

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, 7 March 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor D Bawn
(Chairman in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

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

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

OFFICERS

Brooks, P.

Earle, R.
Greally, R.

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

Head of Northumberland
Communities Together
Chief Operating Officer
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer
Monitoring Officer
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Executive Director
Executive Director
Executive Director of Finance
(Section 151 Officer)

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P. Jackson.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 February 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

19 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBER'S INTERESTS

Councillor Murphy gave notice that she was in the process of being placed on the board for Advance.

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).

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions be noted

21. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT UPDATE

M. Taylor, Executive Director introduced the report to the committee which was an update on the position from 31st December. P. Brooks, Head of Northumberland Communities Together, gave an overview of the report.

The following comments were made in response to member's questions:-

- Officers confirmed an Easter payment was allowed under the scheme as long as the payment was before the 31st March 2022 as that was when the Household support scheme ended.
- Members were assured that all referrals were triaged individually. The service looked at referral on an individual basis as every situation was different. There was no definitive ceiling to the funding that was provided, the funding provided was dependent on the situation and what the appropriate response was. It was confirmed that families were allowed to access the funding when needed and it was not a one-off intervention. Referrals were given the dignity and choice and where appropriate a cash first approach would be provided where referrals could receive necessary funds within minutes.
- Members were assured that Officers were confident that the allocated fund would be spent to support the residents who needed it. It was confirmed that referrals would not be turned away however it may have been more appropriate to connect them with other funded pathways to get the appropriate support.
- The scheme recognised Local Authorities' role to identify the vulnerable families within the area. It allowed discretion to the service which was important as vulnerability varies.
- The service was working with the Business Intelligence Team to provide ward level data and demographic information on those who had accessed the funding. They had started to map the allocation to create a 'heat map' which would be used to help plan targeted interventions in certain areas. Once the data was in an appropriate format it would be shared with members.
- Members would be provided with data that was related to third party funding from previous schemes identified in return reports.
- Members were reminded there were a number of routes in the service to receive funding. Referrals were received through trusted partners,

Councillors, pop up activities, targeted interventions and directly from the individual.

- Members thanked the Officers for their continued hard work.

RESOLVED members agreed to note and support the recommendations in the report.

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

- (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:-

Agenda Item	Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A
9	3 - Contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information).
AND	The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public 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 – POSITION AT THE END OF DECEMBER 2021

Jan Willis, Interim Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Rick O'Farrell, Interim Executive Director Regeneration and Robin Earl, Chief Operating Officer, Advance Northumberland presented this report to the Committee.

Members were happy to see a representative of Advance attend the meeting and felt the valuation in the report was encouraging. Members were advised that Officers would be attending a future meeting to present a more detailed report regarding Advance.

The financial structure of Advance was to be reviewed to ensure the business model was still fit for purpose. Since the creation of Advance's predecessor organisation, HMRC had changed laws on thin capitalisation rules which were broad enough to affect UK companies. These changes had not been envisaged at the time of creation and therefore needed to be strategically reviewed. If the model was to be changed members were assured that the NEP 1 contingency fund would not be used to facilitate this.

Members requested a further report be provided on the NEHL Group's activities and finances.

The Committee welcomed the report and supported the recommendations.

RESOLVED members agreed to note and support the recommendations in the report.

Chairman

Date