

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Monday, 3 October 2022

Present: Councillor M Wilson (Chair)
Councillors V Jamieson, J Kirwin, L Marshall,
J Montague, M Murphy, J O'Shea, B Pickard, J Walker
and G Westwater

Apologies: Councillors L Bones and M Hall

EP7/22 Appointment of Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the appointment of the following substitute member was reported:

Councillor J O'Shea for Councillor M Hall

EP8/22 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

EP9/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

EP10/22 Public Transport

Councillor Carl Johnson, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member with responsibility for strategic transport had accepted an invitation to meet with the sub-committee to review the state of public transport services in North Tyneside and to examine the actions being taken by the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) to deliver the North East Transport Plan.

Councillor Johnson presented an overview of transport governance across the region, the vision and objectives contained within the North East Transport Plan 2021-2035 and the factors which had affected public transport over recent years including the Covid-19 pandemic. The Transport Plan included a programme of improvements to be delivered in the short to medium term, including:

- a) a new fleet of Metros;
- b) dualling of a section of metro line which would enable the frequency of trains to increase from 12 to 10 minutes;
- c) reinstatement of a passenger rail service on the Northumberland Line, including a rail station at Northumberland Park;
- d) potential Shields Ferry changes;
- e) Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) schemes at North Shields interchange and embankment, Four Lane Ends interchange and cycling and walking improvements on routes to Metro stations;

- f) a new Metro station at Murton to be developer funded; and
- g) an enhanced partnership with bus operators.

In addition to the schemes included in the Plan, the JTC were currently focussed on delivering measures to address safety concerns on the Metro, encouraging concessionary pass holders to make more use of their passes, improving the information available to the public about bus and Metro services and working with Active Travel England on cycling and walking projects.

The sub-committee asked questions of Councillor Johnson and made comments when the following topics were discussed:

- a) options for the future development of on demand transport services;
- b) the nature and extent of integrated ticketing and the barriers to extending and enhancing the offer to include more bus services;
- c) the range of ticketing options available to young people to enable them to access education and training;
- d) the need for accessible, accurate and up to date route finder and ticket information;
- e) the need for Nexus to publicise those bus routes secured as part of its £4.5m rescue package to recast the bus network in Newcastle and North Tyneside following cuts in services in March;
- f) the likely implications of any new regional devolution deal and the election of a regional Mayor on the governance of transport; and
- g) how the North East Transport Plan was shaped by economic data to ensure that the network supported access to employment opportunities and adapted to changing trends.

The Chair thanked Councillor Johnson for meeting with the sub-committee.

EP11/22 Green Skills Sub-Group

In November 2022 the sub-committee had appointed the Green Skills Sub Group to examine the Authority's approach to adapting to a green industrial revolution and ensuring people have the right skills for the future green jobs. Having held a series of evidence gathering meetings with officers and key stakeholders during January and February 2022 the sub group had prepared a report setting out its findings, conclusions and recommendations. The sub-committee had approved the report on 10 May 2022 for submission to Cabinet.

The report had been presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 23 May 2022 by Councillor Matt Wilson. On 1 August 2022 the Cabinet had agreed its response to the report and recommendations. The Cabinet had accepted all but one of the recommendations. It had rejected the recommendation that the Authority commission a Retrofit Academy in North Tyneside for the delivery of PAS2035 qualifications because it did not have access to devolved skills funding to enable the direct commissioning of a Retrofit Academy. The commissioning of skills provision was carried out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and via devolved funding to the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA). Officers would therefore continue to work with colleagues from the NTCA to understand and utilise data from recent research such as 'Skilling Up for Retrofitting' on roles required and skills needs to influence the commissioning of current and future funding held by NTCA. This could include devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB), Skills for Growth and Skills Bootcamps funding to ensure that North Tyneside residents and businesses benefit from the provision of green skills funding.

The sub-committee expressed its disappointment with the decision of Cabinet not to pursue the commissioning of a Retrofit Academy in North Tyneside as the sub group had concluded that there was a need to deliver PAS 2035 courses and qualifications locally to equip people with the skills to deliver large scale retrofit programmes. The sub-committee recognised that the wording of the recommendation had been specific to the commissioning of an Academy in North Tyneside which may have limited the options available for its delivery. Members noted from the Cabinet's response that the Authority would continue to work with the NTCA to understand and utilise data from recent research on roles required and skills needed to influence the commissioning of current and future funding held by NTCA and ensure that North Tyneside is well placed with the skills required to support the delivery of retrofitting schemes. It was suggested that the sub-committee write to the relevant Cabinet Members to register its disappointment with the decision to reject the recommendation and to express its support for the commissioning of any PAS2035 courses and qualifications by the NTCA which would ensure that North Tyneside is well placed with the skills required to support the delivery of retrofitting schemes.

It was **agreed** that (1) the Cabinet's response to the report and recommendations of the Green Skills Sub Group be noted; and
(2) the sub-committee write to the relevant Cabinet Members to register its disappointment with the decision to reject the recommendation and to express its support for any action the Authority can take to work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority to commission PAS2035 courses and qualifications which would ensure that North Tyneside is well placed with the skills required to support the delivery of retrofitting schemes.

EP12/22 State of the Economy

The sub-committee was presented with data which provided an indication of the state of the economy in North Tyneside. The data included the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit, the town centre vacancy rate, the number of new business start-ups, the number of companies in distress, out of work benefit claimants, levels of earnings and qualifications within the population and the number of apprenticeships.

In examining the data the sub-committee examined in more detail the number of vacant properties in North Shields and the anticipated impact of implementation of the North Shields Masterplan.

Members considered the impact of rising costs on businesses and the risk this would lead to an increasing number of businesses in distress and closures. It was suggested that the sub-committee may wish to examine this topic in more detail to gain a better understanding of the cost pressures facing local businesses and the capacity of the Authority and the North of Tyne Combined Authority to support businesses and prevent failures. The Chair undertook to work with the Deputy Chair and relevant officers to formulate a proposal on how the sub-committee might undertake such a scrutiny exercise and report the outcome to a future meeting.

The Chair reported that the Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Employment and Skills was to be invited to attend its next meeting and he suggested that the issues raised relating to the continuing high rates of people claiming Universal Credit and the proportion of people without basic numeracy and literacy skills could be discussed in more detail at that meeting.

The sub-committee also asked for the following supplementary information:

- a) the data in relation to Universal Claimants, broken down into three categories to show the trends in the total number of people on Universal Credit, the numbers in work and the number searching, planning or preparing for work;
- b) details of the location of employability events and activity to demonstrate that they are accessible to the areas where the greatest numbers of people are claiming universal credit;
- c) the number of vacant retail units in Killingworth be presented with a comparison to the total number;
- d) that the year 2020 be disregarded from the data relating to start up businesses and sole traders because of the distorting effect of Covid-19 pandemic;
- e) data relating to the number of business closures in the borough
- f) the total number of small, medium and large enterprises in the borough so that the figures relating to business in distress can be put into perspective; and
- g) an indication of the density of businesses in each ward to identify those areas where there is a greater proportion of businesses in distress.

It was **agreed** that (1) the data relating to the state of the economy in North Tyneside be noted;

(2) future reports incorporate the requests for supplementary information as set out above; and

(3) the Chair and Deputy Chair, in conjunction with relevant officers, consider ways in which the sub-committee could effectively examine the cost pressures facing local business and the support available to prevent failures and report the outcome to a future meeting.