



North East Combined Authority

DURHAM • GATESHEAD • SOUTH TYNESIDE • SUNDERLAND

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 16 December 2021 at 2.00pm

Meeting to be held at: Blaydon Room, Gateshead Civic Centre, NE8 1HH

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AGENDA

Page No

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Please remember to declare any personal interest where appropriate both verbally and by recording it on the relevant form (to be handed to the Democratic Services Officer). Please also remember to leave the meeting where any personal interest requires this.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021 **1-4**

4. NECA Budget Proposals 2022/23 **5-16**

5. Digital Exclusion in the North East **17-30**

6. Forward Plan and Work Programme Update **31-38**

7. Public Health and Social Care – Winter Pressures **39-42**

8. Date and Time of Next Meeting

3 March 2022 at 2.00pm

Contact Officer: Toby Ord
Tel: 0191 424 7541
Email: toby.ord@northeastca.gov.uk

North East Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 14 October 2021
(2.00pm – 3.25pm)

Meeting held at Whickham Room, Gateshead Civic Centre, NE8 1HH

Present:

Independent Members: Mr D Taylor-Gooby (*Chair*), Simon Hart (*Vice-Chair*)

Councillors: C Martin (*Durham*), C Lines (*Durham*), J Eagle (*Gateshead*), M Hall (*Gateshead*), J Wallace (*Gateshead*), D Snowdon (*Sunderland*)

Officers: G Armstrong (*Policy and Scrutiny Officer, NECA*), Nicola Robason (*Monitoring Officer, NECA*), Toby Ord (*Strategy and Democratic Services Assistant, NECA*), Rory Sherwood-Parkin (*Senior Economic Policy Manager, South Tyneside Council*), J Lunness (*Strategy and Democracy Support Officer, South Tyneside*), S Gwilym (*Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Durham County Council*), Angela Frisby (*Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Gateshead Council*)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absences were received from Cllr Coult, Cllr Kilgour and Michelle Rainbow.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr M Hall declared an interest as managing director of Prism Care (North East) CIC.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2020

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2021

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

5. COVID-19 REGIONAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Submitted: Senior Economic Policy Manager, South Tyneside Council (previously circulated and copy attached to the official minutes).

Rory Sherwood-Parkin presented the report and delivered a presentation providing an overview of the NECA area's economic recovery in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was noted that overall, there has been a strong economic bounce-back since the height of the pandemic, with the hospitality sector driving the GDP of the area back up. It was mentioned that the rate of these growths is beginning to slow as a backlog of demand accompanied with EU exit has led to inflationary pressures and worsening of supply chain issues, however overall, the current economic situation is better than forecasted by Bank of England.

It was explained that redundancies have spiked nationwide due in part to the end of the furlough scheme, the universal credit uplift, supply chain issues and Brexit trade barriers. As for unemployment, benefit claimant rates have spiked since the onset of the pandemic, however these rates have declined consistently since the start of the year. It was also noted that data suggests disadvantaged areas are not recovering as quickly as others.

It was noted that furlough and vacancy data suggest a labour market mismatch with record numbers of vacancies nationwide, suggesting a need for up-skilling and re-skilling support.

Business confidence was said to be high, however aforementioned inflationary pressures, supply chain shortages and staff vacancies were said to be impacting all sectors differently.

Attention was drawn to footfall levels in the NECA region, which were noted to be bouncing back despite remaining below pre-pandemic levels. This was attributed to office workforces continuing to work from home and students yet to return to University as of the time of data collection, however, it was noted that there is currently a strong night-time economy, aided by summer staycation boosts as hotels reopen. Members were informed that as footfall levels decline in towns, the focus of high streets must be reconsidered.

The Chair thanked Rory for his presentation, querying whether pre-existing inequalities had worsened during the pandemic. It was clarified that the data shown in the presentation could be used to support this argument.

Members expressed their concerns over staff shortages for public transport as staff cannot be trained quick enough to fill vacancies and many are being enticed by higher paying jobs elsewhere. In response, it was recommended that these issues are investigated to provide both short and long-term resolutions to promote jobs in the area and schemes which provide workers with the necessary skills for said jobs.

A member also raised concerns over the low footfall levels of shopping centres in the region and questioned what can be done to tackle this. The Government's proposed introduction of an online shopping tax was discussed in relation, however it was noted that shopping centres in the region are doing more to attract smaller independent businesses and restaurants as bigger chains close their stores.

Members went on to discuss other contemporary issues such as reassuring businesses suffering supply shortages, health and social care staff shortages and the effects of inflation to both the public and businesses.

AGREED – That:

- i. the report be noted and further data be collected.

6. DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN THE NORTH EAST

Submitted: Report of the Skills Director, North East LEP (previously circulated and copy attached to the official minutes).

In absence of Michelle Rainbow, the Chair led members through the report.

Attention was drawn to the executive summary of the report, which expressed concerns over digital exclusion in the North East and provided an overview on those most likely to be affected, accompanied with recommendations on how to overcome digital exclusion.

Ultimately it was resolved that Michelle Rainbow should be present in order for the report to be delivered effectively and the proposed recommendations properly discussed.

