

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2018/19



Date: March 2019

Author: Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee



North Tyneside Council

Introduction

Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2018-19.

This report gives a summary of the work of Overview and Scrutiny over the year and highlights some of the achievements made and areas where scrutiny has had an impact on policy development.

The report also sets out the process for the development of the 2019/20 work programme.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny

The role of overview and scrutiny is to provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the Cabinet (and other decision makers), whilst also assisting in the development of key policies and plans.

Over recent years there has been an emphasis on promoting and developing the policy development role of overview and scrutiny. Throughout 2018/19 this has continued, and policy reviews have been undertaken with links to the priorities within the 'Our North Tyneside Plan' and the 'Creating a Brighter Future' Programme.

We have been a 'critical friend'

The Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and its sub-committees have continued to fulfil the important role of being a critical friend to Cabinet, providing challenge, particularly on budget and performance issues.

A Budget and Council Plan Study Group was established and this provided an opportunity for Scrutiny members to undertake a thorough review of the detailed budget proposals and business case information put forward by Cabinet. The Study Group produced a report and conclusions which were subsequently reported to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and Cabinet as part of the budget-setting process.

The Finance Sub-committee has continued to examine the Council's budget monitoring position on a bi-monthly basis, including the forecast outturn positions for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Investment Plan. Budget management reports have been developed to bring together financial and relevant performance information. This has allowed the Sub-committee to consider the financial information in the context of the policy priorities in the 'Our North Tyneside

Plan'. Members have also continued to review the red risks associated with the Business and Technical Partnerships, and monitored the impact of welfare reform changes.

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee: Review of the Capita Partnership

The Overview Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee established a sub-group to undertake a review of the partnership with Capita in relation to the delivery of the Authority's technical services. The aim of the review was to gain a clearer understanding of the partnership with Capita, how it was operating, and whether the service delivered to the Authority and residents was meeting the levels specified at inception.

The group held a number of meetings with officers from both the Council and Capita, and considered detailed information on specific aspects of the contract. The group developed nine recommendations and these have been reported to Cabinet. These included recommendations to make information about the contract more open and accessible; to develop the oversight role of Members via Scrutiny, including consideration of reports from the Partnering Boards and the involvement of scrutiny in the baseline exercises at years 5, 8 and 12 years; to increase the level of enforcement activity by the Council; recommendations linked to the Local Plan, including opportunities to maximise income through promoting expertise to other authorities; and the development of oversight and contingency planning in relation to the Capita business. The Cabinet accepted all nine recommendations and these will be implemented going forward.

Critical Friend Challenge: The Effectiveness of Collaborative Working in North Tyneside

The Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee set up a sub group to examine the effectiveness of collaborative working across agencies to ensure that each agency understood each other's responsibilities and shared information efficiently, and that the Authority was meeting its obligations.

The sub group met with the Independent Chair of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board; representatives of the North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group; social workers and front line staff in Children's Services; Northumbria Police; and senior managers within the Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding Service.

The sub group completed its evidence gathering in December 2018 and published its report with eight recommendations in March 2019. The sub group concluded that overall the Authority had very good collaborative working relationships with its statutory partners, its neighbouring local authorities and internally. The trusting relationships developed between organisations, services and officers allowed for

criticisms to facilitate improved services and actions, and provided assurance that it was unlikely that an issue would be allowed to fall between any gaps. That there was some scope for improvement was reflected in the recommendations, but in a challenging environment, with competing demands, the sub group felt satisfied that collaborative working was providing benefit to the Authority and the balance between collaborative working and ensuring the service for North Tyneside residents was the best it could be was right, and the effort taken to achieve this balance was not to be underestimated.

We have also focused on policy development

Some examples of the policy development work undertaken during 2018/19 are:

SMG Europe Sub-group - Culture and Leisure Sub-committee

The Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee agreed, as part of its 2018-19 work programme, to establish the SMG Europe Sub Group to carry out an examination of the Operating Agreement relating to the Playhouse, Whitley Bay, and specifically to consider the break point of the Agreement by either party giving nine months' notice to expire on 31 December 2019. The focus of the study was to examine the current operating agreement with the SMG Europe Operator to run the Playhouse until 31 December 2024. The outcomes are intended to support the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure in deciding policy objectives, taking these considerations into account. The work is on-going.

