

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEES**

**2016 - 2017**

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND STRATEGIC TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Alan Sambrook**  
Chairman

1.1 I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee, particularly my Vice-Chairman, Lynne Grimshaw who has ably assisted me throughout the past year. I am sure all the committee would wish to place on record their gratitude to the Scrutiny Officer, who has made our decision making and my role as Chairman easier, both inside and outside of the meeting room. The work of the Committee has been greatly assisted by the regular attendance of Cabinet members and senior officers, for which I am grateful.

1.2 The Committee members have played a valuable and constructive role in the Council's strategic policy making areas this past year, such as providing an important scrutiny role in the development of the Northumberland Local Plan Core

Strategy, Rent Setting Policy and the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Rail Line. The Committee have also monitored and provided overview on key issues which impact on the economic well-being of the people who live and work in Northumberland, such as the impact of Brexit on the County and the delivery of the Economic Strategy, particularly through ARCH.

1.3 The Committee have considered eight reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet, and in addition to supporting the majority of them, members have put forward comments and suggested amendments, many of which have been accepted and included in the final decision. The following reports have been subject to that process:

- Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy: Pre-Submission Draft: proposed Major Modifications
- Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Rail Line
- Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy - Proposed Further Major Modifications and associated documents
- NCC Rent Setting Policy 2016/17
- Planning Protocol on the Pre-Application Advice Process and Planning Applications Validation Checklist
- Commuted Sum (Section 106 Agreements) Developer Fund for Affordable Housing Protocol
- Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Draft Plan
- The Borderlands Initiative

1.4. In addition, the Committee have considered a number of overview and scrutiny reports, including:

- 1.4.1 **Northumberland County Council Economic Strategy - Arch Delivery** – in July, the Committee received presentations on the progress of implementing the Council's Economic Strategy and the performance of Arch in relation to the delivery against that Strategy. Members noted that a Memorandum of Understanding had been agreed with Arch, which allowed for two reports to be provided to the Committee each year on activity undertaken, to ensure transparency on performance and how this linked to the Council's Strategy.
- 1.4.2 Although the North East Region is the fastest growing in the Northern Region in terms of the Gross Value Added (GVA), it still lags behind the National figure with Northumberland continuing to have a slightly higher unemployment rate than the National average, with significant disparity across the County constituencies.
- 1.4.3 The Committee were advised that a large amount of work had been undertaken to ensure that the Council's Economic Growth Strategy was embedded as a golden thread through all activities undertaken by Arch. Details of property investments within Towns across the County were provided including the acquisition and refurbishment of Northumbria House in Blyth; a joint venture to improve the retail offer in Prudhoe and the creation of a new commercial hub in Walkergate and the refurbishment of the Cowe Buildings in Berwick. The masterplan for the Commissioners Quay in Blyth had been progressed with the housing element to follow after the completion of the Tall Ships event. Arch continued to lead on the development of the Ashington Investment Plan, which included the new leisure centre and highway infrastructure.
- 1.4.4 The creation of a homes for sale division of Arch, Ascent Homes, was highlighted with construction underway on 100 new properties in Alnwick, Blyth and Newbiggin which by using their local subcontractor supply network, had provided £3.6m into Northumberland's economy. In respect of estate management, occupancy rates and customer satisfaction, levels were high across all areas.
- 1.4.5 **Potential Impact of Brexit** – in September, the Committee were briefed on the emerging implications of Brexit (both negative and positive) on the North East. They were assured that the Council was working with our partner Local Authorities on this shared issue through the North East Combined Authority (NECA), in liaison with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP), making a range of representations to government regarding the potential impact on the region. This will remain a significant issue for the Council and the Committee will continue to monitor progress in 2017/18.
- 1.4.6 **Housing and Planning Act: Implications for Northumberland** - in December, the Committee were briefed on the implications of the 2016 Act for Northumberland, including the provision of new housing, introducing

requirements on Local Authorities in relation to Starter Homes, Self-Build and Custom House building. The introduction of Starter Homes may have implications for the delivery of affordable housing and affordability issues. The Act also introduces new powers to the Secretary of State (SoS) in relation to Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. Given that Northumberland was moving towards submission of the Core Strategy and there were numerous Neighbourhood Plans across the county at different stages, these powers may be significant.

- 1.4.7 The Act paves the way for a new type of planning permission, the 'permission in principle' (PiP). Permissions in Principle may be granted for housing led developments in relation to the land use, location and amount of development, with subsequent applications for 'technical details consent' (TDC) determined in accordance with the PiP. The result would be the granting of full permission. PiP's may be granted through the future allocation of sites for housing through the Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan, the listing of a site on a new brownfield register (which the Council would be required to keep up to date), or through the application process.

**Alan Sambrook**  
**Chairman – Economic Growth and Strategic Transport OSC**

## 2. COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Bernard  
Pidcock, Chairman**

2.1 I would like to take the opportunity to thank every member of the Committee, as well our Scrutiny Officer and all the staff who have presented reports to us for the support that they have extended to me as Chair, which has ensured professional meetings together with excellent presentations for members throughout the year. Julie Foster, as my Vice Chair, has been helpful and supportive throughout the year.

2.2 Over the past year, we as a Committee have engaged with a full and diverse work programme, covering a comprehensive list of scrutiny items, ranging from the street lighting modernisation programme, changes to the operation of Household Waste Recovery Centres to green energy issues and tackling domestic violence.

