

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 February 2018

(10.07 - 11.44 am)

Meeting held Committee Room, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF

Present:

Independent Members: D Taylor-Gooby (Chair) S Hart (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: A Patterson, J Eagle, O Avery, R Glindon, J Amar, M Clarke,
T Graham and K Stephenson

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Crute (Durham), Weatherley (Gateshead), Graham (North Tyneside), Flynn (South Tyneside), Wright (Sunderland) and Snowdon (Sunderland).

Councillors Lower (Newcastle), Dodd (Northumberland) and Flux (Northumberland) were also absent.

The Chair confirmed that the meeting was not quorate and that any conclusions reached would therefore be ratified as decisions of the next meeting.

Members expressed concern that this was the second consecutive meeting that had not been quorate, and queried whether anything could be done about non-attendance by Committee members. It was also suggested that the number of members required for quorum was high and should be lower, possibly with a condition that a minimum number of the constituent authorities were represented.

It was agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair would write to members who had not attended meetings to remind them of the importance of attendance and use of substitutes, and that officers would review the quorum requirements.

RECOMMENDED – That:

- i. The Chair and Vice-Chair to write to members who had not attended meetings to remind them of the importance of attendance and use of substitutes.
- ii. Officers to review the quorum requirements for the Committee in the next NECA Constitutional Review.

25 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

David Taylor-Gooby declared a personal interest in item 6 (NECA Forward Plan and Work Programme) as a member of an NHS Commissioning Group.

26 **MINUTES OF 13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 and those present agreed their accuracy.

RECOMMENDED – That the minutes be formally approved at the next meeting of the Committee.

27 **NOTES OF INQUORATE MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2017**

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the inquorate meeting held on 14 December 2017 and those present agreed their accuracy.

RECOMMENDED – That the minutes be formally approved at the next meeting of the Committee.

28 **TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY THEMATIC LEAD UPDATE REPORT**

Submitted: Report of Thematic Lead for Transport and Digital Connectivity (previously circulated and copy attached to the Official Minutes).

Councillor Forbes (Thematic Lead for Transport and Digital Connectivity) introduced the report which provided members with an opportunity to comment on the most recent developments associated with the Transport and Digital Connectivity Thematic Lead Update. Councillor Forbes highlighted the key points of the report including the launch of a consultation by Transport for the North on a Strategic Transport Plan, the development of the NECA Transport Manifesto into a Transport Plan, the Metro Future project and the announcement of funding for a new Metro fleet, Metro performance and fares including the new fares for under 19s, the Key Route Network, and air quality.

In response to comments, questions and points raised by members the following was noted:

1. The design specification of the new Metro fleet was being looked at in terms of making it feel safer for passengers, for example through linear seating providing increased visibility along the length of the carriage.
2. NECA would like to move to a 24 hour Metro service but the current population and scale of the night time economy was not sufficient to support it. It was something that could be considered in future. There were some night buses in operation but they were the exception not the rule.
3. The push to improve air quality came about because the Government lost a court case with Clean Earth over its failure to tackle illegal air pollution.

Leaders had considered the issue and agreed that they wanted to do something that would have a longer term and more substantial impact, rather than just fixing the breaches of the Climate Change Act. Better technical planning arrangements between local authorities would help to prevent congestion. Having a good public transport system as an alternative to car use was key – buses only operated on routes that made a profit, although there were now better relationships with some bus operators and discussions were taking place about what would be done to encourage adoption of less profitable routes. A lot of the current routes had not been reviewed for many years and a fundamental review of the bus network was needed. New communities were not served well.

4. In response to a proposal for a new East West motorway from Blyth, Councillor Forbes noted that it was always much cheaper to upgrade motorways rather than build new ones, and that people tended to be fiercely protective of the green belt so any proposals for a new motorway were likely to be met with protest. Roads linking Newcastle and Carlisle were at the narrowest part of the country so there would be a good economic case to be made.
5. The International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP) project was relatively new in transport planning terms. Both short and long term solutions to access were being developed. Highway access was good but there was a need to upgrade junctions. In the short term enhanced and rapid bus links would be provided and work would take place to develop bus interchange links. Over the longer term there were ambitions to extend the Metro service to the IAMP site as part of the Metro Futures project, but this could take many years to develop.
6. There was a challenge currently in gaining funding from Government for transport projects because of the introduction of competitive bidding processes where the odds were stacked against the North East, and it was important that this was challenged. The lobbying for Metro fleet replacement funding had been successful because there had been a wider coalition of support across the region. Lessons should be learned from this in terms of how the region could come together to lobby for particular schemes.
7. There was no intention to have one big bus corporation covering the whole region but there needed to be a range of options that could meet the needs of different communities. Free bus passes for older people were all very well but were of no use if there were no buses. Local authorities had done their utmost to protect rural services by subsidising bus operators to cover those routes, but this was not sustainable in the longer term, and this was an issue that was moving up the agenda at a national level.

