

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, 28 September 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Grimshaw, L.
Parry, K.
Roughead, G.

Robinson, M.
Swinburn, M.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Oliver, N.

Corporate Services and Cabinet Secretary

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

K. Angus
G. Barnes

Director of Human Resources
Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Manager

A. Mason
S. Nicholson

Finance Manager
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors G. Castle and T. Wilson.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC, held on 11 September 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

14. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the latest Forward Plan of key decisions (October 2017 - January 2018). (Forward Plan enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

15. 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 B).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

16. ANNUAL WORKFORCE REPORT

Kelly Angus presented this report which provided an annual position statement in relation to workforce related areas of assurance, workstreams/associated action plans from the Council's HR/OD Strategy and progress to date within key areas for the full financial year of 2016/17. It also provided assurance to the Committee that there was provision and monitoring in place to achieve necessary Key Performance Indicators relating to workforce matters on an ongoing basis. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Members were assured that robust measures were in place to identify patterns of sickness absence and to assist managers in reducing sickness levels and significant progress had been made over the last 18 months in addressing such issues. However, they expressed concern at the levels of absence due to stress. Kelly Angus advised that the revised Corporate Training Needs Analysis (TNA) which had been developed for all Northumberland County Council staff, referred to in the report, had subsequently been amended to require all staff to receive annual stress awareness training from 2017/18 onwards to ensure that staff and managers were aware of the potential onset and interventions available to support stress management within the workplace.

The Committee were advised that Northumberland County Council benchmarks against some other local authorities, but many were not as stringent as Northumberland in reporting in such detail on workforce matters and therefore there were many aspects which were difficult to benchmark performance against other councils. However, the Committee were advised that there were a number of public sector organisations e.g. NHS which can offer useful comparators.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

17. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee were advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 10 October 2017. Members were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the reports.

(1) Approval of the Business Rates Revaluation Relief Scheme

Graeme Barnes advised the Committee that the purpose of this report was to seek Cabinet approval to recommend to County Council the Business Rates Revaluation Relief Scheme for Northumberland. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Committee welcomed this report and expressed their appreciation to Graeme and his team for their hard work in developing this scheme.

RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the Business Rates Revaluation Relief Scheme for Northumberland.

(2) Approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018-19

Graeme Barnes advised the Committee that the purpose of this report was to seek Cabinet approval to recommend to County Council the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018-19. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

A copy of the Scheme was published with the Committee papers on the Council's website.

RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018-19.

18. FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Committee received a presentation from Alan Mason setting out the budget monitoring position as at July 2017. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Members were advised that although the overall position was a forecast overspend of £4.1m, officers were confident that there would not be a deficit position at year end, as the July position excluded the Adult Social Care Grant of £6.4m, £5m of which would offset existing expenditure (not new expenditure), bringing the overall deficit position into a surplus.

With regard to Central Specialist Services within Children's Social Care, members expressed their concern that due to the shortage of foster carers in Northumberland, many children, particularly with special needs were being cared for out of the county. They felt that this had been the case for several years and wondered why the budget allocated to the service did not reflect that. Nick Oliver reported that the new Administration would examine how more care provision could be provided within Northumberland. He reported that an external review of the

Council's finances had been commissioned and anticipated that the results of that exercise would be completed before the end of the year.

The Committee welcomed the detailed presentation and agreed that they would receive six monthly updates.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

19. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

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

He confirmed that the Committee would receive an update on progress with the Ashington - Blyth - Tyne line.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. 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 web site at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____