

North of Tyne Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19 March 2024

(1.00 - 3.02 pm)

Meeting held: Conference Rooms 1 and 2, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF.

Minutes

Present:

Chair: Councillor B Flux

Councillors C Ball, S Fairlie, J Harrison, L Marshall, J Montague, C Seymour, G Stone and L Wright

31 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and brief introductions were made.

32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

34 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

35 BROWNFIELD HOUSING FUND

Submitted: Report of Principal Housing and Infrastructure Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Dame N Redfearn (Cabinet Member for Housing, land and development), introduced the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which provided an overview of the Brownfield Housing Fund programme and its progress to date, and how the programme will be extended and developed as part of the transition to the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA).

H Orton (Principal Housing and Infrastructure Manager), presented the report and highlighted the following key points:

- Since the last update was brought to Committee five schemes had been approved to the value of £10.8m, unlocking 500 units in North of the Tyne
- The programme now extends across the southern areas of the new NEMCA, however reporting to government is against the original geography and targets
- Across the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) Area, £29.6m of £31.8m is approved and remaining in the pipeline. Across the South of Tyne area, £16.8m of schemes are in the pipeline, with almost £6m approved
- The project assurance process has shown that the schemes reviewed and contracted all offer good value for money, are providing jobs and apprenticeship opportunities in communities, while tackling vacant properties and associated anti-social behaviour
- Schemes completed or in progress were shovel ready from the beginning of the programme. Due to the nature of the other sites in the programme there are now some delays, and work is taking place with councils and project applicants to bring these forward
- To mitigate against possible delays, overprogramming was built into the project to ensure the requirements set out for the fund can be met
- The next annual report will be ready for April / May 2024, and the evaluation programme will include the programme extension and additional funds.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. North Tyneside had bought properties from poor landlords operating in the private rented sector. These properties have been refurbished and brought back into the council's portfolio
- ii. Work is taking place with Karbon Homes to build new affordable housing
- iii. Good progress across the programme has been made given the delays and changes that have been experienced
- iv. NTCA is adding value to the programme through its strategic relationship with Homes England which is enabling more complex sites to be brought forward. Also, the new trailblazer deal includes affordable housing grant that will be routed through NTCA who will work with providers to make sure investment goes to those places that need it
- v. Revenue funding attached to the programme has been used to support councils to build business cases
- vi. Officers are confident that NTCAs record in discharging brownfield funding compares well with other Mayoral Combined Authorities, and the target outputs for the programme will have been achieved when the scheme ends
- vii. The programme is effectively proving a concept that can then be used to address housing needs more widely. The vehicle to achieve this is the Strategic Place Partnership that will have a map of housing need across tenures and

- access to funding streams. NTCA is not the planning authority – the devolution deal contains a commitment to collaborate with the planning authority
- viii. Officers are confident that the pipeline includes affordable homes, meets net zero and includes various tenures, with the private and social housing sector providers involved in construction
 - ix. There is a fixed cost-benefit that the programme must show. The cost-benefit ratio used takes into account the whole economic benefit achieved, including the wider environmental benefits. The cost-benefit ratio will be shared with the Committee
 - x. The programme does not include provision for supported housing, this will be addressed through the Strategic Place Partnership
 - xi. Policy commitments made by the North of Tyne Cabinet will carry forward into the new NEMCA, and this includes the programme pipeline and the way the funding is discharged.

RESOLVED – That:

- i. The contents of the report be noted
- ii. The sites awarded Brownfield Housing Fund funding and the impact to date be noted
- iii. The award of an additional £17.4m Brownfield Housing Fund resources to support delivery in Local Authority areas to the South of the Tyne within the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority be acknowledged and progress to date be noted
- iv. Details of the cost-benefit ratio used to evaluate proposed schemes for the Brownfield Housing Fund programme be circulated to members of the Committee
- v. The programme be highlighted for further scrutiny within the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority to ensure that the programme delivers value for money and that the aspirations of the North of Tyne Combined Authority move forward into the new NEMCA.

