

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**7 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Present: Councillor M Huscroft (Chair)  
Councillors F Austin, Mrs J M Bell, B Burdis, S Button,  
R Glindon, K Jordan, C Hobkirk, N J Huscroft, D Lilly,  
D McLellan, N Peggs, C B Pickard and N Redfearn.

Parent Governor Representatives  
J DGLISH

Church Representatives  
Dr D Jackson

Also Present:  
L Arkley – Elected Mayor  
Councillor J MacNamara – Cabinet Member for  
Regeneration  
J Gillespie – Strategic Finance  
G Noble – Strategic Finance  
L Benneworth, Policy and Performance  
J Lee – Consumer Protection  
C MacDonald – Consumer Protection  
M Robson – Legal and Democratic Services

Apologies:  
Councillors J M Allan and C A Gambling  
Ms S Postlethwaite  
Rev M C Vine

### **OV6/09/09 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the appointment of the following substitute Member was reported:-

Councillor B Burdis for Councillor C A Gambling

### **OV7/09/09 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2009 be confirmed.

### **OV8/07/09 ELECTED MAYOR'S STATE OF THE AREA ADDRESS**

The Elected Mayor, Mrs Linda Arkley, attended the meeting to present the State of the Area Address.

The Elected Mayor reported that one of her first acts as Mayor, had been to order a review into all Council expenditure and to get a clear picture of the financial position. She commented that of the £14m needed to be raised to fund the Strategic Investment Plan, only £162,000 has so far been achieved. The Mayor stated that she and her Cabinet had no intention of selling off key playing fields and open spaces to fund the Strategic Investment Plan and she commented that the option of increasing Council Tax to fund the Plan was unacceptable. The Council planned to achieve £11.5m in efficiency savings, including £1.3m of overhanging efficiencies from the 2008/09 value for money programme. To date a total of £7.7m had been achieved. Council debt currently stood at £320m and was planned to rise by £75m. The cost of paying for that debt would rise from £9m to £19.5m.

The Homes and Communities Agency had confirmed that the Council had been unsuccessful in its application to join the sixth round of the National Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Housing scheme. The Mayor, whilst disappointed, recognised the need for more affordable housing in the Wallsend Area and undertook to explore with housing providers how best to address this matter in the future.

The Mayor then presented the latest information about North Tyneside. The population had risen to 197,300, up around 1,300 from last year. Around 40,000 of the population were older people and around 35,000 were children aged under-16. Projections indicated that the population would grow to 225,000 by 2031. The most recently available deprivation data ranked North Tyneside as the 102<sup>nd</sup> most deprived area in England, from a total of 354 areas.

Full-time workers in North Tyneside earned an average of £410.70 per week, which compared to an average of £420.60 in the North-East and £479.10 nationally. In July there were 10.4 Job seekers allowance claimants per unfilled job vacancy, compared to 10.2 in the North-East and 7.4 nationally. However, many residents of North Tyneside travelled to work outside the borough, so this did not necessarily reflect the employment opportunities currently available to residents.

The Mayor stated that employment and viable town centres were issues she took very seriously and she reported that a further £35,000 had already been allocated for town centre regeneration and the process of offering free car parking across town centres had begun.

The provisional 2009 exam results indicated that 54% of pupils had gained five or more A\*- C grades including Maths and English, well above last year's national average of 47.6%. The Mayor recognised that achievement at this level involved tremendous hard work and commitment and she commended the efforts and successes of the borough's young people.

Life expectancy was increasing though a gap still existed between the local and national averages. The rate of deaths from cardio-vascular disease was falling. In 2008 it had fallen to an estimated 81 deaths per 100,000 population aged under 75, compared to 111 in 2002. Cancer remained a major cause of premature death in North Tyneside. However, there had been steady improvement with cancer mortality rates falling more rapidly than nationally. Smoking remained the greatest contributor to premature death in North Tyneside with 25% of respondents in the council's Residents' Survey saying they were smokers, a level that had barely moved since 2007. Obesity was the second most common cause of preventable death. It was estimated that around 20% of all adults in the

borough were obese, and over half were either overweight or obese. Alcohol related hospital admissions, chronic liver disease and alcohol related deaths were all higher in North Tyneside than the national average.