2.3 The Committee have made comment on two reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Food and Feed Service Plan 2016/17
- Environmental Enforcement Fixed Penalty Notice Policy 2017

2.4 The Committee have also considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

2.4.1 **Street Lighting Modernisation Project** – the Committee continue to monitor this project and receive regular updates on progress with the implementation of the scheme.

2.4.2 **Household Waste Recovery Centres (HWRC): Charges and Opening Arrangements** – in July 2015, the Committee agreed to support arrangements for the introduction of charges for DIY soils, rubble and plasterboards at HWRCs from September 2015, in order to try and mitigate the need for site closures at HWRCs in 2016/17. In May 2016, the Committee agreed that charging could be extended to include ceramic kitchen and bathroom fittings in response to operational experience gained up to that time. In June, the Committee supported the reduction in opening days at Allendale, Haltwhistle, North Sunderland, Wooler and Kirkley West Thorne Household Recovery Centres. However, members requested that the impact that both proposals may have on fly-tipping be closely monitored and further updates be presented to the Committee as appropriate.

2.4.3 **Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees into the Community** – in June 2016, following the Cabinet's decision to support the settlement of Syrian

refugees in Northumberland, the Committee were assured that appropriate measures had been put in place to ensure the integration of refugees into their respective communities.

- 2.4.4 Review of Grounds Maintenance** – in November, the Committee received the first of their bi-annual reports on grounds maintenance. There had been some problems with weed spraying, mainly due to particularly wet weather in May/June, resulting in some areas being revisited to address those issues. Some agricultural contractors had been engaged, and quad bikes fitted with weed spraying equipment had been purchased, to help achieve the required standards. In respect of grass cutting, targets had been met and where partnership arrangements were in place with Parish/Town Councils, extra cuts had been carried out and positive outcomes achieved. Overall the standards of grounds maintenance had been very good last summer, which was evident in the results achieved across the County for the Northumbria in Bloom Awards and Green Flag Awards for 10 parks. Money had been invested in an advanced winter maintenance programme, which would include shrub bed maintenance, hedge cutting, edging of footpaths and basic tree work. An extra £275k had been allocated for this which would aid grounds maintenance works in the coming summer season.
- 2.4.5 Progress on Green Energy** – in December, the Committee received details of a number of projects which the Council had initiated, with a view to delivering a range of solutions to exploit renewable energy opportunities to alleviate fuel poverty and to generate additional revenues. The program consisted of a review of the energy markets; a review of the authority's existing energy purchase strategies; the expansion of the PV solar panels programme to remaining viable Council and domestic properties; an investigation into the opportunities available through the deployment of ground source heat pump technology; an investigation into potential deployment of new battery technologies; the delivery of a suitable strategy to support the move to low emission electric vehicles and the identification of potential market opportunities. Members agreed that this was an important area of work and requested that further monitoring be done by the Committee next year.
- 2.4.6 Major Contracts: Procurement Protocols for Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits** – in February, the Committee reviewed the protocols and processes in place in relation to economic, social and environmental benefits associated with major contract procurement. These were governed by the Sustainable Procurement Policy which was developed by the Shared Procurement Service on behalf of Northumberland County Council, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust. Each project valued over £50,000 must undergo a sustainability impact assessment to consider the potential benefit which could be gained from the inclusion of economic, social and environmental requirements within the procurement process. The factors to be considered should ensure:

- Compliance with the Social Value Act 2012
- Use of local SMEs (Small to Medium Enterprises)
- Whole life cycle costing
- Ethical procurement
- Carbon reduction measures

2.4.7 These considerations were used to structure the specifications for the goods, works and/or services being purchased and also to produce tailored project specific questions used for shortlisting tenderers. Once contracts were awarded, compliance with the project specifications was monitored and managed through the monthly project management monitoring processes on the specific project.

2.4.8 **Domestic Abuse** – in March, the Committee received details on the current partnership work programme to co-ordinate service provision to tackle issues and harms caused by Domestic Abuse in Northumberland. The Committee raised a number of concerns regarding how the authority and other agencies dealt with domestic abuse. They welcomed the Deputy Business Chair’s statement that a review was on-going and requested that the comments and concerns raised by members at the meeting be used to inform the review process.

2.5 The Committee continued to monitor issues across its remit, including:

- Members’ Local Improvement Programme
- Flood Response
- Fleet Replacement Programme
- Annual Parking Report
- Fire and Rescue
- Trading Standards

**Bernard Pidcock**  
**Chairman – Communities and Place OSC**

### 3. CARE AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Alyson  
Wallace, Chairman**

3.1 The Committee have been very busy in 2016/17. I would like to thank Kath Nisbet, my Vice-Chair for her support throughout the year, who together with the Committee Members and, of course, Paul Allen our Scrutiny Officer, have helped ensure that the whole overview and scrutiny process has been conducted in a professional and efficient manner.

3.2 It has been another very busy year for the Committee. We have received over 30 reports and presentations, covering such issues as maternity services, primary and acute care, dementia, ambulance handovers and food banks. Although we have endeavoured to examine and give guidance on so many issues, I know that many will remain on the Committee's work programme next year.