36 **DELIVERING DEVOLUTION TOGETHER - FINAL REPORT OF THE NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY**

Submitted: Report of Chief Executive (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Dr H Kippin (Chief Executive) introduced the report which set out the achievements of the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) and the work of the Mayor and Cabinet during the lifetime of NTCA. The report included information on how NTCA is delivering its Vision through its portfolios of work and cross-cutting themes, and annual updates from the Inclusive Economy Board, the Housing and Land Board and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Group.

In presenting the report Dr H Kippin highlighted the following key points:

- The report normally reviews the past year but in this case looks back at the lifetime of the Combined Authority, reflecting on its successes but also looking to the future
- All of the data and information in the report is publicly available
- Key themes from the report are:

- The cross-party and cross-sector nature of the work of NTCA and the effectiveness of the collaborative approach taken
- The context of NTCA, which was operational for less than 12 months before Covid-19 lockdown began
- Building for the future and working with the wider region for the whole of the North East
- A way of working that has successfully navigated the Gateway Review and Assurance Framework that were assessed by Government. Achieving Great Places to Work status also reflects well on the workplace culture.
- The need to continue working collaboratively and to use the new devolution settlement to tackle structural barriers such as transport.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. The reference to new homes in Newbiggin on page 13 of the report will be amended in the digital version to prevent any confusion between Newbiggin Hall, and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea
- ii. The report does not reflect on the challenges the region continues to face, though this is contained in the Investment Plan and Corporate Plan that the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority will receive.

RESOLVED – That:

- i. The final report of the NTCA, Delivering Devolution Together be noted
- ii. The report be amended to prevent any confusion in respect of references to Newbiggin Hall, and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

37 **POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION**

Submitted: Report of Senior Programme Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Unthank (Senior Programme Manager), introduced the report and presented a presentation that was tabled at Committee about the completion of the North of Tyne Combined Authority's (NTCA) Poverty Truth Commission (PTC).

During the presentation J Unthank highlighted the following key points:

- The regional charity Children North East (CNE) was commissioned to undertake the work and this has been delivered over the last two and a half years
- NTCA was the first Combined Authority to develop a PTC and it was the first PTC to take place after the Covid-19 pandemic
- Civic, business and commissioners worked together and their messages at the call to action event were very powerful
- The impact the PTC has made is reflected across four themes in the report – Personal, Organisational, Regional, and National:
 - The personal impact was very tangible with involvement in the PTC influencing civic and business commissioners
 - All the organisations at the Call to Action event made pledges about how to take their work forward
 - The organisational pledges taken collectively at a regional level can have significant impact

- Some commissioners have become involved with the national Poverty Truth Network.

Olha Krasovska (Senior Evaluation Specialist), continued the presentation with an analysis of the impact of the work and any lessons learnt; this included positive feedback from community, civic, and business commissioners who were very engaged in the project; there had been a high drop off rate and a low response to the Call to Action indicating a need to improve engagement through the life of other projects; effectively measuring the impact of this project was difficult and this needed to be considered at the outset in future projects; it was important that commissioners represented their communities and efforts to ensure an inclusive cohort should be undertaken.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members the following key points were raised:

- i. A member queried the value of commissioning the report when it was known that the number of commissioners and businesses recruited had been very low. The project had not delivered any real change and represented a poor return in terms of impact.

Officers acknowledged that more could have been done to get grass root organisations on-board with the project and thereby ensure representation from communities. Similarly, the drop-off rate of commissioners reflected a lack of engagement and inclusion stemming from not enabling those that wanted to be involved. This learning will inform future commissioning.

Officers also said that the report does not represent the final product of the project. The commissioners and all those involved throughout the project will take with them the depth of knowledge they have gained, the relationships they have built, and put into practice the lessons learnt.

