. Members noted that incidents of long term sickness could have a significant impact on smaller teams. They were advised that whilst on occasions the use of agency staff to cover such absences was unavoidable, consideration was

being given to establishing an internal staff bank which would offer staff the opportunity to register for work at any department/area within the Council (dependent upon their skills and experience), and this would ensure a more flexible workforce and reduce existing costs.

The Committee agreed that the causes of staff absences could be the result of a number of complex issues, not always connected with work. They were advised that a Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator had been appointed in November 2018 and had launched a number of initiatives to help relieve stress and anxiety including yoga classes, clubbercise, beginners running, weigh and go, genealogy and ancestry sessions, a staff choir and lunchtime health walks. The establishment of a Community Bank had also helped staff who were experiencing financial challenges.

The Committee discussed the establishment of the Workforce Committee consisting of directors and managers, which met regularly to discuss performance, particularly regarding issues around absence management, and sharing experience of issues within their teams. It was felt that due to this additional scrutiny of sickness absence by the Workforce Committee, the level of absenteeism had decreased and it was anticipated would continue to decrease.

Members suggested that future reports should include benchmark data with similar local authorities as appropriate. They also requested a full copy of the 2018 staff survey data.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) an annual update of this report for every financial year be presented to the Committee;
- (c) the whistleblowing data that is contained in the body of the report and the ongoing work to promote a safe environment for staff to raise concerns through various mechanisms across the Council, be noted, and
- (d) the continued use of Safecall across the Council as a mechanism for staff to raise whistleblowing concerns accordingly, be supported.

8. 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 for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

He referred to the Cabinet Forward Plan discussed earlier on the agenda and asked members to note that the following reports may be referred for pre-scrutiny consideration at the next meeting:

- Blyth Relief Road
- Advance Northumberland Limited

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____