3.3 The Committee have made comment on six reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Procurement of Integrated Sexual Health Services for Northumberland
- A Charter for the Care of People with Motor Neurone Disease
- Framework Agreement for the provision of Learning Disabilities and/or Mental Health Difficulties
- Commissioning of Public Health Services
- Partnership Agreements with NHS Bodies
- Strategic Commissioning and the Accountable Care Organisation

3.4 The Committee have also considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

3.4.1 **Ambulance Handovers and Patient Flow at the Northumbria Hospital, Cramlington** - in November, the Committee received a presentation from the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) on ambulance handovers at The Northumbria Hospital, Cramlington. Key points included:

- The average daily number of red incidents (respiratory/cardiac arrest or any life threatening) received had increased by 20% between October 2016 and October 2013;
- The time it took crews to complete a job had increased by 19% between August 2013 and August 2016. Crews spent on average 11 minutes longer on each job. Based on 380,000 incidents last year, this equated to 2902 days, or an extra 16 shifts a day for a year;



- The number of incidents met within the 8 minute target for red incidents had remained static for the last 3 years, with around 370 incidents per day being reached within that timescale, which had meant that a target rate of 75% had been reached;
- The ambulance service was about 60 seconds away from achieving target;
- Time lost to handovers - if the handover time could be reduced to 5 minutes that could deliver an increase in Red calls performance of 4.2%;
- Overall there had been an increase in volume of calls of 999 and 111 together which had improved the Hear & Treat, See & Treat, See & Convey Rates;
- The NEAS had worked closely with the NHS to identify the best service and assessment for a patient by using a pathfinder which had brought the conveyance rate down, and
- The CQC inspection had rated the service as good, which was better than any ambulance service had done before.

3.4.2 A further presentation from Northumbria Healthcare set out the patient flow and ambulance handovers at The Northumbria hospital, Cramlington. The key points were:

- Patient experience - nearly 4000 patients had given their feedback with the majority of them recommending the service;
- Significant change to the working pathways of all partner care organisations and continuous improvement through 'Flo' (simple name for Telehealth, an easy to use service designed by professionals inside the NHS to provide support and advice for a patient to manage their own health condition);
- The Northumbria was now the region's largest emergency hospital;
- Hospital challenges - ambulance handovers difficult to achieve; flow out of emergency department, triage personnel, volumes and shifting of work into evening and night. The recent work to improve the flow of patients was starting to have a noticeable impact in reducing queues and time taken to handover care;
- Updated Directory of Service, so ambulance could take patients where appropriate to the urgent care centres rather than The Northumbria;
- Allocated dedicated waiting space;
- Contract with ERS had been extended to provide a service for the care of elderly patients;
- An organisational resilience and capacity plan had been put in place for winter 2016/17 to include:
  - prevention and protection - staff flu vaccination campaign
  - preparation and planning - strategies for increasing capacity
  - response and recovery - trigger points, command and control arrangements, and
- Risks had been identified within the plan, e.g. bed capacity, outbreaks and staff absence. To provide assurance risk, treatments had been identified.

3.4.3 **Food Banks in Northumberland** - in February, the Committee received information on the main food banks in Northumberland and the current arrangements and relationship with the Northumberland Emergency Transition Scheme (NETs) following transfer of the delivery of the scheme in house.

3.4.4 Key details included: the development of the scheme; the emergency provision and support for people returning to communities after care/prison etc; the arrangements made for the continuation of the service beyond 2016, including the £5,000 grants given each to the Bedlington, Wansbeck and Blyth food banks to enable them to develop and become more sustainable; the changes made to bring the NETs scheme in house; and details of the referrals process.

3.4.5 Members discussed food banks in Hexham and Prudhoe and that parts of rural areas were also deprived and isolated. It was reported that people could receive paypoint vouchers to obtain food. Many shops in rural areas had been designated as places to redeem the vouchers, including outlets in Haltwhistle and Bellingham. Members were also advised of how a wide range of professional services worked together to assist with low level referrals in Northumberland.

3.4.6 The Committee were further advised that:

- food banks were entirely independent of the County Council;
- the £5,000 grants each given to the Bedlington, Blyth and Wansbeck food banks had been one off payments to assist them create an infrastructure;
- recipients qualified when suffering a crisis/negative unforeseen event;
- payments depended on people's needs and the amounts given varied depending on household composition;
- food banks did not have to register with the County Council, but would receive payment if they qualified under the scheme, and
- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) applied the sanctions. People sanctioned could still access the scheme; there was a limit on two applications with a possible third in exceptional circumstances.

3.4.7 Members expressed a number of concerns regarding the pressures being placed on food banks across the county and the number of families and individuals that were reliant on them. They felt that this was such an important issue that further updates be presented to future meetings of the Committee, so that those concerns could be addressed as far as possible.

3.5 **Consultations** - the Committee has responded to an engagement paper on Maternity Services in Northumberland.

### 3.6 **Monitoring Reports**

The Committee has monitored the following:

- Primary and Acute Care Update
- Director of Public Health Annual Report 2015/16
- Proposed Closure of Belsay Unit at Northgate Hospital Update
- Local Transformation Plan for Learning Disabilities and or Autism
- Welfare Rights Annual Report 2015-16
- Safeguarding Adults Annual Report 2015/16
- Joint Children's and Adult Services Complaints Annual Report 2015/16
- Sustainability and Transformation Plan
- Northumberland Joint Dementia Action Plan Update

3.7 The Committee will consider the following issues at its final meeting in March:

- Northumbria Healthcare Future Priorities and Quality Account 2016/2017
- Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust Future Priorities and Quality Account 2016/2017
- North East Ambulance Service Future Priorities and Quality Account 2016/2017
- New Ways of Working (Vanguard)
- Northumberland Winter Readiness and System Resilience - Debrief

**Councillor Alyson Wallace**

**Chairman - Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## 4. FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Brian Gallacher  
Chairman

4.1 This year the Committee have met on nine occasions despite being scheduled to meet bi-monthly, dealing with 33 substantive reports, more than any other OSC. I am grateful to the Committee members and officers for the full part they have played in dealing with such a substantial workload.