AGREED – That:

- i. the report be noted, and that Michelle Rainbow is to be requested to attend the next meeting to deliver the report.

7. FORWARD PLAN AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Submitted: Report of the Policy and Scrutiny Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to the official minutes).

Gavin Armstrong presented the report which provided Members with the opportunity to consider items on the Forward Plan and the Work Programme of the Committee for 2020/21.

AGREED – That:

- i. the report be noted.

8. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

16 December 2021 at 2.00pm

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16 December 2021
Subject: NECA Budget Proposals 2022/23
Report of: Chief Finance Officer

Executive Summary

This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the NECA Budget Proposals for 2022/23 and future years as part of the budget consultation process.

A report on the draft 2022/23 Budget was presented to the Leadership Board on 2 November 2021. That report is attached as an appendix to this report for consideration and comment. Included in the report is an updated forecast of outturn for the current year against the budget agreed in February 2021.

The report sets out that the forecast for the 2021/22 financial year is for a deficit of approximately £9,600. This is the result of lower than forecast investment interest being due to the historically low interest rates. The deficit will be met from the NECA Corporate Reserve in year. The report highlights that budget proposals for 2022/23 are in line with the forecasts set out as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by the Leadership Board in February 2021.

Contributions to the NECA Corporate Budget and the NECA budget for fulfilment of the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) Accountable Body role will be maintained at the current levels of £25,000 and £10,000 respectively per authority for 2022/23, although these will be subject to review for 2023/24 onwards.

The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considered in the development of the final budget report and reported to the NECA Leadership Board when it sets the budgets for 2022/23 at its meeting in February 2022.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to receive the report for information and provide comment for consideration as part of the consultation process.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposals for the 2022/23 NECA budget, as part of the consultation process. The report on the draft budget was presented to the Leadership Board on 2 November and is attached to this report.

2 Proposals

- 2.1 The draft budget proposals for 2022/23 are set out in the report attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Key proposals presented to the NECA Leadership Board on 2 November include:
- a) The contribution from the NECA constituent authorities to NECA corporate costs to be maintained at £25,000 per authority next year. This will need to be reviewed for future years.
 - b) The £70,000 contribution towards the costs of the JTC Accountable Body role is continued in 2022/23 through an equal contribution of £10,000 from the seven local authority members of the JTC. This will need to be reviewed for future years.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 As part of the process for setting its budget, NECA must ensure appropriate and effective consultation takes place with all Members and other stakeholders on the content of the Budget. This includes consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and this report provides an opportunity for such consultation to take place.

4. Alternative Options Available

- 4.1 The report is presented for information.

5. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 Comments made as part of the consultation process will be considered in the development of the final, detailed budget proposals for 2022/23 which will be presented to the NECA Leadership Board for approval in February 2022.

6. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 6.1 There are no impacts on objectives arising from this report.

7. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 7.1 The financial and other resource implications are set out in detail in the individual reports contained as appendices.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9. Key Risks

9.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

11. Crime and Disorder

11.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

12. Consultation/Engagement

12.1 The budget is subject to a period of consultation which includes this committee as well as other committees of NECA, constituent local authorities and officer groups.

13. Other Impact of the Proposals

13.1 There are no other impacts arising from this report which is for information.

14. Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: NECA Leadership Board 2 November 2021 – 2022/23 Budget

15. Background Papers

15.1 None

16. Contact Officers

16.1 Eleanor Goodman, NECA Finance Manager,
eleanor.goodman@northeastca.gov.uk, 0191 433 3860

17. Sign off

- 17.1
- Head of Paid Service: ✓
 - Monitoring Officer: ✓
 - Chief Finance Officer: ✓

Date: 2 November 2021

Subject: NECA Budget 2022/23

Report of: Chief Finance Officer

Executive Summary

This report sets out budget proposals for 2022/23 for consultation, and indicative estimates for the period 2023/24-2024/25, along with an updated forecast of outturn for 2021/22. The budget proposals will be subject to further consultation and presented to the Leadership Board at its meeting in February 2022 for approval.

In line with the estimates presented to the Leadership Board at its last meeting, the forecast for the 2021/22 financial year is for a deficit of approximately £9,600. This is as a result of lower than forecast investment interest being received due to historically low interest rates. This deficit will be met from the NECA Corporate Reserve in year. The report highlights that budget proposals for 2022/23 are in line with the forecasts set out as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) presented to the Leadership Board in February 2021.

Contributions to the NECA Corporate Budget and the NECA budget for fulfilment of the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) Accountable Body role will be maintained at the current levels of £25,000 and £10,000 respectively for 2022/23, although these will be subject to review for 2023/24 onwards.

Recommendations

The Leadership Board is recommended to agree the following proposals to be consulted upon.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 A report was presented to the Leadership Board in September setting out the draft proposals for 2022/23 and future years and the updated forecast of outturn for the current financial year, 2021/22.
- 1.2 In line with the budget-setting timetable agreed by the Leadership Board in July 2021, this report sets out budget proposals for the NECA Corporate budget and the Accountable Body budget for the provision of this role for the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC). The draft proposals have been revised for new information since the last report and this report now presents the proposals which will be subject to consultation in line with the NECA constitution.