- ii. A member said that the project had not delivered the outcomes desired. However, this needed to be balanced against the fact that, at the time, NTCA was a new authority taking forward a PTC project over three local authority areas, which was both unique and challenging. The project should be a stepping stone and the learning from it used by the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Officers said the project had been experimental to some degree and that the report identified that a PTC does not work well across a combined authority footprint. Learning from the project could be used to inform PTC projects at a local authority level.

- iii. A member asked whether NTCA had approached commissioners to establish the barriers to their involvement.

Officers said that the project was delivered by CNE and NTCA did not have a direct relationship with the commissioners. CNE had been asked to consult commissioners to understand the barriers to their involvement, but there is little evidence to date this has taken place. However, having a feedback loop is

important and there is a post-project communications plan that requires CNE to contact those involved in the project and gather their feedback.

Officers added that NTCA had a duty of care to ensure that commissioners voices were heard, despite them being unable to be involved in the project to its conclusion. CNE have reflected that the experiences and voices of those commissioners can be seen in the themes described in the report.

Officers also highlighted that there are many child poverty outcomes that are outside the control of local councils and NTCA. However, there is a spread of activity to support people in poverty and achieve better economic outcomes that can be tackled at a combined authority level through skills, jobs, transport and housing.

RESOLVED – That:

- i. Children North East’s final report arising from the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission and NTCAs evaluation be noted
- ii. Members comments be noted to help shape future poverty prevention projects that are taken forward by the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority.

38 NTCA QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITOR REPORT 2023/24

Submitted: Report of Director of Finance (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Gillespie (Director of Finance) introduced the report which set out the forecast financial position for the Corporate Budget and all funding streams as at 31 March 2024, with a snapshot of balances and funding from 31 March 2024 to the establishment of the new combined authority on 7 May 2024. The report also sets out the indicative reserves position on 7 May 2024.

In presenting the report J Gillespie highlighted the following key points:

- The report takes into consideration confirmation of the commencement of the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) and so reflects the extended year end of the 6 May 2024. This brings challenges for officers in terms of year end and finalising accounts, but it doesn’t change what has been delivered
- As with past reports, the key areas of funding are set out and includes brownfield housing discussed by Committee earlier in the agenda
- The report includes reference to work that is progressing in preparation for the new NMECA, such as the Adult Skills Framework.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. The ‘Contribution to Reserves’ described in the report has increased due a surplus on investment income. This is due to the level of interest rates over the last 12 months
- ii. Officers are pro-active in ensuring that all the money received by the Combined Authority is allocated and spent within the timeframes prescribed by the relevant funding streams and associated projects.

RESOLVED – That the 2023/24 Quarter 3 NTCA Budget Monitor Report be noted.

39 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 AND DECISION REVIEW**

Submitted: Report of Senior Governance Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

M Robson (Senior Governance Officer) introduced the report which set out the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 and the General Exception and Special Urgency Decisions taken by the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) over the past year.

In presenting the report M Robson explained that the 2023-24 report is different to past reports in that it considers activity over the past year, but also reflects on the work of the Committee over the whole period it has been operational.

Questions were then invited and in discussions with Members, it was noted that:

- i. There is uncertainty about the arrangements for the scrutiny function under the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA). It has been observed that the scrutiny function seems to be reducing in size while the amount of money available to the NTCA and new NEMCA, is increasing.

The Vice-Chair reflected that this was the last meeting of the Committee and thanked the past and current Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs for their work. She also thanked officers for their support including Janice Gillespie, Katy Laing, Michael Robson, Dr Henry Kippin, and Elizabeth Kerr who had been pivotal in steering the Committee through its development.

The Chair offered his thanks to the Committee, officers, and support staff.

RESOLVED – That:

- i. The Annual Report be approved and referred to the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority's Cabinet; and
- ii. Details of the general exception and special urgency decisions taken by the North of Tyne Combined Authority over the past year be noted.

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