

# DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 18 June 2024 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor R Crute (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Charlton, B Coult, J Elmer, P Heaviside, L Hovvels, C Marshall, C Martin, E Peeke, A Reed, K Shaw, M Stead, A Sterling, C Varty (substitute for J Miller) and S Zair

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Deinali, Hunt, Johnson, Lines and Miller.

## **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor Varty for Councillor Miller.

## **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to the concerns raised by members about fun and food and the eligibility criteria for participants and organisations seeking provide activities to accessing funding. Concerns were also raised about the school meals provider and a letter was sent to the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services expressing those concerns and seeking assurances that we would continue to lobby government. A response was received from the Corporate Director and circulated to members of this board and the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair pointed out that a number of issues would be picked up at Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and added to that work programme. He noted that a pilot scheme had been set up whereby auto- enrolment would be introduced for free school meals and parents would have to opt out of the scheme. This was aimed at maximising

take up of free school meals and had been discussed with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder.

#### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 4 - 2023/2024**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the Council's use of its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) during the period 1 January to 31 March 2024 (for copy see file of Minutes).

##### **Resolved:**

- (i) That the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period covering quarter 4 2023/24, be received.
- (ii) That the powers were being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remained fit for purpose.

#### **6 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services that presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual report 2023/24 for comment and approval prior to submission to the County Council meeting in July 2024 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Board that the report reflected and looked back on areas of scrutiny activity undertaken by the Board over the past year, whilst also setting out potential areas of activity moving forward for 2024/25. He added that a six-monthly update of scrutiny activity, due in January 2025, would also be reported to County Council.

He advised that the terms of office had been extended for the non-statutory, non-voting OSC co-opted members for a further two years, with a full refresh due to take place in 2026.

Page five of the annual report highlighted some of the activity that had taken place and page six of the report summarised the key issues to cover for the year ahead. Members were aware of the election of a new North East Combined Authority (NECA) Mayor for the LA 7 authorities of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Scrutiny arrangements had been established with the first NECA OSC meeting taking place on 16 July 2024. Councillor Crute

and Lines would be the Council's representatives on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with Councillors Marshall and Zair as their respective named substitutes.

The Chair highlighted the changes in the way we would scrutinise from a regional point of view and he envisaged being able to report back to this board and the thematic scrutiny committees. Work on the mechanisms around that were being discussed.

Councillor J Charlton as Chair of SSOSC had been disappointed that her committee could not do all of the things highlighted in the work programme due to officers not being available to attend. She was hopeful that this was now back on track for the coming year. The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer added that there had been some delays in reports coming to committee on off road bikes but an update on that had been received and reported to committee.

Councillor Hovvels was concerned about the costs associated with off road bikes and the amount of time spent policing this issue, a problem that was countywide. She added that there had been a lot of investment in some areas but that members needed to be appraised of the bigger picture. She understood that the Police were stretched and a small team had to cover the whole County. The Chair was keen for this to remain on the work programme but that we needed the right people around the table to continue discussions.

Councillor Marshall referred to the omission from the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (EEOSC) workplan last year of the Leisure Transformation Programme especially as a number of changes had been implemented, including the scrapping of the new leisure centre in Seaham. There had been no involvement from non-Cabinet members on how the new plans would be developed and he was disappointed that there had not been that opportunity to look at any plans.

Moving on to the Aykley Heads development, Councillor Marshall said that clarity was needed on future plans. He was pleased to see that The Story had now opened, re-uniting the DLI memorabilia, and he was pleased to have been part of the plans at the beginning of that process. He asked that clarity was given now about how this all fits together as the public needed to know.

The Chair agreed that that there had been considerable frustration expressed by this committee and both the EEOSC and ESCOSC about the Leisure Centre Transformation.

Referring to the workplan and in particular any site visits arranged, Councillor Coult asked members to commit to attending, as numbers had been disappointingly low.

The Chair said that this had been raised previously by Councillor Reed and he reminded members that any visits arranged in and around the community were of benefit to them but also to the community.

Councillor Reed referred to a recent visit where only 3 people were on a 53 seater bus, and one of those was a member of staff. She was concerned that this was not cost effective and urged members to attend any arranged visits. She commented that a recent visit to Morrison Busty depot had been a wonderful experience and had opened to hers to the technology used.

