

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 Meeting Space, Block 1, Floor 2, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF on Monday, 6 December 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor L Dunn
(Vice Chairman in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Ezhilchelvan, P.
Jackson, P.
Murphy, M.

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

OFFICERS

Lally, D.
Lancaster, H.
Greally, R.

McMillan, S.
Nicholson, S.
O'Farrell, R.
Taylor, M.
Willis, J.

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

ALSO PRESENT

Wearmouth, R.

Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder
for Corporate Services

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D. Bawn.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 November 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

20. 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).

Members questioned why the report regarding the trading companies financial performance was in Part II. Members were advised that it had been put into Part II as member's questions regarding the report may have been commercially sensitive. J. Willis assured members that she was working with the Monitoring Officer to structure future reports.

Members were also informed that the report for Ad Gefrin had been withdrawn from the Forward Plan and would no longer be subject to pre scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions be noted

21. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Councillor R Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, presented the report to committee supported by Maureen Taylor, Interim Executive Director Communities and Business. The report outlined how Northumberland Communities Together would allocate the funding to support those who needed it.

The following comments were made in response to questions:-

- Members welcomed the report and expressed thanks to the Council's staff and external partners for their assistance in response to Storm Arwen.
- Members were reminded that a Storm Arwen mailbox had been set up for Councillors to contact the Council regarding concerns for residents.
- Members noted that the government advice had not been received for the previous discussion about the Household Fund. As the fund was not able to be used for Council Tax relief, officers were looking at other options and had created a mechanism that was to be more generous and hopefully help not only those for the 8% but also those just over that.
- With regard to the list of Trusted Partners and Referring Organisations, members were encouraged to help identify those groups not listed, but could assist in identifying individuals in need, to come forward to ensure that the scheme gets maximum coverage.
- Members noted that officers were confident that the Council would be able to provide support at least equivalent to full council tax scheme relief.

- Members noted that further reports, which would include information on how the Council have been able to support residents, would be presented to Cabinet and requested that they also be presented to this Committee.
- Members were reminded that a briefing had been given to all members to inform them about NCT, also NALC had invited M Taylor to make the presentation to Town and Parish Councillors and it was urged that all delegates attend.

RESOLVED the Committee agreed to advise the Cabinet that it supported the recommendations in the presentation, subject to consideration of the issues raised above.

22. NCTA DIGITAL PROGRAMME

Sarah McMillan, Assistant Service Director, presented to the Committee. The presentation gave an overview of the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) digital programme and how it would benefit the County.

The following comments were made in response to questions:-

- Members were assured that support was available to start-up businesses through multiple avenues and would be a specific response to the needs of the individual start-up.
- It was agreed that Degree Apprenticeships were an important part of what the North of Tyne were doing. The connection and links between skills, needs and business needs would be an important part of the programme.
- There was a specific programme of work that was to encourage businesses to embrace technology during the pandemic with specific funding. Due to the success of this programme it would be considered for any potential future funding to support such activity.
- It was agreed that it was important to close the digital divide, especially in rural areas. Suggested clustering would have been picked up by the wider programme. Work was underway on future programmes.

RESOLVED the Committee noted the information given.

23. DEBT RECOVERY UPDATE

Keith Teasdale, Recovery Manager, presented the report to Committee. The report gave an overview of the Council debt recovery and any outstanding debt.

The following comments were made in response to the presentation:-

- K. Teasdale agreed to share with members details regarding the “other debt” listed in the report.
- Members were happy that benchmarking the performance against other Authorities showed that the Council was performing well.
- It was confirmed that the Council responded to customers proportionally and according to circumstances when recovering debt. Members were assured that help would be given to residents who needed it.
- Members noted that sundry debts related to difficult circumstances and decisions and acknowledged the skills needed to administer this service effectively.

RESOLVED that Committee supported the recommendations in the report, subject to consideration of the issues raised above.

24. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its Work Programme for the 2021/22 council year.

RESOLVED that this information was noted.

25. **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

25. TRADING COMPANIES' FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22

This confidential report was presented to the Committee by Jan Willis, Interim Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, supported by Rick O'Farrell, Interim Executive Director of Regeneration. Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Daljit Lally, Chief Executive were also in attendance.

The Committee welcomed the positive financial position of Advance Northumberland.

Members noted that this was the first quarterly report on financial performance of the NEHL Group and understood that further details would be included in future reports as the year progresses.

RESOLVED that the recommendations in the report be supported and to continue to receive quarter reports as they were prepared for the Cabinet.

Chairman

Date