

# Advance Northumberland

## Board Minutes

**Date/Time**

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019  
13:00 - 15:40

**In attendance:**

Cllr Richard Wearmouth  
Cllr Jeff Reid  
Cllr Malcolm Robinson  
Cllr Christine Dunbar  
Cllr Susan Dungworth  
Chris Sayers

John Woodman

**Present:**

Ken Dunbar  
Colin Dickson

Kim Grant (Minutes)  
Alison Elsdon

**Part:**

Michael Black

Pam Robertson  
Andrew Brooks

**Apologies:**

Cllr Peter Jackson  
Daljit LaUy  
Neil Bradley

**Venue:**

Advance Northumberland, Wansbeck  
Workspace, Rotary Parkway, Ashington,  
Northumberland, NE63 8QZ

Advance Northumberland Chairman  
Leader of Liberal Democrat Group

Chair of Board of Governors, Northumbria  
University

Advance Northumberland Managing Director  
Advance Northumberland Chief Finance  
Officer  
Advance Northumberland Personal Assistant  
NCC Service Director Finance

Advance Northumberland Director of  
Investments & Economic Growth  
Advance Northumberland HR Manager  
NCC Health & Safety Adviser

Leader NCC  
NCC Chief Executive  
NCC Finance Director

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## 1.0 **Welcome and Introductions**

1.1 The Chairman welcomed the attendees and declared the meeting quorate.

## 2.0 **Apologies for Absence**

2.1 The Chairman reported that there had been apologies for absence from Cllr Peter Jackson, Daljit Lally and Neil Bradley.

## 3.0 **Declarations of Interest**

3.1 There were declarations of interest from K Dunbar and J Woodman.

K Dunbar in respect of Item 9 on the agenda due to being acquainted with the Tenant.

J Woodman in respect of Treelocate, (should the matter be discussed) due to being acquainted with the owner.

## 4.0 **Minutes of Previous Meetings**

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019 were **REVIEWED** and **AGREED** as an accurate record of proceedings, subject to following amendments:

- Para 8.1 amended to read "potentially criminal matters"
- Para 9.4-amended to replace "Cllr" with Malcolm
- Para 9.3, page 3 renumbered to 9.6

## 5.0 **Matters Arising**

[REDACTED]

## 6.0 **Ratification of Board Decisions Made Electronically**

6.1 The following electronic decision was ratified by Board;

- Farrans Invoice No. 6 for the remediation works on Northumberland Energy Park.

6.2 Following questions from Board regarding the risk to Advance Northumberland in authorising these large transactions the Managing Director reminded Board that, in the absence of the new tripartite grant funding agreement (GFE) with the Council and the LEP, Advance Northumberland was able to bankroll this payment. It was hoped that the GFA and Operating Agreement would be agreed by Board in time for the

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next set of invoices which would be for substantially higher amounts for which the Council and LEP funding would be necessary.

6.3 C Sayers requested that a documentation trail be put in place to substantiate the agreement.

7.0 **Performance Updates**

7.1 **Finance Update**

7.1.1 The Chief Finance Officer presented the report and gave the Board an update of the current position and key risks;

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## The Board:

- 7.1.2                   • **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 7.2                   **Executive Performance Summary**

7.2.1                   The Managing Director presented the report and gave the Board an update from the month's Performance Clinic.

7.2.2                   The Managing Director reaffirmed the earlier decision to the Board which was to accept that Advance Northumberland Homes would continue to suffer a higher than normal void level on properties in the Hirst area until a strategic regeneration programme was agreed between the Council, Advance and other interested parties. A meeting had been arranged with NCC to discuss ideas and this would be reported to the Board at a future meeting

## The Board:

- 7.2.3                   • **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 7.3                   **Human Resources**

7.3.1                   The HR Manager presented the report to update the Board on current HR activities.

7.3.2                   The HR Manager stated that the current headcount within Advance Northumberland at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 was 121 and labour turnover for the period 2019120 was 29.03% (9 voluntary leavers - annualised data).