The Chair thanked Cllr Forbes and Tobyn Hughes for their attendance.

A Member highlighted that there had been no verbal update on Digital Connectivity. The Committee noted concerns that the Government push for high speed broadband was focused on large conurbations, rather than rural areas, and that a recent project in the North West had demonstrated that infrastructure built from

scratch may be a better solution for rural areas. It was agreed that the Chair and the Policy and Scrutiny Officer would request a written submission from the Thematic Lead on progress with digital connectivity that focused on rural areas, and that it would be presented at a future meeting.

RECOMMENDED – That:

- i. The report be received and comments noted.
- ii. The Chair and the Policy and Scrutiny Officer request a written submission from the Thematic Lead for Transport and Digital Connectivity on progress with digital connectivity in rural areas, to be presented at a future meeting.

29 **NECA DECISION MAKING PROTOCOL**

Submitted: Report of Monitoring Officer and Policy and Scrutiny Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Nicola Laverick (Policy and Scrutiny Officer) and Peter Judge (Monitoring Officer) introduced the report which outlined the proposed Decision Making Protocol for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, highlighting the key issues. Members' attention was drawn to the definition of a 'Key Decision' in part 4 of the draft Protocol including suggestions made by the Chief Finance Officer for a minimum value over which decisions relating to capital and revenue spending would be considered to be Key.

In response to comments, questions and points raised by members the following was noted:

1. The Committee were able to review any decision of any value relating to the NECA. The Protocol was designed to clarify how it did that, to provide clarity for Members and Officers, and to ensure a focus on the Committee's priorities and the most important decisions. The Committee could identify areas they wanted to focus on through their long-term work plan and would be provided with clear guidance about those matters that must be brought to them.
2. The Committee were able to call in any officer of the NECA to answer questions, and could also chose to take evidence from members of the public.
3. The Committee were entitled to review confidential reports and could request to see, for example, detailed transport plans such as those pertaining to access to the IAMP. It would be an ideal time, in advance of the possible creation of a North of Tyne Combined Authority and of a joint transport committee, to review transport plans.
4. There was an obligation for the NECA to have a decision making protocol in place, and this had yet to be addressed.

5. The procedure for urgent decisions would include consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny.
6. Officers from each local authority had been given the opportunity to review the draft protocol, and it would be shared with them again in advance of the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
7. The NECA Constitution would need to be amended in time, but the Protocol was consistent with the existing Constitution.
8. The five working day window of opportunity for Members to call-in decisions was short, but Members were reminded that notification of key decisions was required to be published 28 days in advance resulting in a 33 day minimum timescale for making key decisions. Members were asked to reflect on this, and to consider what the correct balance should be, in advance of further discussion at the next Committee meeting.
9. The Call-In Request form could be submitted electronically and did not need to be signed by hand by all four members requesting the call-in. It was agreed that officers would amend the form to make this clear.

RECOMMENDED – That:

- i. The report be received and comments noted in producing an amended protocol.
- ii. The draft Decision Making Protocol be shared again with officers in each constituent authority in advance of further discussion at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting.
- iii. Officers amend the Call-In Request form to clarify that electronic submission was acceptable and that it did not need to be signed by hand.

30 NECA FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted: Report of Monitoring Officer and Policy and Scrutiny Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Nicola Laverick (Policy and Scrutiny Officer) introduced the report which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Forward Plan for the current 28 day period and the proposals for a revised and updated Work Programme for 2017/18. Nicola highlighted the issues previously identified by Members for inclusion on the Work Programme, including updates and discussions about the North of Tyne Combined Authority, visits to other combined authorities and a review of the issues considered by their overview and scrutiny committees, a review of digital connectivity at a future meeting, and an opportunity to review any transport barriers to employment and education.

It was noted that following an update at the last Committee meeting on progress in taking forward the recommendations of the North East Commission for Health and Social Care Integration set out in its report 'Health and Wealth: Closing the Gap in

the North East, it had been suggested that further updates be brought back at an appropriate point. It was agreed that the July meeting of the Committee would be an ideal time for an update, however the Chair and Vice-Chair would liaise with the North East Joint Health Scrutiny Committee prior to any item being brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that there was no duplication of work.

RECOMMENDED – That:

- i. The report be received and comments noted.
- ii. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee liaise with officers and with the North East Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Consideration then be given to inviting Sheena Ramsey, or an appropriate officer, to attend the July 2018 meeting of the NECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present an update on progress with taking forward the recommendations of the North East Commission for Health and Social Care Integration.

31 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Thursday 15 March 2018 at 10.00am.

Councillor Patterson submitted her apologies for this meeting.