

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 the Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF on Monday, 16 January at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chairman in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Dunn, E.
Murphy, M.

Oliver, N.
Robinson, M.
Taylor, C.

CABINET MEMBERS

Sanderson, G
Seymour, C.

Leader
Deputy Portfolio Holder for
Corporate Services

OFFICERS

Gardner, K.
Greally, R.

Nicholson, S.
Willis, J.

Senior Service Director
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Executive Director of Finance
(Section 151 Officer)

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A. Wallace and R. Wearmouth.

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 October 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M. Murphy declared she was on the board for Advance therefore she would not comment on item 9.

42. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Forward Plan of forthcoming Key Cabinet decisions was reported to the Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions be noted.

43. STRATEGIC CHANGE BUSINESS PLAN

Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council, introduced the report to Committee. Local Government was facing an unprecedented series of challenges over a sustained period. Against a background of severe financial constraint, customer demands were increasing and advances in technology had led customers to expect that their local Council would interact with them in very different ways. In addition, the Council faced increasing pressure on services from an ageing population.

The strategic change programme had set out to redesign the way the Council delivered local public services within the context of the ongoing challenges. The Council could no longer afford to do all the things it had done in the way it currently did them. The aim of the programme was to transform public services so that they were delivered in a more cost-effective and sustainable way. This included how services were delivered to customers, the way the Council was run, and how the Council utilised resources, technology, assets, and people.

This business case set out a package of step changes that would deliver significant financial savings, whilst making the Council more modern, efficient, and fit for purpose. This was not about cutting services, but about transforming the way services were delivered and how the Council operated to achieve the best outcomes for customers and residents.

The business case had set defined seven workstreams as follows:

- Best Services to Customers
- Best Value for Money
- Best in Class Commissioning
- Best Use of Resources
- Best use of Assets
- Best Use of Technology
- Best Talent and Opportunities

The Programme and the business case would support the Council to deliver its three priorities of economic growth, addressing inequalities, and value for money. If the business case was approved, a further report would be brought to Cabinet outlining the authority's approach to the management of change and the proposed governance arrangements for the programme.

Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Kelly Gardner, Senior Service Director: Improvement and Innovation Service were in attendance to assist with queries from members. The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- the Programme was not just about saving money, but also about improving services whilst providing value for money;
- engagement was key to the success of the initiative through consultations with the public, elected members and staff, and in particular, front-line staff who actually deliver services and can best identify what the Council is doing right and where it can be better, and
- the Council would continually look to how it could be more innovative in dealing with problem issues and how data could be used to best effect to inform that process.
- Members were assured appropriate consideration had been taken towards the plan. The need for change was identified over 12 months ago and careful and measured approach had been taken. The work was a programme and would therefore be phased.
- Outside partners were involved in the process to bring specialism within the team and to add additional capacity. Transformation programmes had been implemented before and had not been successful. It was hoped with a delivery partner and consultants there would be more accountability in the programme.
- More detailed proposals would be brought to committees for members to comment on such as innovation from the Council, effective potholing as well as the 'find my street' programme. Members welcomed the opportunity for further scrutiny as the programme developed.
- Members were assured there was dedicated funding set aside for the programme.
- The workstreams within the programme would have key outcomes which could be measured to the progress being made. The progress would be monitored by Kelly's team and the delivery partner.
- Members were assured that the new Chief Executive had been informed of the new programme and welcomed it. The Chief Executive wanted the programme delivered in a timely manner to combat the future financial challenges.
- Officers were keen explore innovation within the Council and took on board Members suggestions of 'hackathons' to engage with stakeholders over certain issues.
- Members acknowledged that the centres of excellence would be where the services had internally streamlined after overlaps in work had been identified. It was hoped that whilst services would be streamlined existing staff would also be upskilled and;

- any impact on jobs would be dealt with by the management of change process. It was hoped that compulsory redundancies would be avoided and the downsizing of teams would be through natural wastage.

RESOLVED to advise the Cabinet that it supported the recommendations contained in the report, subject to consideration of the issues highlighted above.

44. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its Work Programme for the 2022/23 council year.

RESOLVED that this information was noted.

45 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that

- 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
- 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
9	3 - Contains information relating to business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
AND	The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure could adversely affect the business reputation or confidence in the person/organisation, and could adversely affect commercial revenue

46 **TRADING COMPANIES FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE**

Councillor Seymour, Deputy Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, introduced the report to Committee. Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer was in attendance to assist with queries from members. The following comments were made in response to member queries:-

- The holding company had been made dormant rather than dissolved as there was still a potential need for a company in the future therefore, it was more beneficial to retain the company than start a new company.
- As the company was dormant there was no activity or costs recorded.
- Members acknowledged that there had been an improvement in the commercial position at Manor Walks since the pandemic.

RESOLVED that this information was noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____