2. Proposals

2021/22 Forecast of outturn

- 2.1 The NECA budget for corporate costs is required to support operational costs including staffing employed by NECA, Service Level Agreements (SLAs), independent members allowances and expenses, and supplies and services costs. The report to the Leadership Board on 2 February 2021 set a net NECA Corporate budget for 2021/22 of £202,940 which provided for NECA corporate capacity and to fulfil the JTC Accountable Body role. This is funded from contributions from NECA constituent authorities totalling £100,000 (£25,000 per authority), contributions from JTC constituent authorities totalling £70,000 (£10,000 per authority) and interest income on short term investments.
- 2.2 Interest rates remain at a historically low level of 0.1%. This has had an impact on the level of interest that the authority has been able to achieve on its investments, part of which contributes to the NECA Corporate budget. In September the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted not to increase rates, however it is considered increasingly likely that, should current high levels of inflation be sustained, the MPC may need to increase rates in 2022.
- 2.3 Accordingly, the forecast for investment income receivable in 2021/22 is forecast to be below the budget set for the year in February 2021. The small forecast deficit resulting can be met from the NECA Corporate reserve in year, which is higher than was forecast at the time of setting the budget due to slightly higher investment income received in 2020/21, and totalled £426k at 1 April 2021.
- 2.4 The forecast has been updated on the most recent information and is set out in the table below.

2.5

	NECA Corporate		JTC Accountable Body	
	2021/22 Original Budget	2021/22 Forecast	2021/22 Original Budget	2021/22 Forecast
Employees	49,815	50,687	11,790	11,996
Service Level Agreements	53,000	52,353	75,400	74,622
Independent Members Allowances and expenses	7,000	6,000	0	0
Supplies and Services	5,935	6,935	0	0
Total Expenditure	115,750	115,975	87,190	86,618
NECA Corporate Contributions	(100,000)	(100,000)	0	0
JTC Accountable Body Contributions	0	0	(70,000)	(70,000)
Interest Income	(15,750)	(10,000)	(17,190)	(13,000)
Total Income	(115,750)	(110,000)	(87,190)	(83,000)
Net deficit to fund from reserves	0	5,975	0	3,618

Budget Proposals 2022/23 and Estimates for 2023/24 and 2024/25

2.6

Appendix 1 sets out the indicative draft budget for 2022/23, along with Medium Term Financial Strategy estimates for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The constituent authority contributions to the NECA Corporate Budget and to the NECA budget for fulfilment of the JTC Accountable Body role are included at the current levels of £25,000 and £10,000 respectively for 2022/23 and beyond, however, these will need to be subject to review for 2023/24 onwards and is dependent upon investment income recovering to the rates achieved during 2020/21 and balances held being at a sufficient level.

2.7

The proposals set out for consultation are largely in line with draft proposals reported to the Leadership Board in September, but have been updated for the latest available information. On 7 September, the Prime Minister announced a 1.25% increase in National Insurance Contributions payable by employees and employers. This has led to a small increase in the staffing budgets met by the NECA Corporate budget. The increase is applicable from 5 April 2022, so does not have an impact on the forecast for the current year.

Reserves

2.8

The Corporate reserve of NECA was £426k at 1 April 2021. After meeting the small in-year deficit for 2021/22, it is forecast to be approximately £415k. Based on current

budgets, this is considered a prudent level of reserves to hold to mitigate against unforeseen costs which may arise specifically in relation to this area of the budget.

- 2.9 Separate reserves are held for Transport activity (including Nexus and the Tyne Tunnels), and decisions on these reserves will be taken by the JTC as part of its own budget considerations.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 This report sets out budget proposals for 2022/23 for the NECA Corporate budget, including fulfilment of its Accountable Body role for the JTC.

- 3.2 The report identifies that NECA Corporate contributions will be maintained at £25,000 per authority and contributions to the JTC Accountable Body role will be maintained at £10,000 per authority in 2022/23 and will be reviewed for 2023/24.

4. Alternative Options Available

- 4.1 The Leadership Board may agree to the proposals set out being taken forward for consultation and, taking into account comments raised as part of the consultation, presented to the Leadership Board for agreement in February 2022.

Alternatively, the Leadership Board may put forward alternative proposals to be consulted upon.

5. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 The NECA Constitution requires that consultation on budget proposals be undertaken at least two months prior to the budget being agreed. The proposals will be subject to consultation with the Leadership Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and officer groups. The results of the consultation will be taken into account in the preparation of the final budget proposals presented to the Leadership Board for agreement at its meeting in February 2022.

6. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 6.1 The budget and medium-term financial strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 has been and will continue to be prepared to reflect the objectives of the Authority and feedback from constituent authorities. Future reports will set out the revenue and capital budget proposals in detail for agreement that will help deliver the objectives of the Authority.

7. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 7.1 The financial and other resources implications are set out in the main body of the report.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 The budget must be approved unanimously in accordance with the requirements of the NECA Order and the NECA Constitution.

