

Appendix 2: Reflections on discussion at Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Committee

I was pleased to hold a detailed discussion about my report at the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Committee. This is a valuable part of council processes, and I was glad that the detailed information in the content of my portfolio was able to provide a comprehensive discussion by the committee. From the wide range of topics discussed, including support for vulnerable populations, infrastructure funding, planning reform, and promoting equality and inclusion in the community, it is clear that our council and our partners are committed to addressing the challenges we face and improving the well-being of all residents in the city.

Where the discussion had covered new areas of the report content, I have set out my reflections thematically below:

Rough Sleeping:

As in many major cities across the UK, the issue of rough sleeping in Newcastle continues to be a concern, and though the situation in our city is comparatively better than some other UK locations thanks to sizeable efforts by the council and our partners to mitigate the effects of austerity and the cost of living crisis, numbers are still on the rise. To address this issue, a collaborative approach with partners across the city is working to improve support for rough sleepers, including individuals with physical or mental health issues, and many who come from outside the local authority to our city centre.

Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

During the meeting, we discussed section 106 and CIL monies secured from major developments, in both on and off-site contributions. There are strict regulations around the drawing down of funds based on project completion and the council has appropriate systems in place to ensure that monies can be usefully spent when they become available.

Social housing and council housing support and waiting lists:

We continue to work hard to reduce waiting times for housing. We have limited housing stock and limited resources for the purposes of expanding our stock, and this has been increasingly pressurised by increased demand exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. We need government to better fund local authorities to provide more good quality housing, recognising its fundamental importance in reducing inequalities and supporting people to have the best foundations for improved health and wellbeing, and we will continue to deliver this message in support of our residents.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Report (EDI):

The EDI report that accompanies my portfolio report includes the development of an anti-racist city charter.

We recognise the significant role that socio-economic status plays in creating inequalities for people in Newcastle. Addressing these inequalities, especially in education, health, and representation, is a crucial challenge. The importance of engaging marginalised voices and representation cannot be overemphasised, including improving the inclusivity of council decision-making processes.

Intersectionality is important here, and we need to consider ways to include more diverse representation in our activities. This includes for example, in our official communications.

In discussing gender and disability pay gaps, we recognise the need to encourage people to share personal characteristics to ensure accurate reporting. A strategic group has now been established to consider disability access and inclusion.