

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, 4 December 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Grimshaw, L.
Parry, K.

Roughead, G.
Wilson, T.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Daley, W.

Deputy Leader and Children's Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

A. Johnson
L. Bryden
J. Rose
S. Lawson
S. Mounsey
S. McNaughton
S. Nicholson

Project Director
Senior Manager: Commissioning
Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager
Project Officer
Revenues and Customer Contact Manager
Strategic Transport Policy Manager
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors G. Castle, D. Ledger, M. Robinson and M. Swinburn.

29. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

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

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

30. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

(1) Corporate Plan

This report sought Cabinet endorsement to the draft Corporate Plan 2017-21 as the basis for informing the preparation of the forthcoming Medium Term Financial Plan. The Committee were requested to comment on the draft to inform preparation of the final version. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The Committee were advised that the draft Plan would also be considered by the Local Area Councils at their next round of meetings. The final draft would then be presented to this Committee on 18 January 2018, prior to determination by Cabinet and Council in February 2018.

The Committee welcomed proposals to set up a Northumberland Community Bank, but requested that reference be made in the [Learning] section to “special educational needs and learning disabilities.” The Deputy Leader and Children’s Services portfolio holder advised Members that detailed consultations on the provision of special education needs had taken place across the county and that he supported reference being made to include this provision in the Plan.

There was also discussion regarding the [Enjoying] section with particular regard to the impact that withdrawing the Core Strategy had on resisting over-development in the county. Members from the south-east believed that their areas were more vulnerable to such development, although that view was not universally accepted by all members present. However, the Committee felt that wherever possible, brownfield sites should be developed before the release of any greenfield land and the Corporate Plan should include an assurance that the Northumberland Local Plan would provide a planning framework to protect and preserve all green spaces in the county from developers.

RESOLVED that

- (a) members comments be noted and included in the draft Corporate Plan as appropriate, and
- (b) note be made that the final draft will be presented to the Committee for comment in January 2018.

(2) Debt Recovery Update

The purpose of this report was to provide information relating to the level of outstanding debt owed to the Council, so that the Committee may satisfy itself 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 were advised that an all-member briefing would be held early in 2018 on the roll-out of Universal Credit in Northumberland.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(3) External Inspections

This report summarised the findings of external audit and inspection of County Council services and arrangements over the last twelve months. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

A member requested information on the arrangements for member visits to adult and children's residential establishments.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(4) Ashington - Blyth - Tyne Line

This report provided the Committee with a description of the benefits and strategic economic significance of reintroducing passenger services alongside commercial use of the existing freight lines of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail line; and an update on progress of the project to date thereby allowing the next steps required to take the project through Network Rail's GRIP process to be approved. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

The Committee were advised that subsequent to the circulation of the report, the Department for Transport published a policy paper - "Connecting People: A Strategic Vision for Rail" which included reference to this scheme.

In response to some member concerns regarding level crossing safety across the route, the Committee were advised that all crossings would be subject of a risk audit to ensure that the most appropriate measures were put in place, whether that be barriers or foot bridges.

Members also discussed the possibility of including additional "stops" along the route, but were advised that a number of factors had been considered when choosing station stops, including travel times and catchment areas. A proposal to include a branch line for loading freight trains had not been considered as part of the project, although this could be examined in the future.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) further reports be presented to the Committee as the project progresses.

31. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 outweighed the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A

7 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).

The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because the report contains information on the financial obligations of a third party.

32. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Proposal to Support Nunnykirk School in the form of a Financial Guarantee

This report sought Cabinet approval to a request received from the Nunnykirk Centre for Dyslexia for the Council to provide a financial guarantee to secure a loan. (Report is enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F).

The Committee were advised that report would be considered by the Cabinet on 12 December 2017. Members were invited to comment on the proposals contained therein. Those comments would then be presented to the Cabinet by the Committee Chairman prior to its determination of the report.

The Committee noted and endorsed the Council's main motivation for proposing to act as guarantor for the loan, which was to protect the educational and development wellbeing of the Northumberland Special Educational Needs pupils at the school.

Members also noted that officers from this authority were working with the school to develop a long-term strategic plan.

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

Chairman _____

Date _____