9. Key Risks

9.1 Appropriate risk management arrangements are put in place in each budget area by the delivery agencies responsible. Reserves are maintained to help manage financial risk to the authority.

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

11. Crime and Disorder

11.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

12. Consultation/Engagement

12.1 The NECA Constitution requires that consultation on budget proposals be undertaken at least two months prior to the budget being agreed. The draft proposals will be subject to consultation with the Leadership Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and officer groups. Comments raised as part of the consultation process will be taken into account in the preparation of the final reports.

13. Other Impact of the Proposals

13.1 There are no other impacts arising from these proposals.

14. Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1 – NECA Corporate and JTC Accountable Body Budget estimates 2022/23-2023/24.

15. Background Papers

15.1 NECA Constitution

16. Contact Officers

16.1 Eleanor Goodman, NECA Finance Manager,
Eleanor.goodman@northeastca.gov.uk, 0191 433 3860

17. Sign Off

- 17.1
- Head of Paid Service: ✓
 - Monitoring Officer: ✓



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- Chief Finance Officer: ✓

Appendix 1 – NECA Corporate and JTC Accountable Body Budget Proposals 2022/23-2024/25

	2022/23 Proposed Budget			2023/24 Draft Budget			2024/25 Draft Budget		
	NECA Corporate	JTC Accountable Body	Total	NECA Corporate	JTC Accountable Body	Total	NECA Corporate	JTC Accountable Body	Total
Expenditure									
Employees	53,580	13,230	66,810	54,120	13,400	67,520	54,660	13,530	68,190
Service Level Agreements	53,530	76,160	129,690	54,070	76,910	130,980	54,600	77,680	132,280
Independent Members Allowances	7,000	0	7,000	7,000	0	7,000	7,000	0	7,000
Supplies and Services	7,000	0	7,000	7,000	0	7,000	7,000	0	7,000
Total Expenditure	121,110	89,390	210,500	122,190	90,310	212,500	123,260	91,210	214,470
Income									
NECA Corporate Contributions	(100,000)	0	(100,000)	(100,000)	0	(100,000)	(100,000)	0	(100,000)
JTC Accountable Body Contributions	0	(70,000)	(70,000)	0	(70,000)	(70,000)	0	(70,000)	(70,000)
Interest Income	(20,000)	(19,000)	(40,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(40,000)	(22,000)	(20,000)	(42,000)
Total Income	(120,000)	(89,000)	(209,000)	(120,000)	(90,000)	(210,000)	(122,000)	(90,000)	(212,000)
Net (to)/from Corporate Reserve	1,110	390	1,500	2,190	310	2,500	1,260	1,210	2,470

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16 December 2021

Subject: Digital Exclusion in the North East

Report of: Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director, North East Local Enterprise Partnership

Executive Summary

This report provides a background to a recent report on Digital Exclusion in the North East published by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership. The executive summary to the report is attached as appendix 1 and the presentation at the committee will outline the key findings.

Digital exclusion, where people lack digital skills, connectivity and accessibility, has been recognised as a problem for several years. However, the problem has been exacerbated by Covid-19, where access to the internet and digital devices has been vital for accessing goods and services and maintaining social contact.

Key recommendations of the report include – intervention across many groups and communities, and a co-ordinated response from education, business, voluntary and public sector to help address a large and complex issue. The report notes that there has been recent progress made on improving digital inclusion and this offers an opportunity to roll out successful approaches more widely across the region.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of the presentation.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Background Information

- 1.1 This presentation on Digital Exclusion outlines the increasing importance of digital skills, the impact of digital exclusion and how a strategic regional approach to tackling digital exclusion is required to reverse the increasing digital divide.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 There are no proposals being put forward as the presentation is for information and discussion.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 Not applicable.

4. Alternative Options Available

- 4.1 Not applicable

5. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 6.1 None.

7. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 7.1 None

8.

- 8.1 None

9. Key Risks

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9.1 None

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 None

11. Crime and Disorder

11.1 None

12. Consultation/Engagement

12.1 None

13. Other Impact of the Proposals

13.1 None

14. Appendices

14.1 Digital Exclusion in the North East LEP Area: Executive Summary

15. Background Papers

15.1 None

16. Contact Officers

16.1 Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director, North East Local Enterprise Partnership
michelle.rainbow@nelep.co.uk

17. Sign off

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 17.1
- Head of Paid Service: ✓
 - Monitoring Officer: ✓
 - Chief Finance Officer: ✓

18. Glossary

- 18.1 None

Digital Exclusion in the North East LEP Area: Executive Summary

September 2021



Introduction

In today's world digital skills are becoming increasingly important. They can connect people to education and training, better jobs, social interaction, and public services, as well as providing access to cheaper products and services online.

Digital exclusion, where people lack digital skills, connectivity and accessibility, has been recognised as a problem for several years. However, the problem has been exacerbated by Covid-19, where access to the internet and digital devices has been vital for accessing goods and services and maintaining social contact.

With increasing aspects of life taking place online, a strategic regional approach to tackling digital exclusion is required to reverse the increasing digital divide.

About the research

In March 2021 the North East LEP and its Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) commissioned New Skills Consulting (NSC) to undertake research into the nature and extent of digital exclusion in the North East, focusing primarily on the economic and skills-related impacts of digital exclusion.