7.3.3                   The HR Manager confirmed that the sickness absence rate for the period ending 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019 was; short term 8 days, long term 89 days (of which 60 were attributable to accidents at work) which equated to **4%**. The mean number of day's absence was 0.8 per person. There were 4 people who were classed as being on long term sickness, 3 of which were due to accidents at work. All of whom were being managed with occupational health support.

7.3.4                   The HR Manager stated that recruitment was ongoing with 4 live vacancies, 5 vacancies awaiting approval and 6 posts currently under offer.

7.3.5                   The HR Manager confirmed that completion rates for mandatory training on the NCC portal were being monitored and at the end of June 2019 were 93.8% which was an improvement from the previous month.

7.3.6                   The HR Manager confirmed that Advance Northumberland was progressing with plans for Continuing Excellence as part of the Company's on-going commitment to the Belter Health at Work award. The assessment date had

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been confirmed as 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019. New health advocates had been appointed and these have an action plan of activities.

7.3.7

The HR Manager informed Board that Advance Northumberland's programme of management training sessions was ongoing with a focus on the following areas;

- Managing Investigations
- Managing Hearings
- Advance Northumberland HR Policies

Two Dignity at Work training sessions had been delivered, which included Equality and Diversity, Bullying and Harassment and Stereotyping. Fifteen people had attended these sessions.

7.3.8

The HR Manager stated that, in relation to other training activities, the focus had been on health and safety training, particularly within Ascent Homes and Estates, to ensure there was reduced risk to the business. Each person had a health and safety training needs analysis, which was role specific. Significant elements of this training had been delivered by the health and safety manager, however it was expected that the training would now need to be outsourced. A programme would be drawn up with the relevant manager on a priority basis. These areas would include;

- Asbestos Awareness refresher training
- Working at Heights
- Spill containment
- Pasma Mobile Tower usage
- Scaffold Awareness
- CSCS Cards

Eight people were currently undertaking career pathways.

One apprentice within the Group was currently studying Business Administration, with completion statement awaited with the intention of offering a permanent role. One member of staff had been enrolled on an AAT Level 4 course and an advert going out for a finance apprentice with Access Training. Further staff are expected to be enrolled on apprenticeships in IT.

7.3.9

The HR Manager stated that funding for Business Northumberland had been confirmed, with a three year extension.

7.3.10

The HR Manager informed Board that random Drugs and Alcohol testing would commence in September 2019. One person had been tested on a "with cause" basis, which fortunately had not required any further action.

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[REDACTED]  
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7.3.12 The HR Manager confirmed that the Employee Forum met on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019 with two new representatives to boost coverage in the Estates team.

7.3.13 The HR Manager went on to confirm that the Staff Survey had closed on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Completion rates overall were 81.4%. A working group from across the business has been formed to look at the results and form an action plan to take forward issues raised. The areas being addressed were;

- Communications
- Bullying and harassment from customers and colleagues
- Recognition and saying thank you
- Customer service
- Work related stress
- Performance reviews

7.3.14 The HR Manager stated that two Open Space Learning events had been held, looking at the following areas;

- Making Advance a great place to work
- Customer Service

Feedback on these first two sessions would be given to SLT and ideas actioned where possible to do so.

7.3.15 The HR Manager informed Board feedback had been received from Westfield Health on the scheme usage. There had been 162 claims in the last 12 months, predominantly for dental and optical with physiotherapy/chiropractor appointments the third highest. This scheme will continue to be promoted to staff and has been presented to site construction staff to ensure awareness and usage of the scheme.

7.3.16 The HR Manager confirmed that the Flexitime system was to be reviewed through the employee forum and SLT following 3 months of the scheme being in use.

7.3.17 The HR Manager confirmed that Advance Northumberland would be adopting NCC HR policies, as appropriate. Work was underway to align these to Advance Northumberland. Twenty two policies had been approved with a further 15 to review. The following policies had been submitted to Board for approval this month;

- Recruitment
- Giving References

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- Whistleblowing
- Managing Performance

7.3.18 The HR Manager confirmed that additional HR software had been purchased which enabled the reporting of learning and development, on-line absence reporting/ booking and recruitment. The holiday and absence portal went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, which meant a paperless system for absence requesting and reporting. All approved HR policies were available on this portal which ensured that the most current version was available to all staff. Performance review would also be uploaded onto this system.