Retail and Town Centre Sub-group – Economic Prosperity Sub-committee

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Bruce Pickard, suggested that the Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee could usefully investigate the future role and nature of town and retail centres. Councillor Pickard posed the question that if the Council were to regenerate its town and retail centres, how could it develop sustainable retail models in the light of the growth of online shopping? In response the sub-committee appointed a sub-group to examine the topic and to formulate recommendations as to how the Council might shape its regeneration plans to develop and support sustainable retail and town centres in North Tyneside. This work is ongoing.

Direct provision of Social Care – Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee

Members of the Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee had a particular interest in the quality of social care provision in the borough and the role of the Council in supporting good quality provision. In relation, to this the Sub-committee scrutinised work undertaken by the authority to assess the viability and risks of delivering home care services via an alternative delivery model, and also on-going work to strengthen the home care market through revised commissioning arrangements and operating models. This work is on-going.

Review of the Lettings Policy – Housing Sub-committee

The Housing Sub-committee has, over two meetings, considered the proposed changes to the Council's Lettings Policy (for North Tyneside properties). Members expressed concern at some of the proposals being brought forward as part of the review and asked officers to evidence more clearly the reasoning behind the changes. Due to the feedback from Housing Sub-committee, some of the initial proposals had been re-evaluated and withdrawn. After lengthy discussions with officers and the relevant Cabinet Member, the sub-committee still had reservations about some of the proposed changes and expressed these in writing to the Cabinet Member. The sub-committee asked to be kept informed of the outcome of consultation with other groups and the final proposals that would be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Monitoring Role

Whilst helping to develop new policies and assisting in the review of others, scrutiny has also invested time in monitoring the development and delivery of existing plans and policies to ensure that the best quality services are delivered to residents and visitors of North Tyneside.

Some examples of the plans and policies that have been monitored throughout the year include:

Service Delivery and Performance - Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and its sub-committees have continued to receive monitoring reports on service delivery and performance across the Council. Scrutiny Members have also had the opportunity to comment on various policies and strategies prior to submission to Cabinet for approval.

Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust: Annual Quality Account - The Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee received a presentation from the Trust on the Quality Account 2017/18. The Sub-committee welcomed the opportunity to submit a statement for inclusion in the published document covering views on the Trust's performance over the year as set out in the Quality Account and the priorities identified by the Trust for 2018-19.

Safeguarding – the Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee received the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report and Action Plan at its meeting in November 2018. The sub-committee did not make any formal recommendations on the report, but Members did highlight some areas around the format of the Annual report to be fed back to officers. They also highlighted some issues to be raised with the board around incidences of financial abuse of

vulnerable adults in relation to door step lending, and raising awareness of safeguarding issues with the public.

Update on the Adaptations and Loan Equipment Service – The Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee considered the work of the Equipment Service and had an opportunity to view some of the adaptation equipment available to loan through the service. Members noted the significant positive change that the service can have to the quality of people's lives.

Attainment of Free School meals/Pupil Premium pupils - The Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee received its annual update on the attainment and progress of young people across the borough and focussed on the attainment of looked after children and the attainment of those in receipt of Free School meals/Pupil Premium pupils to monitor the effectiveness of the support and challenge programme of the FSM/PP programme to ensure comparable progress to those not in receipt of FSM. The sub-committee was pleased to note this year was the strongest performance for the looked after cohort at GCSE and the attainment gap was now in line with national at -27% and improved from last year's gap of -34%.

The Employment and Skills Strategy - The Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee received an updated Employment and Skills Strategy in January 2019 on how it was going to deliver the Ready for Work and Life element of the Our North Tyneside Plan.

Signs of Safety - After the introduction of Signs of Safety, a practice model for children in need of a statutory assessment, by North Tyneside and its partner agencies in 2017 the Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee monitored its implementation and adoption across the Authority.