The following key research tasks have been undertaken to inform the report:



Comprehensive review of current data, reports and policy documents



Mapping and gapping of current solutions and interventions



Consultations with 45 colleagues from education, training and employment support



Online survey with 30 schools and colleges from the North East LEP area

Defining digital exclusion

There is no single, agreed definition of digital exclusion and, rather than being an absolute term, it is a spectrum on which people experience different facets of exclusion to a greater or lesser extent. There is, however, broad recognition that the main ways in which people experience digital exclusion are:



Devices

Lack of access to adequate or appropriate digital devices.



Connectivity

Lack of internet access due to poverty or unreliable service.



Skills

Lack of appropriate digital skills to enable engagement in learning or employment.



Confidence

Lack of confidence in using digital devices and engaging with online services.



Resistance

Some people don't want to develop digital skills or don't understand the benefits of digital engagement.

Who is digitally excluded?

Different aspects of digital exclusion can affect a broad range of people. However, research¹ shows that people from disadvantaged and socially excluded groups are more likely to experience digital exclusion than others, including:

-  **Older people**

-  **Without a job**

-  **Lower income groups**

-  **Living in social housing**

-  **People with disabilities**

-  **Low educational qualifications**

-  **Living in rural areas**

-  **Homeless**

-  **First language is not English**

Digital exclusion in the North East

It is difficult to quantify the extent of digital exclusion in the North East because there is limited data available at a regional and sub-regional level. Nevertheless, available data² indicates that the region is one of the worst affected in the UK.

Indicator	North East	England Av.
Proportion of people offline	8%	5%
Proportion with low levels of digital engagement	32%	28%
Confidence in using the internet	83%	86%
Digital skills improvement during Covid	23%	29%
Passive and uncommitted internet users	32%	20%

Office of National Statistics data for 2020 indicates that in the North East there are approximately 61,000 lapsed users (those who last used the internet more than three months ago) and 176,000 adults who have never used the internet.

Feedback gathered during the research also indicates that digital exclusion impacts learners across the North East, particularly in settings with a higher proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The key barriers they face are lack of access to devices, broadband connectivity and parental support.

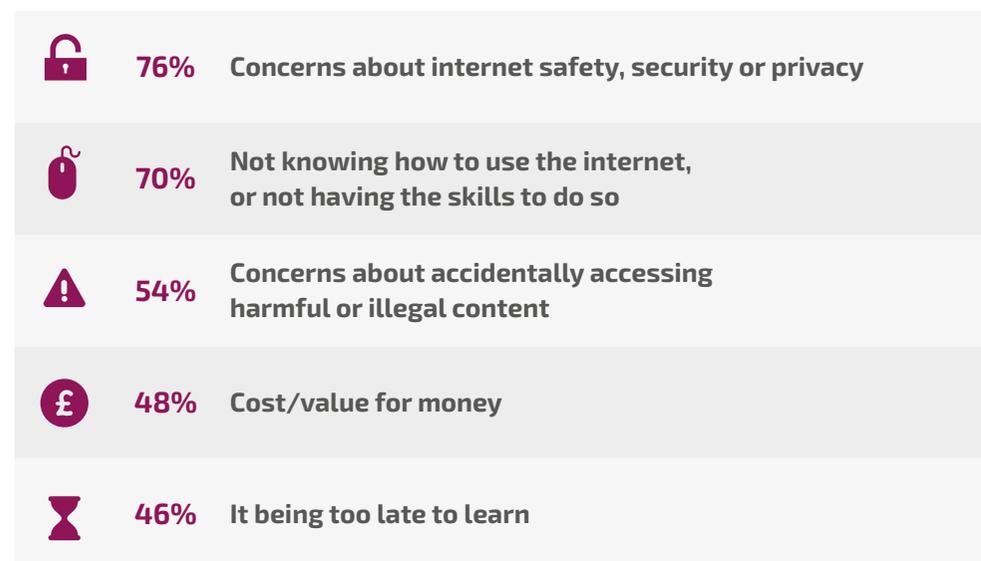
¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion/what-digital-inclusion-is>

² Source: UK Consumer Digital Index 2021, Lloyds Bank; and Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) Internet User Classification (IUC; Alexiou & Singleton 2018)

Attitudes towards digital exclusion

Research undertaken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic³ showed that, generally speaking, adults who don't use the internet don't feel that they are missing out by not being online. Of those who are non-users of the internet 75% did not feel that they are missing out and 79% believed they were unlikely to use the internet in the future.

Reasons for not using the internet are multifaceted, and include:



Source: ComRes, Digital Exclusion Research, 2019

Impact of digital exclusion during Covid

- Lack of access to devices and connectivity has been exacerbated by the closure of libraries and IT suites.
- The loss of learning during the pandemic has increased the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners.
- While most employment support clients have a smart phone, many had no access to an appropriate device for online training, job search and interviews.
- For those who were engaging reluctantly in education or employment support, remote provision has made it easier to withdraw altogether.
- Conversion rates from employment support into work have fallen and lack of digital skills means clients are increasingly excluded from the labour market.
- The pandemic has exposed discrepancies between education settings in the quality of digital infrastructure and the digital skills and knowledge of staff.