7.3.19 The HR Manager confirmed that the performance management cycle was April to March. End of year reviews were due to be completed by the end of April. Completion rates currently were;

- End of Year Reviews - 53 (60.92%)
- Objective Setting - 49 (49%)

As the way of reporting has changed to the online portal additional time had been given for Managers to complete this task. Reminders had been given to SLJ and line managers to ensure this was completed.

#### **The Board:**

7.3.20

- **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **7.4 H&S Data Report**

7.4.1 The Health & Safety Adviser presented the Health & Safety dashboard which gave an update on current Health & Safety (H&S) issues and confirmed that there had been two minor accidents in the month involving sub-contractor bricklayers as well as two incidents with vehicles on Commercial properties.

7.4.2 The Health & Safety Adviser informed Board that a new column had been introduced to the report which showed the identification of new policies.

7.4.3 The Health & Safety Adviser also talked through the last Health & Safety audit at Ascent Homes, Ellington site, emphasising not only the issues that were identified but best business practices introduced. These included ramping tripping hazards, bucket exchange area and a quarantine area for equipment that requires re-test.

#### **The Board:**

7.4.4

- **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **8.0 Policies for Approval**

### **8.1 H&S - COM Policy**

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- 8.1.1 The Managing Director introduced the policy, explaining that Advance Northumberland had a variety of legal responsibilities under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (COM) 2015. Ascent Homes were responsible for the Planning, Design and Commissioning Construction Projects within the Company. These projects may include Open Market Sale Housing, Capital Housing and Commercial Projects, External Projects and Emergency Works.
- 8.1.2 The Managing Director went on to explain that the maintenance projects were covered by the Advance Northumberland Estates teams and covered a range of services from maintenance and cleaning of new build, existing structures, small scale maintenance or emergency repair. All maintenance and cleaning works fall within the definition 'of construction work under the COM regulations.
- 8.1.3 The Managing Director confirmed that the COM Regulations 2015 applied to all construction projects and imposed specific duties on the Client, Principal Designer, Designer, Principal Contractor and Contractor. This policy document was designed to put this framework in place.

### **The Board:**

- 8.1.4
  - **APPROVED** the COM policy.

### **8.2 HR - Recruitment & Selection Policy**

- 8.2.1 The HR Manager introduced the Policy explaining that the Policy had been developed to ensure that Advance Northumberland carried out recruitment and selection processes in a consistent way that complied with employment legislation/employment check standards and good practice. This included the process for ensuring that all appropriate employment checks were undertaken for all employees whether temporary or permanent, including fixed term contracts and those on casual contracts, apprentices and trainees.
- 8.2.2 The HR Manager informed Board that they were being asked to decide on two specific areas relating to the policy, which were made in line with the recent Audit Committee report;
- Application forms - a decision on whether or not to introduce application forms as part of the recruitment process was requested. Forms were not currently in use. Anecdotal evidence from recruitment partners suggests that the requirement for an application form would be a deterrent to potential candidates. Board was asked to consider if they wanted application forms introduced.
  - DBS checks - Advance Northumberland was not an authorised body for the requesting of DBS checks. The service would allow us to use an umbrella organisation to process these checks, however the only role that could currently be checked for was Accountant.



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None of Advance Northumberland other roles were eligible to be checked under the process. Board was asked to consider if they wanted to implement this check.

## The Board:

- 8.2.3
- **APPROVED** the Recruitment and Selection Policy and the following specific areas;
    - o Application forms required at the discretion of HR.
    - o Basic DBS check to be introduced.

## 8.3 HR - Giving References Policy

8.3.1 The HR Manager introduced the Policy which had been developed to ensure that references were only given by those authorised to write references in an official capacity and that those employees who gave references acted in a consistent way.