4.2 The Committee have made comment on ten reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet and made a further recommendation regarding the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Proposed Amalgamation of James Calvert Spence College (Middle) and James Calvert Spence College (High) Schools
- Proposed Closure of Whitfield CE Primary School
- Outcomes of Consultation on Proposals for the Ponteland Partnership (in May and July)
- Delivery and Commissioning of Children's Centres 2017-21
- Annual Report of the Director of Education and Skills
- Impact of the Proposed National Funding Formula on School Budgets
- Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships
- School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2018/19 Academic Year
- Audit Working Group

4.3 The Committee have also considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

4.3.1 **Reporting and Acting on Child Abuse and Neglect: Government Consultation** - in September, the Committee considered a government consultation on the introduction of explicit statutory duties to report and/or act on child abuse and neglect. Members made a number of comments which were included in the Council's response.

4.3.2 **Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report** - in November, the Committee received the Board's annual report, which provided an overview of the work carried out under the multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding children in 2015/16 and updated members on issues identified.

4.3.3 However, members were advised that a fundamental review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) within the context of local strategic multi-agency working was being undertaken by Alan Wood MBE. The review and the subsequent Children and Social Work Bill sought to

abolish LSCBs and replace them with a new statutory framework for multi-agency arrangements for child protection. The Committee expressed great concern that whilst all services were facing challenging and changing public sector environment, policy changes and new national priorities, the safety and protection of the children and young people in the county remained paramount. They requested that the Cabinet recommend to Council that, as part of its budget discussions, consideration be given to ensuring the budget allocation would still be available to support the Northumberland Local Safeguarding Board in its current form. The recommendation was supported by Cabinet.

#### **4.3.4 Care Proceedings and Public Law Outline Annual Report on Progression**

- in November, the Committee were informed of Children's Services' performance within care proceedings 2015/16. The numbers of children in Northumberland dealt with by the courts in care proceedings had increased and a number of cases delayed beyond the national target of 26 weeks was identified as a challenge for Northumberland. The Public Law Outline (2014) had introduced a 26 week time limit for the completion of care and supervision proceedings in accordance with both the recommendations of the Family Justice Review and Children and Families Act. Concerns had been raised regarding the delays in Northumberland, which were on an average, 33 weeks. However, members were assured that plans were in place to ensure that all cases presented to court were well prepared with assessments completed. Measures were also being taken to improve communication with the parties who worked in the family justice system and also the Lead Family High Court Judge HRH Judge Hudson.

#### **4.3.5 Educational Outcomes for 2016** - in November, the Committee received a detailed presentation about academic outcomes in the 2015/16 term. It included Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 as well as sixth form and post-16 outcomes. It also included outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs and vulnerable pupils. The key headlines of the presentation were:

- Northumberland's good level of development (GLD) average score in 2016 had increased to 73.4%, above the national emerging average of 69.3% for the first time ever;
- 83.7% of children sitting the phonics tests at Year 1 were working at the required standard, above the national average of 81%;
- results in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 1 had all improved over the past three years;
- the disadvantaged gap had closed over the past three years in all subjects but not significantly at Key Stage 1, and was up 1.7% at Key Stage 2;
- looked after children did worse at Key Stage 2 than their peers, but Northumberland performed better when compared to other areas;
- 87.79% of Primary and First Schools were rated as good or better;

- there was a varying range of attainment of 5 or more A\* to C GCSEs across the county, with individual schools ranging from 29% to 76%;
- the percentage achieving a Grade C or above in both English and maths had increased from 59.5% (validated) in 2015 to 61.0% (unvalidated) in 2016;
- Northumberland was in the bottom 20% of the social mobility index and an identified 'cold spot';
- Northumberland was roughly in line with its neighbours, statistical neighbours and the national average in terms of attendance and also broadly average for exclusions, and
- post 16 outcomes: student numbers had increased by 143 since 2015.

4.4 **Monitoring Reports** - the Committee periodically receives the following Monitoring Reports:

- Regulation 43 Summary Report
- Safeguarding Activity Trends Report
- Finance and Performance Quarterly Report
- Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers (Ofsted SIF Inspection)
- Adult Learning Service Self-Assessment Report for 2015-16
- Fostering Service Annual Report for 2015/16
- Adoption Agency Annual Report for 2015/16
- Director of Children's Services Role - Review of Test of Assurance

4.5 In March, the Committee will consider the remaining reports in our work programme:

- Outcomes of Task and finish Group – Implementation of Special Educational Needs Code of Practice
- Outcomes for Early Years Education 2016
- Response to the Schools National Funding Formula Consultation – Stage 2
- Care Proceedings and Public Law Outline Annual Report on Progression

4.6 As Chairman, I continue to monitor any actions arising from the Committee minutes and ensure, as far as possible, that they are followed up. In particular, when a Cabinet Member or officer has indicated that a response to a particular question is provided after a meeting, I will ensure that it is answered, and if appropriate, reported to the next meeting.