Construction project – the Housing Sub-committee has received updates on the Construction project, which has overseen the transfer of construction, housing repairs and maintenance services to the direct management of the council. Members have followed progress with the arrangements to transfer staff and the consultation that has taken place around this. The sub-committee also considered the technology that would be used in logging and responding to repairs, and logistics in terms of fleet and work wear and accommodation for staff. The sub-committee will continue to monitor the progress of the Construction Project going into the new municipal year and look at the impact on performance and customer satisfaction.

Active North Tyneside Annual Report - The Culture and Leisure Sub Committee received the Active North Tyneside Annual Report 2017-18 which presented the work undertaken to demonstrate progress against delivery of performance of Active North Tyneside during the past 12 months. The Sub Committee also considered the Local Swim Project, a Sport England pilot to carry out research at a local level to see what was behind this decline and look at interventions to try to reverse the trend. The Authority was initially given £25,000 to carry out research and received a further £198,000 to deal with issues highlighted from the research carried out, the interventions subsequently introduced and the impact this has had; an Arts Council funded initiative to support engagement with the arts/culture with young people and the Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums as the local delivery body for the Authority; and North Tyneside Council's tourism and events programme and plans for future activity 'Developing a Tourism Offer'. The Sub Committee would also monitor the work of the Culture Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group, initiated by the North Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board, to deliver its objective to "reduce social isolation and increase cultural engagement across the population of North Tyneside to improve health and wellbeing"; and the outcomes in the Arts Council England document 'Shaping the Next Ten Years'.

The Chairs and Deputy Chairs have met bi-annually to share information on ideas and topics for review, to identify issues where services could be improved for residents, and to avoid any potential areas of duplication.

Achievements

Recommendations

During 2018-19, four in-depth reviews were completed and responses received from Cabinet; including one which was complete towards the end of 2017-18 and a response received in June 2018. As a result 20 recommendations have been considered by Cabinet, with a further eight recommendations recently submitted and under consideration. Cabinet accepted all 20 recommendations and has responded to the recommendations setting out how implementation will be taken forward. The Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and the sub-committees will continue to monitor implementation of these recommendations and the subsequent outcomes on the delivery of services.

Engagement and partnership working

A key role of overview and scrutiny is to promote issues of concern to the public and, where appropriate, consult with residents and service users on scrutiny investigations to be taken forward.

Scrutiny has continued to work closely with its partners, maintaining positive relationships and sharing key information, particularly in relation to health bodies and policing issues.

Representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Group, Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust, Healthwatch, and NHS England have all been in attendance at various meetings to share information and maintain key links with Members.

The Housing sub-committee is designated as the crime and disorder committee and has met with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Vera Baird in relation to the delivery of priorities contained within the Police and Crime Plan.

Various pieces of work this year have involved engagement with service users and partner organisations and this has been highlighted throughout this report.

Retail and Town Centre Sub-group

The Retail and Town Centre's Sub-group has sought input from a range of interested parties to feed into the review. From a business perspective, the group has met with representatives of the Whitley Bay, Wallsend and North Shields Chambers of Trade, The Crown Estate, New River, owners of the Forum and the Beacon Centre, and representatives from the Royal Quays. In addition, the Sub-group considered information from the Youth Council and representatives of the Youth Council attended a meeting of the Sub-group to share their views on young people and the future of town centres.

Reducing litter through education – Environment Sub-committee

The Sub-committee considered a suggestion from a member of the public in relation to reducing the amount of money spent on doing ad-hoc litter picks outside schools and instead spend the money on the provision of education to stop the litter being dropped in the first place.

Future Scrutiny

Preparation for the development of the 2019-20 overview and scrutiny work programmes is under consideration. The Chairs and Deputy Chairs will be discussing possible areas for review in order to prioritise topics for scrutiny during 2019-20. Elected Members, senior officers and the public will be encouraged to suggest topics that scrutiny could usefully investigate.

All suggestions received will be considered by individual sub-committees at the beginning of the new municipal year in order to develop work programmes for the year ahead. Some reviews will carry forward from this year. When prioritising topics, consideration will be given to whether the issue is timely and whether there is potential to have a positive impact on Council policy.

For 2018/19 the Council agreed a slightly reduced timetable of scrutiny meetings in line with financial pressures impacting on all areas of the organisation. This is continuing into 2019/20 and the committees will be looking at how they can work more efficiently, while ensuring that important issues are scrutinised effectively.