In terms of sexual health, the North Tyneside teenage pregnancy rate had been lower than the baseline in every year since 1998. However, the rate of teenage conception increased in 2007 to its highest level since 2002. There was some evidence from the first quarter of 2008 that rates of teenage pregnancy were reducing again.

Levels of crime in North Tyneside were the lowest of any of the districts in Tyne & Wear. In 2008/09, there were 11,993 crimes recorded. This amounted to an overall crime rate of 62.6 offences per 1,000 population. Regarding perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour, almost all (96%) respondents in the Resident Survey 2009 felt safe outside in the daytime, with 65% feeling safe after dark.

The Mayor stated that residents wanted to live in a borough they were proud of, a borough which was safe and clean and cared for the environment. They were her ambitions too and in this regard she reported on the installation of dozens of new dog bins around North Tyneside, a programme of improvements to the borough's roads and pavements and she had requested that the Council's Climate Change Strategy be reviewed.

The Mayor welcomed the plans by MGT Power Ltd, for a new Biomass power plant on the North Bank of the Tyne. This would bring substantial benefits to the borough and the wider region, representing an investment of over £400 million. Another key element in the future of North Tyneside, was the development of the second Tyne Tunnel. The Mayor expressed her concerns about the inevitable congestion on the A19 unless improvements were made sooner than planned.

The Mayor concluded by stating her plans for the next 12 months would revolve around restoring responsibility to the public finances and in doing so, lead a Council which is able to offer residents value for money. She intended to protect front line services, cut back on waste, invest in town centres and regenerate the North Bank of the Tyne. The Council would foster a closer working relationship with schools, sports clubs and voluntary sector organisations, to offer young people a brighter future, in a cleaner and greener borough.

During questioning the Mayor provided supplementary comments in relation to: the practical measures taken so far to support the town centres; the consequences of the unsuccessful bid for the 6th round of the PFI housing scheme; the £14m funding gap in the Strategic Investment Plan; the Cabinet's policy regarding the option to sell key playing fields and open spaces; the consultation undertaken in connection with the new Biomass power plant on the riverside and the servicing of the Council's debt.

The Chair thanked the Elected Mayor for her address and for answering the Committee's questions.

**OV9/07/09 2008/09 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE PROVISIONAL OUT-TURN**  
**(Previous Minute OV3/07/09)**

At its previous meeting, the Committee had deferred consideration of the 2008/09 Performance and Finance Provisional Out-turn report to enable the Interim Director of Finance or her representatives to be present during consideration of the report. The Committee had particularly wanted to investigate in more detail:-

- (a) the issues raised by the Mayor in her statements regarding the financial out-turn 2008-09, in the light of the information contained in the report; and
- (b) the issues highlighted by the Finance Sub-Committee arising from its consideration of the report, the conclusions and recommendations it had reached and the supporting evidence for them.

The report set out details of the delivery of Council Plan milestones during 2008/09, the achievements of the Strategic Investment Plan along with the provisional performance of the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account, Dedicated Schools Grant, Strategic Investment Plan and the delivery of the Treasury Management Strategy during 2008/09.

During questioning officers confirmed that quarterly performance reports in relation to the delivery of the Local Area Agreement would be presented to the Committee and more detailed information concerning schools in deficit had been submitted to the Finance Sub-Committee.

It was stated that whilst the Strategic Investment Plan 2008/09 represented the highest level of investment, the level of reprogramming had been at its lowest. In order to confirm this, the Committee requested officers to provide all Members of the Committee with comparative figures for reprogramming within the Plan since 2000.

The Committee also sought advice from officers as to how funding for the Strategic Investment Plan was managed throughout the course of the year. The Committee were advised that the Council had a range of funding sources available to it and these were taken into account during the budget setting process and then managed and balanced throughout the course of the programme depending upon external conditions, including the value of the Council's assets. This year the value of the Council's assets had fallen considerably and unexpectedly.

It was **AGREED** that (1) the 2008/09 Performance and Finance Provisional Out-turn report be noted; and  
(2) the supplementary information requested in relation to the reprogramming of the Strategic Investment Plan be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

**OV10/07/09 2009/10 QUARTER 1 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee considered the 2009/10 Quarter 1 Performance and Finance Management Report. The report set out details in respect of the delivery of Council Plan milestones, progress in the delivery of Strategic Investment Plan along with the forecast budget monitoring position for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account, Dedicated Schools Grant, and the Strategic Investment Plan at the end of Quarter 1, i.e. 30 June 2009. The Committee were invited to examine the performance elements of the report as

the Finance Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 19 August 2009, had previously considered the financial aspects of the report.