**Councillor Brian Gallacher**  
**Chairman - Family and Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

## 5. ARTS, LEISURE AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Terry Johnstone,  
Chairman

5.1 I would like to thank the Committee and officers for their support over the past year. The Committee have continued to monitor the performance of Active Northumberland in providing services in the arts, leisure and culture. From the wide ranging services provided by Active Northumberland, the Committee have considered a number of reports including the Tall Ships, the Sill Project and impact the Tour of Britain has had on cycling events.

5.2 The Committee have made comment on just the one report prior to determination by the Cabinet, in respect of the “*Review of Libraries and Tourist Information Centres*”. The Committee welcomed the report and recognised the need to change the way in which visitor information was provided.

5.3 **Tall Ships** - the Committee have closely monitored progress of the preparations for this very important and exciting event throughout 2016.

5.4 Up to 450,000 visitors had attended across the four day event, with a total estimated combined economic impact of £13.5 million for the County. 77 Sponsored trainees had taken part in the regatta itself and of the 140 volunteers assisting at the event, 100% had achieved a Level 2 qualification in customer service and visitor services.

5.5 Media coverage had included 370 articles of which 98.6% were positive. The event had been covered on BBC Breakfast and ITV had broadcast from the event across the weekend. The event generated a huge social media response with 6.7 million people seeing information on Facebook and 4.9 million people saw the #TallShipsBlyth on twitter. 278,000 people visited the Tall Ships Website with 13,500 people pre-booking their parking for the event.

5.6 The Committee were advised that 99% of all visitors agreed or strongly agreed that the Regatta 2016 was a good thing for Blyth, with 80% of visitors from Northumberland being very likely to visit again; 80% of the rest of visitors from the North East and 63% of visitors from the rest of the UK likely to visit Blyth again. In respect of visiting Northumberland, 95% of visitors from the rest of the North East and 81% of visitors from the rest of the UK would visit again.

5.7 **Arts Support in Northumberland** - in July, the Committee considered a summary of the funding and support provided for the Arts through Active Northumberland on behalf of Northumberland County Council, to allow comparisons to be made between the different organisations. Information on support from other organisations was also included. Members noted that whilst the support of the Council for some organisations was critical, providers had been advised that this support may change

in the future due to the Council's budgetary constraints and approach to funding. Support was also provided to help organisations in other ways such as signposting to other grant funding and highlighting ways to maximise other potential income. Members were advised that whilst "Highlights Rural Touring" was based in Cumbria, the funding provided by Active Northumberland was for events held within Northumberland. Northern Film and Media provided locations for TV and films and was considered to provide a good return on the funding by way of increased publicity for, and increasing visitor numbers to, Northumberland. A recent award to the Phoenix Theatre had contributed to the employment of a full time staff member with the aim for the Theatre to become a development hub similar to Queens Hall in Hexham and the Maltings in Berwick.

- 5.8 **The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre** - in July, the Committee were advised of the imminent opening of the centre with a programme of linked community events and engagement activity.
- 5.9 The Sill has been financed primarily through a Heritage Lottery award of £7.8 million, with NCC providing a grant of £500,000 and was expected to provide the following economic and community outcomes:
- Creation of an all-weather facility for 100,000 visitors a year in an area acknowledged to have poor visitor infrastructure
  - Up to 30,000 activity places over the duration of the project providing opportunities for skill development and training opportunities for individuals and groups
  - Fully-serviced facilities and a base for more than 20 local start-up businesses related to outdoor pursuits
  - County-wide impact - The Sill will encompass other protected landscapes such as the Coastal AONB and North Pennines AONB
  - International research facility for landscape, land and water management
  - £5 million per annum boost to the rural economy
- 5.10 **Active Northumberland (AN) Management Agreement** - in September, the Committee received a presentation which highlighted key aspects of the agreement. The three elements of the Agreement were:-
- Management Agreement. This defined the management of the relationship between AN and Northumberland County Council (NCC).
  - Licence Agreement. This provided for the use of the premises and relevant responsibilities of AN and NCC.
  - Contract for Services. This defined the day to day operational relationships between AN and NCC.
- 5.11 The services currently provided by Active Northumberland were:-
- Leisure Operations



- Leisure Trading
- Sports Development
- Cultural Services
- Library Services
- Tourist Information
- Tourist Information Centre Trading

- 5.12 The Management Agreement was a five year rolling contract, which was reviewed and extended through an Annual Service Delivery Plan with provisions included for monitoring and termination.
- 5.13 **Leisure Centres Capital Programme** - in September, the Committee received a presentation on the progress of the Leisure Centres Capital Programme. This included two major investment programmes completed at Concordia Leisure Centre and Prudhoe Waterworld, along with emerging schemes at Blyth Sports Centre and Ponteland Leisure Centre.
- 5.14 Details were also provided in relation to the Library Integration Programme for Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Hirst Welfare Centre and Ponteland Leisure Centre. In respect of the five year Leisure Remedial Programme, the Committee were advised that there would be £10m of investment by 2018. The key town investment programmes entailed working in partnership with a range of stakeholders to discover new ways to deliver modern and accessible leisure facilities.
- 5.15 **Cycling in Northumberland** - in December, members were reminded that the aim of hosting the Tour of Britain cycle ride in 2015, had been to raise the profile of Northumberland as a cycling destination and to promote the health benefits of cycling to residents of the county. The Council's Cycling and Walking Board together with the Northumberland Cycling Tourism Advisory Group were involved in bringing groups together and to increase the social and economic benefits of cycling.
- 5.16 The cycling route Sandstone Way which linked the very north of the county with Hexham had since been launched. An initial run of 3,000 copies of printed cycle maps had sold out with good feedback received. The Cycle Northumberland brand had been developed and included the launch of a website and toolkit to be used by businesses wishing to provide facilities for cyclists. Numerous other improvements to the cycling network had been undertaken with future proposals including possible improvements to the A1 as part of the dualling process. Proposals for a European funding bid were being drafted with the aim of completing a missing section of cycle track through Wark Forest completing a cycling loop around Northumberland.
- 5.17 A survey had indicated that the average spend for a cyclist visiting the county was £478. It was confirmed that an approach would be made to Business Improvement in Hexham for funding of additional signage etc.