Councillor Zair confirmed that the Leisure Centre Transformation had been flagged with him and he would ensure that a report comes to EEOC later in year, and assured members that he was in discussions about this issue.

**Resolved:**

That the report be agreed for submission to the County Council meeting in July 2024.

## **7 Refresh of the Work Programme 2024/25 for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The Board received a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services that provided an updated work programme for 2024/2025.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer reported that the work programme had been framed around the shared County Durham Vision 2035 and based on the three strategic ambitions:

- More and better jobs
- Long and independent lives; and
- Connected communities.

He went on to advise that the work programme reflected level of scrutiny activity within the remit of this Board for the past year and provided a draft programme of items coming forward for 2024/2025 including:

- NECA – report to the October meeting setting out the position statement and how NECA would formulate scrutiny arrangements and how this board could contribute to the wider agenda.
- Community Engagement Review follow up
- Digital Strategy update
- Refresh of the Workforce Strategy

- Council Plan refresh

Usual updates on key decisions, performance, budgets, petitions would be received and the work programme allowed for an element of flexibility to ensure that scrutiny could respond to any emerging issues and policy changes.

The Chair said that it was important for the workplan to be flexible to allow us to pick up on any emerging issues. He said that NECA would give that regional dimension and he was looking forward to updates on the County Durham Pound and how this would sit at a regional level.

Councillor Shaw expressed concerns in the lack of action dealing with HMOs across the County. He was aware with problems in Durham City whereby family housing had been converted and this had been noted in recent planning committees whereby a growing number of properties were being converted in the East Durham area. He was concerned that where an area was deprived and had issues of anti-social behaviour, increased crime rates that this further exacerbated the issues around HMOs. He asked that we look at the strategies in place but to try and mitigate the impacts that this had on a local community, but to try and still provide that level of much needed housing.

The Chair advised that a joint meeting with Safer Stronger OSC and Economy and Enterprise OSC would be looking at housing issues, including the HMO impact in certain areas. He added that this would need to align with the selective licensing scheme.

Councillor Martin highlighted the importance of regional scrutiny and said how important it would be to get out voices heard and to have the opportunity to comment on NECA's reports and proposals rather than just having a look retrospectively on points raised through NECA. He went on to add to a point previously raised by Councillor Elmer on what shareholdings the Council had, including Newcastle Airport and Durham Cricket Ground, and how did we promote our interests for the public to see. He appreciated that these discussions could have a level of confidentiality around them but asked if we could look into this and discuss.

The Chair said that there may be elements of crossover between the Board and the Audit Committee and suggested that we pick this up on an informal basis. With regards to NECA he agreed that we needed to look at how we could align some of our priorities with the region and that we needed a reporting mechanism in place to take our points to them, and he was keen for information to flow both ways.

Councillor Elmer confirmed that his interest initially was around the shares and if they were beneficial. He was concerned about the aviation effects on carbon emissions but that he had suggested looking at each portfolio and checking that any investment aligns with our corporate priorities.

**Resolved:**

That the report be received and the proposed work programme for the COSMB for 2024/25 be agreed with the addition of those items identified by the Board and detailed above.

## **8 Update in relation to Petitions**

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided for information the quarterly update in relation to the current situation regarding various petitions received by the Authority (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager advised that the schedule provided a list of those petitions that were active, and those that were to be closed and which would be removed from the list prior to the next update.

Since the last update five new e-petitions had been submitted, one had completed, three were not valid as one received no signatures, one related to other procedures, and one was similar to a petition received within a 12 month period. The remaining petition was currently live on the website collecting signatures.

Two new paper petitions had been submitted, one was rejected as did not meet the criteria however the service had responded directly to the petitioner. The other was awaiting a response from the service. It was noted that the petitions that were shaded had previously been reported and now showed either that the petition was still running, waiting for a response from the service or included a response from the service.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **9 Notice of Key Decisions**

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which listed key decisions which were scheduled to be considered by the Executive.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that new to the plan were the following:

- Review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26
- LADO Annual Report
- Milburngate Update (exempt report)
- Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 -2022/23 Update

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.