The Committee focussed its attention on those projects not on schedule.

Although the 2009 end of year target to reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation to 53 had been achieved, it was stated that further improvements would need to be made in this area to achieve the 2010 target of 43 or less. The Committee challenged the improvement measures that had been put in place as they believed these were actions that had previously been agreed as part of the Homelessness Strategy. If it was anticipated that the target for 2010 was not going to be achieved the Committee believed that further additional measures would need to be taken over and above the existing strategies. The Committee asked that additional information be provided to all Members of the Committee on the proposed improvement measures thereby enabling members to judge whether the Council's strategies were being reviewed and revised to address the anticipated level of performance.

With reference to the government's announcement that the Council had been unsuccessful in its bid for the sixth round of Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding, the Committee had received inconsistent reports as to the reasons why the bid had been unsuccessful. The Committee requested that an explanation be sent to all Members of the Committee to provide clarification. The Committee also sought assurances that the Council would review the bidding process and incorporate any lessons learnt in any future submissions.

In response to questioning the Committee were presented with details of the consultation undertaken in connection with the roads and pavements schemes. An earlier phase of consultation had been incorporated within the residents survey and this had been followed up as part of a Residents Panel event. It was stated that an additional £1m had been included in the 2009/10 budget for the maintenance of roads and pavements. It was proposed that in future the area forums would play a greater role in consulting with residents and in determining local programmes of work.

The Committee requested that all Members of the Committee be provided with additional information setting out:-

- a) how much of the £1m allocated for the repair of roads and pavements in the 2009/10 budget remained uncommitted;
- b) how the public consultation undertaken to date had been carried out; and
- c) how many residents from each area of the Borough had been involved.

It was **AGREED** that (1) the 2009/10 Quarter 1 Performance and Finance Management Report be noted; and  
(2) the supplementary information requested in relation to the housing Public Finance Initiative (PFI) bid, the homelessness target and the public consultation on road and pavement repairs be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

**OV11/7/09 GAMBLING ACT 2005 DRAFT STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY (GAMBLING)**

The Committee were presented with the Cabinet's initial proposals in respect to the Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling). The Statement formed part of the Council's policy framework and as such the Committee was required to consider the Cabinet's initial and final proposals and make any comments and/or recommendations.

Under the Gaming Act 2005 the Council was required to produce and publish a Statement of Licensing Policy which sets out the policy framework within which the Council would exercise its functions as a licensing authority in determining applications for premises licenses covering gaming, betting and bingo and permits authorising the operation of gaming machines. The existing policy was due to expire on 31 January 2010 and the Council was required to produce a revised policy by that date.

Officers highlighted the significant changes in the draft revised policy and outlined the results of the formal public consultation period that had come to an end on 4 September. The Council had received 5 responses to the consultation and details were submitted to the Committee. It was explained that the responses would be reported to a working group of elected members for detailed consideration and that due to the nature of the comments received, it was unlikely that they would lead to any changes to the draft policy. In view of this, the Committee felt it unnecessary for the Cabinet's final proposals to be presented to a future meeting as the policy was likely to remain unaltered.

The Committee discussed and sought clarification on the options available to the Council in passing a 'no casino' resolution.

It was **AGREED** that (1) the Cabinet's initial proposals in respect to the Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling) be noted without any comments or recommendations being referred to the relevant Cabinet Member; and  
(2) in view of the response to the public consultation exercise, the proposal to involve elected members in considering the results of the consultation and the likelihood that the Cabinet's final proposals would be unchanged from the initial proposals, the final proposals need not be reported to the Committee.

**OV12/7/09 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 (Previous Minute OV5/7/09)**

The Committee received a report that provided an overview of the work proposed to be undertaken by its sub-committees during the course of the year which will make up the overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10. The Committee were asked to endorse those projects identified so far and to receive a further report once all the sub-committees had determined their work programmes.

It was **AGREED** that the report be noted.