

**Approved Minutes  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

10 December 2019

(10.00 am - 12.00 pm)

Meeting held: Committee Room, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QH

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Chair: Cllr G A Roughead

Vice Chair: Cllr L Wright

Councillors: P Earley, S Graham, M Hall, P Holland, G Stewart and Cllr L Lunn

**19 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**20 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllrs A Lower and Cllr S Dungworth; Cllr Dunn attended as a substitute for Cllr Dungworth.

**21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Earley declared an interest in agenda item 8 (Returnship Programme) as a Trustee at North Tyneside Carers Centre and agenda item 9 (Budget Monitoring Q2 report) in respect of his prior appointment as a NTCA Cabinet Member and attendance at Cabinet when the budget was agreed.

**22 AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 OCTOBER 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**23 MAYOR OF THE NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY, MAYOR DRISCOLL - UPDATE**

The Mayor had previously provided a briefing note, a copy of which was circulated and attached to the Official Minutes.

Mayor Driscoll attended the meeting and addressed those present. His comments included:

- Considerable progress has been made in respect of inward investment and detailed discussions have taken place with a view to future investment. Contracted projects were forecasting the creation of 1122 jobs.
- The Returnship programme which will help and support those seeking to return to work.
- Climate Change and the Citizens assembly. The assembly will gather individuals interested in climate change on a random basis ensuring a broad mix of people. Meetings have taken place with Cabinet leads in North Tyneside and Northumberland and proposals to address climate change were progressing.
- A brief update was provided in respect of the people's bank.

Mayor Driscoll responded to questions which included:

- The Mayor addressed a question as to whether young people will be involved in the Citizens' Assembly explaining that there are companies who select participants ensuring a representative group of residents by using a variety of methods which starts with royal mail listings.
- A member asked the Mayor to explain his response to the growing local media criticism concerning the climate crisis. In responding the Mayor stated that the scope of the climate crisis was well beyond the powers of the authority and the three constituent local authorities. He reminded members of the high volume of vehicles used everyday to get people to work, inadequate transport links to reduce that and the number of old houses in the area where the heating escapes through un-insulated walls and roofs. He added that central government should provide funding for actions such as tree planting and clean transport.
- Responding to a question in relation to rail connectivity the Mayor explained that proposals have been submitted to government in respect of the Ashington-Blyth-Newcastle line.
- The Mayor was asked if a people's bank would look to provide ATM machines in those communities where they have been removed. In response he explained that a people's bank would probably use satellite premises and technology in communities to enable the public to interact with staff. Rural communities also faced problems with a) cash storage and b) the risks involved transporting cash to the nearest bank for deposit.

The Chair thanked Mayor Driscoll for attending and addressing the meeting.

## 24 CABINET MEMBER(S) - UPDATES

### (a) Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

Cllr Pickard had previously provided a briefing note, a copy of which was circulated and attached to the Official Minutes.

Cllr Pickard provided a verbal update on his portfolio highlighting the following points:

- Investment Funding totalling £13.9 m has been committed to deliver a variety of projects.
- Investment Fund used to lever in additional private sector funding.
- Pipeline of inward investment proposals in progress.
- The Investment Fund is performance monitored.
- Upcoming milestones to reach; launch of North of Tyne Growth Fund and North of Tyne Rural Growth Fund; investment proposals to support key sectors coming forward for decision.

Cllr Pickard responded to queries raised by the committee:

A member raised a query about the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and concerns raised by some current providers regarding distribution of funding; the cost of managing the budget and the duplication of roles and associated concerns regarding potential redundancies. In response Cllr Pickard explained that there had been discussions with 3 of the leading providers; those discussions were still progressing.

Reference was made to the Returnship project and assurance was sought that where possible training will take place in a variety of locations to improve accessibility and there will be opportunities to resume professional qualifications.

Members were advised that more detailed information on how the fund would be distributed and the cost of managing the budget in response to questions raised would be circulated after the meeting.

The Chair thanked Cllr Pickard for attending and addressing the meeting.

### (b) Cabinet Member for Business Competitiveness

Cllr Forbes had previously provided a briefing note, a copy of which was circulated and attached to the Official Minutes.

Cllr Forbes provided a verbal update on his portfolio highlighting the following points:

- Some business sectors in the economy were growing and developing faster than other areas such as digital, Offshore Subsea and Energy; life sciences such as aging, Climate Emergency and associated economic opportunities including offshore wind, low carbon energy resources and housing retrofit.
- Uncertainty within the business sector in respect of future trading due to the likelihood that the U.K. will leave the European Union. The north east region was the biggest exporter of goods to Europe.
- Ensure that project plans are well developed, and that the workforce has the necessary skills for industries of the future.

Cllr Forbes responded to queries raised by the committee:

In response to a request for an example of partnership working/best practice across the 3 North of Tyne constituent authorities Cllr Forbes highlighted the work in relation to the digital economy and the strong economic opportunities such as new technologies associated with social care.

When asked to provide an example of best practice that stands out nationally Cllr Forbes explained that the NTCA needed to add value, it wasn't about replacing what the constituent authorities did, and also ensuring that it does not duplicate projects/programmes provided by the 3 constituent authorities individually. Members have built a good partnership/relationship, bringing their combined strengths, enabling members to consider and understand the needs of both the urban and rural areas and to not be territorial.

The Chair highlighted the good working relationship between members and officers.