³ ComRes, Digital Exclusion Research, 2019 (Survey of 1,000 recent users and non-users of the internet)

Positive opportunities from Covid

- It has focused attention on digital exclusion, creating greater awareness and momentum to tackle the problem.
- It has created impetus to accelerate digital adoption, which has improved the quality, efficiency and flexibility of services.
- It has accelerated the improvement of staff digital skills and the upgrade of IT equipment and infrastructure.
- It has led to the creation of valuable online resources that can be accessed multiple times at any time.
- Digital provision has made it easier for some people to access services, opening them up to new audiences.
- Many learners and employment support clients have improved their digital skills and increased their confidence in using digital technology.
- Across education, training and employment support settings it has raised awareness of the importance of digital skills for work.

Wider impacts of digital exclusion

Digital exclusion is having an impact on educational attainment and employment outcomes that is far wider than the more immediate impacts of the pandemic.

- It is creating challenges and widening the achievement gap in education, particularly for learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
- As well as impacting on academic performance and results, it impacts on progression into employment and access to good quality jobs.
- It increases the gap for those who are already furthest from the job market.
- Many employment support clients lack the devices, skills and confidence to search and apply for jobs online and complete online interviews.
- Lack of digital skills presents a major barrier to clients being able to secure work, even in low skilled and entry level jobs.
- The move up the career ladder from low-skill to high-skill jobs comes with increased demand for specific digital skills

92% Businesses who say digital skills are important for their employees

82% Current online vacancies that require digital skills

28% North East employers with skills gaps who say basic digital skills need improving

23% Businesses who say their employees lack basic digital skills

Source: WorldSkills UK, Learning and Work Institute and Enginuity; DCMS, No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills; and DfE, Employer Skills Survey

Digital skills gaps

According to the 2019 Employer Skills Survey⁴, 20% of North East employers with a skills shortage vacancy said they found computer literacy or basic IT skills difficult to obtain from applicants. 26% said they found advanced or specialist IT skills difficult to obtain.

Top 4 IT skills that need to be improved (North East employers with an IT skills gap)

33%	Basic Microsoft Office skills
18%	Specialist software or hardware / internal systems
18%	Foundation digital skills
17%	Advanced Microsoft Office skills

Source: Department for Education, Employer skills survey 2019

Despite the importance of digital skills in the workplace, research indicates that employer investment in training in the UK is low compared to other advanced economies and has declined in recent years. Data from Make it Click (2020) shows:

- Fewer than 40% of UK business leaders think employers bear most responsibility for keeping employees' digital skills up to date.
- 38% say employees are responsible and 5% say Government is responsible.
- 20% say they do not have funds to train employees on the job.

Research shows that many individuals recognise the need to improve their IT and digital skills in order to improve their employability and job prospects.

88%	Young people who say digital skills will be essential for their future career
62%	Young people confident they have the basic digital skills employers require
18%	Young people confident they have the advanced digital skills employers require
59%	UK employers who say improving digital skills is important to employability post-pandemic
57%	Furloughed workers who want to improve their digital and IT skills

Source: WorldSkills UK, Learning and Work Institute and Enginuity; Microsoft research; Make it Click

⁴ Department for Education, "Employer skills survey 2019: England results", October 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2019-england-results>

Current solutions and interventions

There are numerous initiatives aimed at developing digital skills and providing access to digital equipment and infrastructure. However, the current approach to tackling digital exclusion is fragmented, with initiatives at national, regional and local level, targeting different groups or challenges. It includes UK Government interventions as well as those delivered by the private sector, the education sector and VCSE organisations. Key characteristics of the current support landscape are:

- It is complex and there is little co-ordination, with some initiatives overlapping and some gaps in provision.
- There is a lack of evidence or data to inform and shape the range of initiatives.
- There is a broad range of fully-funded digital skills provision ranging from short basic courses to full-time accredited courses.
- Much of the current provision is not fit for purpose as it is quickly out of date and people want short, practical courses delivered in an informal setting.
- Research suggests a lack of awareness about the provision available and a lack of understanding about individual digital skills needs.
- Some initiatives are short-term in response to the pandemic, but there is a longer-term need for a more co-ordinated and systematic approach.

Summary of key research themes

- People from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately affected by the digital divide.
- There is a lack of co-ordinated activity and no structured approach at a regional or national level and tackling the problem requires ownership.
- There has been a loss of learning for students during the pandemic, particularly for disadvantaged and less able pupils, which has further widened the disadvantage gap.
- More widely, digital exclusion has negative impacts on engagement with learning, access to resources, quality of work, educational outcomes and progress into employment.
- Early intervention and consistent approaches to digital skills development are needed to close the digital divide.
- Digital skills are increasingly essential for most jobs, even at entry level. However, there is a lack of clarity about basic digital skills and no common framework to assess and develop these skills.
- There is a need for more short, focused interventions to develop practical digital skills for work or life, delivered in informal community settings.

