

## **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 Thursday, 27 July 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor D. Bawn  
(Chairman, in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Castle, G.  
Grimshaw, L.  
Ledger, D.  
Parry, K.  
Robinson, M.

Roughead, G.  
Swinburn, M.  
Watson, J.  
Wilson, T.

#### **MEMBERS**

Oliver, N.

Portfolio Holder: Corporate Services &  
Cabinet Secretary

#### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

S. Lawson  
S. Mounsey  
A. Stewart  
S. Nicholson

Project Officer  
Revenues and Customer Contact Manager  
Finance Manager  
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

### **1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee noted the following membership and terms of reference for the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC, which were agreed by Council on 24 May 2017.

**Chair: D. Bawn**

**Vice Chair: L. Grimshaw**

**Quorum - 3**

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|---|---|
| <b>Castle, G.</b><br><b>Ledger, D.</b><br><b>Parry, K.</b><br><b>Robinson, M.</b> | <b>Roughead, G</b><br><b>Swinburn, M.</b><br><b>Watson, J.</b><br><b>Wilson, T.</b> |
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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 following minutes, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman:

- (a) Corporate Performance OSC - 16 February 2017
- (b) Economic Growth and Strategic Transport OSC - 21 March 2017
- (c) Corporate Resources and Regional Affairs OSC - 6 April 2017.

## **3. FORWARD PLAN**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the latest Forward Plan of key decisions (July to October 2017). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **4. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS**

##### **Write Offs 2016-17**

The Committee were advised that Cabinet approval would be sought on debt written off during the 2016-17 financial year, and to update Section 6 of the Finance and Contract Rules regarding write off delegations. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Susan Mounsey, Revenues and Customer Contacts Manager, presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee were impressed with the work the Revenues Section undertook to achieve the level of debt recovery it had been able to realise in 2016-17, but appreciated that an amount of debt to the Council was unrecoverable and some write offs were inevitable. Members expressed their thanks to the team for those efforts.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendations contained in the report.

#### **5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS**

##### **5.1 Debt Recovery Update**

Susan Mounsey, Revenues and Customer Contact Manager, presented this report which provided the Committee with information relating to the level of outstanding debt owed to the Council, so that the Committee may be satisfied as to the efficiency and effectiveness of its collection and recovery policies and systems. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Committee made comment and sought clarification on a number of issues arising from the report:

- members were advised that since the report had been published, in respect of the debtors listed in paragraph 8: NHS Customer 2 - one invoice was paid and one was credited off and NHS Customer 4's invoice was credited off; Customer 1's debt would be partially paid and enquiries were ongoing to realise the remainder, and the debt against Customer 3 had been fully repaid;
- in respect to Housing Benefit Overpayments, members requested that the next update include a breakdown of the reasons for the overpayment so that trends could be identified and if practicable, particular focus could be applied to resolving problem areas. It was suggested that tenancy agreements

- should include a warning that tenants must inform the Revenues and Benefits Section of any changes in circumstances as soon as they occur;
- with regard to the table in paragraph 42, members were advised that the final figure in “2016-17” should read “£973,374”, and
- members noted that Universal Credit was introduced in Northumberland in February 2016, but were concerned at the high level of tenants in arrears as a consequence of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap. They requested that this was an issue that should be closely monitored. It was further reported that an all member briefing would be held next Spring ahead of the full roll out of Universal Credit in Northumberland.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) the next report to the Committee include an update on the concerns raised by members regarding Housing Benefit Overpayments and Tenant Arrears.

**5.2 2016-17 Outturn Report**

Andy Stewart, Finance Manager presented this report which was to provide members with the Council’s 2016-17 outturn position for both Revenue and Capital. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The Committee made comment and sought clarification on a number of issues arising from the report:

- the overspend on Out of County Residential placements and on Special Educational Needs home to school transport were highlighted as areas of concern, but members were advised that the Administration was examining the detail and the position was being monitored by the Family and Children’s OSC;
- the proposed saving of £110,000 for depot sharing within Technical Services would not be achieved as the proposal was not going ahead, and
- although the report showed an underspend in the planning services budget, members noted that the figure may not include the cost arising from challenges to decisions on planning application. They therefore requested further details on how those costs were accounted for.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) the information regarding planning challenges be supplied to members.

### **5.3 Performance Outturn 2016-17**

Stuart Lawson, Project Officer presented this report which set out the outturn performance for the financial year 2016-17. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Mr Lawson invited members to contact him to receive a demonstration on how to access and utilise the performance statistics which were available on the Council's website.

Members were disappointed to hear that on waste disposal, recycling levels were down on the previous year and the volume of municipal waste sent to landfill had increased, but noted the explanations set out on page 21 of the report.

The Committee congratulated Mr Lawson and his team on the progress made in developing the online performance system.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **6. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

### **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee's work programme enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **7. POLICY DIGEST**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that this report, which gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members was available through the service finder element of County Council's web site at [www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk).

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

