

**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, 17 April 2023 at 10.00 am.

**PRESENT**

Councillor E. Dunn  
(Vice Chairman in the Chair)

**COUNCILLORS**

Beynon, J.  
Ezhilchelvan, P.  
Oliver, N.

Robinson, M.  
Taylor, C.  
Wallace, A.

**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)

1 member of the press was in attendance.

**46. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors David Bawn, Mary Murphy and Richard Wearmouth.

**47. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **48. 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.

#### **50. BEST: DELIVERY PARTNERS RESOURCING**

Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council, introduced the report to the Committee which had been agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 11 April 2023. Kelly Gardner, Senior Service Director was also present to answer members questions.

The detailed report outlined the resource needed to design, deliver and implement the BEST programme. The programme would ensure the Council worked in a way which was value for money. It was a whole Council approach and would listen to all staff from all levels. It was confirmed that there would be senior member representation on the board, and it was suggested that the portfolio holder for corporate services would take a lead on this.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- It was confirmed that the Committee would receive regular updates regarding progress on the programme. Members would also be able to request deep dive reports should they want to examine particular aspects of the programme in greater detail.
- Members were assured that all work streams in the programme had key performance indicators and project managers who would monitor them. It was acknowledged the importance of assessing financial and non-financial benefits from the programme.
- There would be specific investments needed throughout the programme but all 39 projects had detailed business cases. The programme had been designed to be self-funding and therefore there was no reason to propose that the £9 million would not be sufficient. £2.4 million of the £9 million had been committed already which left £6.7 million to be used when necessary.
- The need to work with all staff was recognised. Officers confirmed that the programme had already started to engage with staff to become ambassadors and had received a lot of interest. A soft launch of the programme was scheduled for Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> Aprils where staff would have the opportunity to engage with executives and project leads.
- It was acknowledged that the project was a massive undertaking which was why it was important to source external consultants and partners to ensure the specialist knowledge needed to design, deliver and embed the programme was there. It was also confirmed that it was expected that staff

would benefit from the consultant's knowledge through working with the delivery partner as well as a learning and organisational development programme.

**RESOLVED** that the programme continued to be monitored throughout its progress.

**55. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2022-23: POSITION AT THE END OF DECEMBER 2022**

Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), was present to respond to member's questions. The report outlined the position of the Council at the end of December 2022 against the budget for 2022-23.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- It was confirmed that the overspend in adult social care was being closely monitored and the situation had started to stabilise.
- Children's Services was a demand led service and it was acknowledged that all local authorities were experiencing similar pressures due to inflation. Preliminary work had already been done through the BEST programme to contain those pressures. The new executive director for children's services had also brought proposals forward to combat the pressures.
- It was acknowledged that the Council usually predict an underspend in the budget however this year there would be an overspend. However, it was acknowledged that the overspend was minimal. The Council had experienced intense inflationary pressures from such things as energy prices and the pay award.
- Recruitment and retention of staff was being examined through the BEST programme. There were several workstreams which were managing this. It was also acknowledged that the job market was improving and more people were returning to work.
- It was agreed that Committee would receive details of the capital programme planning in the future as there was scope for improvement.

**RESOLVED** that the information was noted.

**55. WORK PROGRAMME**

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

Members were reminded that the BEST programme would bring 6 monthly updates on the progress and they could request deep dives on any of the BEST programme projects.

**RESOLVED** that this information was noted.

## 56. 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 outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A</b>
10	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

## 57. TRADING COMPANIES FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), introduced the report to committee. The report gave committee an update on the current financial position of the trading companies

A financial review and a shareholder governance review had been carried out in the hope to produce a sustainable long-term model. The outcomes and proposals from the review were due to be received the week commencing 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and would undergo an appraisal through the shareholders committee. It was agreed that the proposals from the review would be brought to this Committee. It was also proposed that there would be a change to the reports, which would see a broader report that looked wholly at the company. This report would go through the shareholder committee rather than Cabinet.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**Chairman**

**Date**