Recommendations

Digital exclusion is a large and complex issue that requires interventions across many groups and communities, and a co-ordinated response from education, business, VCSE and the public sector. Nevertheless, the recent momentum achieved towards improving digital inclusion during the pandemic offers a real opportunity to roll out successful approaches more widely across the region in a way that would have a meaningful impact on reducing the digital divide.

The research highlighted priority actions for tackling the economic and skills impacts of digital inclusion, some directly actionable regionally, and others which will require lobbying and influencing with Government and other stakeholders.



High profile education and awareness raising activities



Address the problem of access to digital devices



Address the two key connectivity challenges – affordability and rural access



Develop a common framework for essential basic digital skills



Short, practical courses and advice delivered in informal, community-based settings



Prioritise early intervention to develop functional digital skills from a young age



Embed digital skills into the FE and HE curriculum



Map provision to employer needs and incentivise investment in the workforce

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16 December 2021

Subject: Forward Plan and Scrutiny Work Programme Update

Report of: Policy and Scrutiny officer

Executive Summary

This report provides members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to consider the items on the Forward Plan for the current 28-day period and discuss items for the Work Programme for 2021/22.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- i. Review the current Forward Plan and consider which items they may wish to examine in more detail;
- ii. Suggest any items for the Work Programme for 2021/22 that Members would wish to explore in more detail, either at the Committee or via a 'deep dive' or working group;

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The Forward Plan is a document which NECA is required to maintain under the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017. The Forward Plan is published on NECA's website and lists the decisions that the North East Combined Authority intends to take in the coming months and must include all decisions to be made in the next 28 days.
- 1.2 The Forward Plan template contains specific information relating to each decision, including the date the decision will be made, a brief explanation of the topic, the consultation to be undertaken, and contact details of the author. The Forward Plan template has recently been updated and includes further information including if the decision is a 'Key Decision' and if an item will be discussed in private.
- 1.3 Details of each decision are included on the Forward Plan 28 days before the report is considered and any decision is taken. This supports the transparency of decision making within the Combined Authority and allows members of the public to see the items that will be discussed. There are special procedures for circumstances where publication for the full 28 clear day period is impractical or where there is special urgency. Both of these procedures involve the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

Role of Overview and Scrutiny

- 1.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee examine any decisions of the North East Combined Authority – be that by the principal decision-making body or a committee or officer holding delegated authority. This Scrutiny occurs in public and ensures democratic and public accountability.
- 1.5 One of the main functions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the review and scrutiny of 'Key Decisions' made by the NECA Leadership Board and Officers of the Combined Authority. The relevant regulations set out a test for what should be considered a Key Decision – being those which are most significant in financial or other terms. This is explained in the Decision-Making Protocol adopted by the Committee on the 15 March 2018. At the inaugural meeting of the NECA Leadership Board on the 13 November, following the governance changes, it was agreed that the Decision Making Protocol would remain in place:

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<https://northeastca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/NECA-Decision-Making-Protocol.pdf>

1.6 It is NECA's practice to include formal decisions on the Forward Plan to maximise the opportunity for review and scrutiny. In considering items in the Forward Plan, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should determine which areas scrutiny can add most value to in relation to the decisions being made.

1.7 The Forward Plan at the date this paper was issued is published at:

<https://www.northeastca.gov.uk/committee-meetings/forward-plan>.

Update on Requests for Special Urgency / General Exception

1.8 In accordance with the Decision Making Protocol, it was agreed by Members that the request of any Short Notice Procedure that involved the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be reported at the next Committee. The table below shows the number of requests made since the last meeting was held:

Type of Short Notice Procedure	Number of Requests since previous Committee
Requests for Special Urgency	0
Request for General Exception	0

1.9 The table above reflects that there have been no requests for general exception and no requests for special urgency since the last Committee.

Annual Work Programme – Update

1.10 The most recent version of the work programme has been compiled to allow the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to consider items that they have requested.

1.11 The work programme is also designed to give an overview of all performance, decision-taking and developments within the NECA, as well as being focused and flexible to allow for new issues and recognising the capacity of the scrutiny committee to respond in a timely way to emerging developments throughout the year. The Plan allows the Committee to take a longer-term view than the Forward Plan, adding a longer-term perspective to the Committee's work. Advantages of a longer-term perspective is the opportunity to gain a deeper

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understanding of matters and to allow for more constructive engagement and scrutiny.

- 1.12 Members are also invited to comment and give consideration to any additional items they would wish to consider on their Work Programme or those decisions where they can add value.
- 1.13 The proposed work programme included in appendix 2. It should be noted that the work programme covers items that will be discussed at the meetings. It does not preclude 'deeper dives' providing more focused scrutiny of particular topics by a sub-group of the committee outside of these meeting dates. These topics can be raised with the Chair and Scrutiny Officer at any time.
- 1.14

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Committee Members are invited to review the Forward Plan for the current 28-day period – giving consideration to any items they may wish to examine in more detail – and to suggest any items for addition to the Annual Work Programme for 2021/22.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 To provide an opportunity for Committee members to input on any additional items as part of continued planning for the Work Programme for 2021/22.