5.18 The Committee had continued to monitor strategic leisure issues in the last year, and in April 2017 were expected to receive reports on the following:

- Hadrian's Wall strategy
- Tall Ships Finance
- Cycling in Northumberland
- Cultural Strategy Action Plan

**Councillor Terry Johnstone**

**Chairman - Arts, Leisure and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

## 6. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Kate Cairns**  
**Chairman**

6.1 The Corporate Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets bi-monthly and has held four meetings this year.

6.2 **State of Northumberland and Corporate Plan Progress** - in December, the Committee received this annual report on the State of Northumberland and achievements in delivery of the Corporate Plan. Both reports provided background information to support the Cabinet and Council in considering the Council's budget for the following financial year and the medium term financial plan.

6.3 The update on the state of Northumberland covered a framework of 45 key indicators reflecting the Corporate Plan's key priorities.

6.4 Members were advised that the main issues in the 2016 update which could impact on the Council's policies and budgets include:

- The level of reported crime had increased by almost a third since the previous year;
- 15% of all children in Northumberland – over 9,400 in number – were living in poverty. Contrary to the regional and national trend, this number had grown (by 3.8%) over the past year;
- The percentage of households who are fuel poor had increased by 16.7%
- Northumberland had a significantly lower proportion of older people in income deprivation (13.4%) than both the North East (20.3%) and England (16.2%), a position which had improved more than the region or nationally, and
- the 20% prevalence of child obesity in Northumberland, and whilst this was not only higher than the national average, it had increased by 13% over the past year.

6.5 The Corporate Plan was endorsed by the Policy Board in September 2013 under the key themes of:

- Economic Growth
- Places and Environment
- Stronger Communities and Families
- Health and Well Being
- Developing the Organisation

6.6 Against a background of continuing financial constraint, the Council had continued to deliver services and invest in Northumberland's future:

- **Investing in our children's future** - reorganising children's care services so that the Council could respond quickly and consistently where needed, investing more money in social workers to better manage caseloads; and continuing the programme of schools reorganisation supported by significant capital expenditure in Prudhoe, Bedlington and Alnwick with future plans for Ponteland, Hexham and Astley.
- **Leading nationally on health and social care** - through integrated working with Northumbria Healthcare and providing expertise internationally.
- **Improving and protecting our environment** - with improved roads and street cleaning, close cooperation with town and parish councils, national awards for parks and coastline and investment in flood defence.
- **Driving economic development** - through work with our 6 north east colleague authorities in responding to the opportunities of devolution, and now through work with the North of Tyne consortium; investing in Northumberland's infrastructure such as the Morpeth Northern Bypass, Hexham bus station and the proposed Ashington Blyth and Tyne line; pursuing a strategy for investment through the main towns initiative and supporting major events in Northumberland such as the Tall Ships and Tour of Britain; using ARCH as the Council's economic development delivery vehicle; improving the planning system to support development and investment across Northumberland.
- **Supporting the housing market** - with work through ARCH and Homes for Northumberland (which has now become an integral part of the Council); working with housing developers to increase house building in Northumberland; delivery of 619 affordable homes in Northumberland over the last three financial years and on track to complete a further 427 by March 2017.

6.7 **Risk Registers** - in December, the Committee received a detailed presentation on Risk Management, which included information about the difference between risk management in everyday lives and work; benefits; governance arrangements; the definition of risk, risk grading and grading classifications; risk management framework and methodology; where risk management took place in the Council's organisational structure and the frequency of monitoring and review.

6.8 **Financial Monitoring** - at each meeting, we received a presentation on financial monitoring for the previous quarter. The presentations included details of the overall position for each directorate, a detailed breakdown of each directorate by service, and an update on the efficiency targets for each directorate during 2016-17. Key details for individual service areas were drawn to members' attention, and members then discussed and asked questions about the information, offering comment as appropriate. This monitoring exercise provided the Committee with up to date information which illustrated any exceptions in performance that could lead to referrals for further investigation.

6.9 **Performance Review** - at each meeting, members received an update of the latest performance data. The Committee could refer issues of particular concern for further examination to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In May, the

Communities and Local Services OSC were asked to look into why the public perception of dog fouling was causing concern, and in February, the Family and Children's Services OSC were requested to examine the checks required of bus operators and drivers involved in school transport, safe routes and the consequences of failing to maintain standards.

**Councillor Kate Cairns**  
**Chairman - Corporate Performance Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

## 7. CORPORATE RESOURCES AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Ian Lindley**  
**Chairman**

7.1 This has been the first year of the Corporate Resources and Regional Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee as it was only established in May 2016. I would like to thank the Committee, particularly my Vice-Chair Mark Purvis, for their support during the year and all the officers who have kept me fully briefed on the current issues within my remit. The Committee have met bi-monthly and have held seven meetings this year.