A member asked what the combined authority was doing to promote its work both nationally and internationally. Cllr Forbes outlined the major sporting and cultural events that have taken place in the region such as the North of Tyne stage of the Tour of Britain. Culture and tourism was also a significant employment sector and events which attract visitors, income and media coverage can also help dispel the outdated stereotype of the region.

Cllr Forbes responded to a query as to whether the combined authority had developed a viable business programme if the UK leaves the European Union. He explained that a team of officers constantly monitored events, held regular dialogue with people and were ready to act when needed.

A member asked about 'green' jobs within the offshore industry and what the combined authority are doing to attract employment opportunities for people in the region. Cllr Forbes spoke about projects such as the big opportunities from the proposed Doggerbank wind farm; the cables needed to secure the windmills which will be made in the North of Tyne area and housing retrofit.

The Chair asked Cllr Forbes about partnership working in relation to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth partnership and how he kept himself updated on those projects which were within the North of Tyne Combined Authority's area. In responding Cllr Forbes commented that he did and also on projects of the Local

Enterprise Partnership and the Northern Powerhouse, explaining that there were always opportunities for partnership working that will benefit the region.

The Chair thanked Cllr Forbes for attending and addressing the meeting.

## 25 **THE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP AND THE STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN**

Submitted: Report of the Head of Strategy and Policy, North East Local Enterprise Partnership (previously circulated and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

R Baker gave a presentation in respect of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) providing an overview about the region's economic ambitions, the priorities set out in the SEP and the role of the North East LEP in co-ordinating and facilitating its delivery.

During the presentation he gave a brief introduction to the LEP and some of its activities, explaining that it is a partnership responsible for strategic economic leadership. The LEP draws together 9 Business leaders, the Leaders of the 7 Local Authorities and representatives of the 4 universities and 9 colleges in the region. Members received information on funding and investment; the North East Strategic Economic Plan (More and Better Jobs) and the key targets within the Plan and the Five programmes of delivery.

- Members requested that the presentation be circulated after the meeting.
- A member asked if the involvement of the combined authority was seen as positive and whether Local Enterprise Partnerships locally, regionally and nationally do as much as possible to promote their work. In response R Baker explained that the LEP had been involved with the creation of the NTCA and was supportive although their preference was that it should cover a larger geographical area. The LEP works and collaborates with the combined authority to promote the area and encourage economic growth. He added that the LEP was the most active on social media in the country and had published a video that was produced to help change pre-formed views of the region.
- A member referred to the presentation slide about More and Better Jobs and the target that 93% of jobs will be in the 'better' category and asked which business sector the jobs were in and whether they were across the employment spectrum. R Baker explained that the vast majority of new employment opportunities happen within the labour force as a result of 'natural churn' with people leaving the labour market through retirement, or moving to new roles, and new people joining the labour force. By setting a target that 70% of the new jobs should be 'Better', and then defining them as professional, managerial and technical, the Plan is aiming to see more leadership and higher productivity roles created as these offer better opportunities and enables the region to retain higher skills, and indicate a wider improvement in the quality of the economy. Growth has been seen in areas like manufacturing, digital and professional service sectors in both public and private sectors, as well as in transport and construction. Some

indicators are measured comparatively with other parts of the UK to enables us to test whether we are closing gaps with the rest of the UK.

- Reference was made to the current skills gap and the skills agenda and assurance sought on how the LEP will coordinate its vision in respect of improving skills with that of the combined authority's vision, the devolution of the Adult Education Budget and the Employability and Skills Programme

The Chair thanked Mr Baker for attending and addressing the meeting on the North East Strategic Economic Plan.

## 26 **RETURNSHIP PROGRAMME**

Submitted: Report of the Head of Inclusive Growth (previously circulated and a copy attached to the Official Minutes).

Consideration was given to the report which provided a detailed description of the Returnships project including the context, purpose, mechanism and timelines.

L Mills introduced the report advising that this was an opportunity for the committee to carry out some pre-scrutiny on the project. She explained that the combined authority will take the lead and work with agencies to provide support to residents who are disengaged from the labour market.

L Mills responded to questions from the committee:

- A member referred to paragraph 1.5 in the report and raised concerns regarding duplication, the creation of additional staffing posts at the combined authority which could be detrimental to those already employed by other agencies. In response L Mills explained that the Returnships project was taking a collaborative approach and officers have been working closely with other authorities and career organisations to avoid duplication and ensure value for money.
- Reference was made to the growth industries within the North of Tyne area and further assurance was sought that consideration will be given to taking training out to people in their communities rather than expecting people to travel. Responding to the question L Mills explained that officers have begun working with some small to medium enterprises regarding their involvement. She acknowledged that trainers should be accessible to residents and willing to support them.
- Responding to a query as to whether young carers will be included in the Returnships project L Mills stated that work will be undertaken in partnership with carer organisations and, there was an expectation that they will be able to target individual needs by offering specific job experience.
- L Mills was asked to confirm whether opportunities will be given to those who need refresher training and recent experience to resume their previously held existing professional qualifications, for example social workers. L Mills reassured members that options to address the concern will be investigated.

**RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the Returnships project and requests the Head of Inclusive Growth as part of the work on the Returnship project:

- i) Investigates opportunities to allow people to access work experience to allow them to regain their professional qualifications after a period of absence.
- ii) Ensures that consideration is given to the provision of training in communities thereby reducing the need for residents with caring responsibilities or limited incomes to travel

27 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

18 December 2019.