4. Alternative Options Available

- 4.1 Option 1 – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may review Forward Plan and suggest additional items for the Work Programme.

Option 2 – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may choose not to review the Forward Plan or consider any additional items for the Work Programme.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

5. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 In considering the Forward Plan, Members are asked to consider those issues where the Scrutiny Committee could make a contribution and add value.
- 5.2 If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee determines to review or scrutinise a decision notified in the Forward Plan, a meeting of the Committee will be arranged to allow scrutiny members to carry out their role in a timely manner.

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5.3 The work programme will be refreshed and updated at each meeting of the Committee throughout the year.

6. Potential Impact on Objectives

6.1 Development of a work programme and review and scrutiny of decisions in the Forward Plan will contribute towards the development and implementation of the policy framework of the NECA, the Joint Transport Committee and the North East LEP as well as providing appropriate challenge to decisions making.

7. Financial and Other Resources Implications

7.1 No financial or other resource implications are identified at this stage.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from these recommendations.

9. Key Risks

9.1 There are no key risks associated with the recommendations made in this report.

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 There are no specific equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

11. Crime and Disorder

11.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

12. Consultation/Engagement

12.1 On-going consultation takes place with Officers and Scrutiny Members across the NECA in regard to the items for the Annual Work Programme as Appendix One.

13. Other Impact of the Proposals

13.1 The proposals consider the wider impact and take into account the Principles of Decision Making as set out in the NECA Constitution. They allow Members consideration of the items on the Forward Plan and allow them the opportunity

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to have an overview of all performance, decision making and developments across NECA.

14. Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1 – Annual Work Programme Update

15. Background Papers

15.1 None.

16. Contact Officers

16.1 Gavin Armstrong, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

Email: gavin.armstrong@northeastca.gov.uk

Telephone Number: Tel No: (0191) 4247537

16.2 Nicola Robason, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Email: nicola.robason@southtyneside.gov.uk

Telephone Number: 0191 424 7186

17. Sign off

17.1 ✓ Head of Paid Service

✓ Monitoring Officer

✓ Chief Finance Officer

18. Glossary

18.1 NECA - North East Combined Authority

North East LEP - North East Local Enterprise Partnership

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Appendix One

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22

Standing Items for each Committee Meeting:

- Declaration of Interest
- Minutes of Previous Meeting
- NECA Forward Plan and Work Programme Report

Source of work programme and items of importance:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee obtains work programme items from the following sources:

- a) Items submitted by Members of the Committee (and including items referred by other members of the Combined Authority);
- b) Suggestions from NECA Chief Officers; Patrick Melia – Head of Paid Service, Nicola Robason – Deputy Monitoring Officer and Paul Darby – Chief Finance Officer
- c) The Budget and Policy Framework; Transport Plan and Strategic Economic Plan
- d) The Forward Plan;
- e) The Thematic Leads;
- f) Evidence for any policy review work of relevance to NECA

Items for future consideration (2021-2022)

Meeting Date	Subject
March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to employment -Mental health provision impacting employment and accessibility. • Thematic update from portfolio lead (topic TBC)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devolution – Potential Impacts on NECA • Thematic Updates from Portfolio Leaders • Environmental Plan and the impact on the region
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It should be noted that the work programme above covers items that will be discussed at the meetings. It does not preclude ‘deeper dives’ providing more focused scrutiny of particular topics by a sub-group of the committee outside of these meeting dates.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16 December 2021

Subject: Public Health and Social Care – Winter Pressures

Report of: Alice Wiseman, Amanda Healy, Caroline O’Neill

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation in the NECA area and North East. It will also identify the key winter pressures in the public health, care home and home care sectors and to highlight the main risks and mitigations for the system. The Committee will receive a detailed presentation at the meeting covering the most up-to-date information for the following key areas:

- COVID 19 Case Rate
- Vaccination rates
- Hospital Bed Occupancy
- Health and social care pressures
- Challenges, priorities, areas of advocacy and key risks

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of the presentation.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Background Information

- 1.1 This presentation on the current COVID-19 situation in the NECA area and North East and the winter pressures that are being planned for. It will describe the response from NECA and the four constituent authorities to the pressures experienced in the areas of public health, care home and home care provision.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 There are no proposals being put forward as the presentation is for information and discussion.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 Not applicable.

4. Alternative Options Available

- 4.1 Not applicable

5. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 6.1 None.

7. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 7.1 None

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 None

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9. Key Risks

9.1 None

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 None

11. Crime and Disorder

11.1 None

12. Consultation/Engagement

12.1 None

13. Other Impact of the Proposals

13.1 None

14. Appendices

14.1 None

15. Background Papers

15.1 None

16. Contact Officers

- 16.1
- Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health, Health and Well-being Group Gateshead Council
 - Amanda Healy, FFPH, Director of Public Health, Chair of North East DPH Network, Adult and Health Services, Durham County Council

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- Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Children, Adults and Families, Gateshead Council

17. Sign off

- 17.1
 - Head of Paid Service: ✓
 - Monitoring Officer: ✓
 - Chief Finance Officer: ✓

18. Glossary

- 18.1 None