7.2 The Committee have made comment on five reports prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Write Offs 2015-16
- Approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017-18
- Setting of the Council Tax Base 2017-18
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2017-20 and Budget 2017-18
- Potential Loan to Northumbria Calvert Trust

7.3 The Committee have also considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

7.3.1 **Workforce** - in July, the Committee received the Annual Update for Workforce followed by further quarterly updates. The report, previously named the Annual Sickness Report, provide a position statement in relation to workforce related areas of assurance, workstreams/associated action plans and progress to date within key areas for the Council. Members were assured that there was provision and monitoring in place to achieve necessary Key Performance Indicators relating to workforce for 2016/17.

7.3.2 In November, the quarterly update focussed mainly on the outcome of the 2016 Staff Survey. The aim of the survey was to gather information to help improve the working lives of staff and so provide a better service across the county. All centrally employed members of staff were invited to take part and the responses had been analysed in conjunction with the Picker Institute Europe, which conducted the survey on behalf of the Council. Members were pleased to note that the overall response rate across the Council was 61.15%, compared to the previous survey (carried out in 2014) of just 23% reply rate. Council and Directorate action plans would be drawn up to address the concerns raised in the survey and it was anticipated that they would be ready for implementation by early 2017.

7.3.3 **Citizen's Advice Northumberland: Responding to a Changing World** - in

September, the Committee received a presentation from Moira Macfarlane, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Northumberland. Members discussed the roll out of Universal Credit and the problem of homelessness within the county. It was reported that Citizens Advice was the main provider of free quality marked advice in the county but like all organisations needed to demonstrate how it delivered its services. Members were advised of the partnership work and the work being carried out to develop alternative access and delivery channels to meet the demand for advice while making better use of existing resources and a challenging funding environment.

7.3.4 It was reported that following the completion of the merger process a review of the organisation to ensure that it was delivering services which best meet local need and which remained fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world was taking place. It was envisaged that the review would be completed soon.

7.3.5 The Committee applauded the valuable work carried out by Citizens Advice to help all but particularly the most disadvantaged people within communities who often had the greatest need and complexity of problems.

7.3.6 **Combined Authority** - in September and February, the Committee received updates on the work of the Combined Authority. However, members were concerned that the devolution deal between the seven Local Authorities comprising the Combined Authority had fallen through and that the Government had withdrawn the option of devolution. The Committee noted that the three north of Tyne Local Authorities wished to proceed with devolution and, as such, had re-commenced talks with Government. As part of this, the three Local Authorities have had to:

- detail the economic coherence and value of the area;
- demonstrate the support of the local business community and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP);
- outline the proposed approach to transport governance within the context of retaining Nexus as the delivery vehicle, and
- highlight those areas of work where it will still be appropriate to operate at North East level across all seven Local Authorities either through the LEP or other mechanisms.

7.3.7 The Committee understood that discussions were ongoing with the Government as to the potential content of a devolution deal, and would continue to receive updates when they were available.

7.3.8 **Debt Recovery** - the Committee continue to receive quarterly monitoring reports which provided members with information relating to the level of outstanding debt owed to the Council, so that they be assured as to the efficiency and effectiveness of its collection and recovery policies and systems.

7.3.9 **Social Value Act** - in April, the Committee will receive a report on how the Council implements the Act which required those who commission public services to think about how they could also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

**Councillor Ian Lindley**  
**Chairman - Corporate Resources and Regional Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



## **8. THEMED SCRUTINY**

8.1 The in-depth scrutiny projects known as ‘themed scrutiny’ are now well established, whereby the Vice-Chairman of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee takes the lead on one or more projects at a time, working with Task & Finish Groups that undertake research over a period typically of between three and four months, depending on the nature of the work. The Vice-Chairman reports progress monthly to both the parent Committee and the Chairmen’s Group. The Task and Finish Groups submit their final report to the Committee and, when appropriate, the Committee submits its own recommendations to the Cabinet for approval. This year the following projects have been completed or are ongoing:

### **8.1.1 Arts Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### **(a) Funding for Arts Support in Northumberland Task and Finish Group**

The purpose of the Funding for Arts Support in Northumberland Task and Finish Group was to review current grant funding arrangements for arts bodies operating within Northumberland and to report back to the Arts Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee with any recommendations they find appropriate. The work of this Group has not been completed to date.

### **8.1.2 Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### **(a) Alcohol Consumption in Northumberland**

The Alcohol Consumption in Northumberland Task and Finish Group was established to review issues associated with alcohol consumption in Northumberland and to consider how measures aimed at increasing responsible drinking and improve community well-being in the County can best be introduced. The group has met on three occasions and will submit its findings to the Cabinet in April.

#### **(b) Primary Care Applications Working Party**

The purpose of the Primary Care Applications Working Party was to scrutinise and comment upon applications for variations to primary care services as consultee on behalf of Northumberland County Council’s Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The group has met on three occasions and will submit its findings to the Cabinet in April.

### **8.1.3 Communities and Local Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### **(a) Transport Asset Management Programme (TAMP)**

This Working Group was established in March 2015 to review the output from the previous TAMP Working Group; to debate and make recommendations with regard to:

maintenance strategy for all assets; service standards to maintain that strategy, and performance measures to monitor strategy delivery. After meeting on 13 occasions, the Group submitted 23 recommendations to Cabinet on 7 March 2017 covering issues including: communications; systems; highways assets - carriageways; highways assets - structures; highways asset - street lighting; highways assets - restraint assets; highways assets - traffic management information assets, and highways assets - soft landscaping. Cabinet agreed to accept all the recommendations.

#### **8.1.4 Economic Growth and Strategic Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

##### **(a) Review of Supported Bus Services**

In May 2015, the Cabinet agreed recommendations made by the Review of Supported Bus Services Task and Finish Group on the consultation and engagement process to be adopted in carrying out the review. The Group was then quickly re-established (albeit under this OSC following the scrutiny review (previously the Communities and Place OSC)) to oversee the implementation of that process and to assess the outcomes. That work was completed in the west of the county last year and in the north this year to the Group's satisfaction.

#### **8.1.5 Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

##### **(a) Implementation of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs**

The Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (FACS) agreed to establish a task and finish group to examine progress towards meeting the goals set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (January 2015). Three meetings of the group were held between 8th December 2016 and 9th February 2017. Members requested that the Director of Education produce a short report that summarised the findings of the group for consideration by the Cabinet on 11 April 2017.

##### **(b) Audit Working Group**

This was a joint Working Group comprised of members of Audit and FACS committees and was established to look at the funding of small rural schools. Councillor Anne Dale chaired the Group. The work began to help people become better informed about concerns about the future of schools in Northumberland with particular reference to small rural ones, and also how the funding formula was distributed. The Director of Education and Skills had held meetings with the most vulnerable schools and the Group investigated possible new approaches to School Partnerships working with a range of local sponsors, including a shared service approach. The report provided significant detail about the financial position and risks. 10 key recommendations were agreed by Cabinet in February.

## **9. POLICY DEVELOPMENTS - IMPACT ON SCRUTINY**

- 9.1 The Overview and Scrutiny function will play an important role in subjecting policy proposals to independent analysis and help the Cabinet and its Partners consider the long-term implications of the decisions being taken. Scrutiny can also provide valuable assurance to the public and stakeholders that their views and concerns will be taken into account in the way the new measures are shaped and implemented.
- 9.2 To retain public confidence, it is important that all existing and new forms of service delivery are subject to robust and public accountability. Scrutiny can harness the challenging and investigative aspects of its work together with its positive role in contributing to policy development and the restructuring of local services.

## **10. WORK PROGRAMMES**

- 10.1 The work programmes will continue to be delivered through a number of mechanisms, for example:
- (a) Revisiting previous reviews and issues considered, focusing on progress made with recommendations contained in the reports
  - (b) Light touch reviews on particular issues
  - (c) Task and Finish Working Groups to look at in depth investigations;
  - (d) Receiving information on policy/strategy areas as part of their overview function
  - (e) Cross cutting issues will be considered by joint meetings
  - (f) Referrals from the Executive or Full Council.
- 10.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen have regular briefings from Directors and Service Heads on current and potential issues which may impact on the respective committee's future workload. These meetings are crucial in managing the work programmes, to ensure that particularly significant issues are given priority.
- 10.3 In addition, the Council's Business Chair has confirmed the following methods by which members can influence the scrutiny work programme:

### **10.3.1 Scrutiny**

- (a) Any scrutiny member can ask for an issue relevant to their remit to be scrutinised by giving notice to the scrutiny officer and notifying the Chairman.
- (b) Any five non-scrutiny members can also request an issue is scrutinised by informing the scrutiny officer and the relevant Chairman.

- (c) These requests then go to the Chairmen's Group for consideration and referral. It might not always be the case that the item requested by a committee member is best suited to that committee or workloads and overlap may see it given to another committee to carry out.
- (d) Equally often items are raised that need more work and may be sent to working groups (Policy) to do the initial report which will then come back to the committee to scrutinise and do further work if needed.
- (e) Scrutiny should also respond to any requests from Council or Cabinet to review particular areas of Council activity.

### 10.3.2 Pre-scrutiny

Items on the Forward Plan requiring a decision by Cabinet will be subject to Pre-scrutiny by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 10.4 It is envisaged that the scrutiny function will continue to contribute positively to policy development, community engagement and participation, performance monitoring and scrutiny of partners and improvements in services provided.

## 11. CALL-IN

- 11.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committees can exercise their right to call-in, for reconsideration (through the Chairmen's Group) of decisions made, but not yet implemented by the Cabinet. There were no call-ins in 2016/17.

## 12. VISITS

There has been a visit by the Care and Well-being OSC to Northumbria Hospital and by the Arts, Leisure and Culture OSC to the new Ashington Leisure Centre.

## 13. CHALLENGES/AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- 13.1 The key challenge for both members and officers this year is to continue to make scrutiny more effective and outcome focused.
- 13.2 To maintain and build on the current levels of member engagement and attendance by focusing on priority issues of concern to members, providing concise information in appropriate formats and offering a range of training and development opportunities which meet member requirements.
- 13.3 To take on board the increased powers and responsibilities of the relevant legislation.

13.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to monitor the status of their recommendations to Cabinet. The aim, as always, will be to achieve best practice standards and to make a positive contribution to partnership working and service improvement.

#### **14. FURTHER INFORMATION**

If members would like to receive a copy of any of the reports referred to above, please contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator. Feedback on scrutiny work or suggestions for possible issues to be included in the work programmes is always welcome. Members are invited to contact the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen or the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

#### **15. AUTHOR AND CONTACT DETAILS**

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