8.3.2 The HR Manager stated that the policy sets out a framework to ensure a consistent approach was followed in relation to giving references for current and former employees. As well as providing guidance on writing a reference, the policy covered legal considerations, administrative arrangements and specific issues including disciplinary issues, sickness, criminal records and allegations of abuse.

## The Board:

- 8.3.3
- **APPROVED** the Giving References Policy.

## 8.4 HR - Whistleblowing Policy

8.4.1 The HR Manager introduced the Policy, the objectives of which were;

- To encourage the employees to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, with the knowledge that their concerns would be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate and that their confidentiality would be protected wherever possible.
- To provide employees with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
- To reassure employees that there were able to raise genuine concerns in good faith in the Public Interest without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

8.4.2 The HR Manager stated that all workers had a contractual right and duty to raise genuine concerns they have with their employer about malpractice, financial impropriety, bribery or any other serious risks they consider to be in the public interest. This policy had been developed to ensure that the Company had a process for employees to raise any such concerns. It complied with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1998 and good practice,

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which protected workers from being subjected to detriment by their employer because they had made a report.

- 8.4.3 The HR Manager confirmed that the policy gave an overview of Whistleblowing and public interest disclosure, a breakdown of responsibilities for members of staff, support available to staff making such disclosures and a flowchart outlining the process.
- 8.4.4 The Board felt that it was important that employees could raise concerns to Board members if necessary.

### The Board:

- 8.4.5
- **APPROVED** the Whistleblowing Policy with the addition that Board members could be approached via the Company Secretary.

## 8.5 HR - Managing Performance Policy

- 8.5.1 The HR Manager introduced the policy which had been developed to assist managers and employees to ensure they understood which was required of them in their role and what they needed to do to develop and progress in order to provide and maintain high quality services. This policy also aimed to set out the formal process to follow to support employees who were not meeting their performance objectives to improve their performance.
- 8.5.2 The HR Manager stated that the policy provided a step by step guide on the process for developing and supporting employees to meet required job performance standards and a formal procedure where these standards were not met despite the necessary training and support being provided.
- 8.5.3 The HR Manager confirmed that this policy was a direct take from NCC's policy.

### The Board:

- 8.5.4
- **APPROVED** the Managing Performance Policy.

## 8.6 Finance - Standing Orders

- 8.6.1 The Managing Director introduced the policy to update the Standing Financial Instructions in line with advice from legal advisors and to reflect organisation change.
- 8.6.2 The Managing Director reminded Board that the Interim Director of Finance provided a range of financial policies and delegations which were approved by the Board in the first quarter of 2018. Following advice from Ward Hadaway there was a need to review the policies to remove superfluous matters, including those issues covered in other policies such as Standards of Business Conduct and Ethical Standards. There was also a need for the Standing Orders to reflect the agreed new structure and ensure the key responsibilities aligned with the appropriate post holder. The Chief

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Operating Officer would assume those responsibilities which currently lay with the Interim Director of Finance.

8.6.3 The Managing Director confirmed that the key amendments made were as follows:

Changed job title from Director of Finance to Chief Operating Operating Officer. (*this would be effective from the date that the new postholder takes up post and would remain the responsibility of the Managing Director for the short term*)

There were no sub-delegations as was the case in 2.2.5 in SFI policy

Removal of Information Governance, which was covered by other policies

Removal of Senior Information Risk Officer which was covered by other policies

Removal of section covering Salary Sacrifice which would be covered in another policy

8.6.4 The Managing Director confirmed that the following additional changes would be required and would be brought back to a future Board:

- Need to amend scheme of delegations policy to reflect changes in Standing Orders
- Need to update information risk policies
- Debt recovery policy to be drafted.
- External borrowing and investment would be informed by the Operating Agreement
- Special payments would need to be incorporated into scheme of delegation
- Need for a company owned losses procedure

### The Board:

8.6.5 • **APPROVED** the Standing Orders Policy

## 8.7 Local Charity Support - Street Collection

8.7.1 The Managing Director introduced the report to enable the Board to consider how Advance Northumberland might deal with requests for street collections from National and Local charities at Manor Walks and Westmorland retail park, Cramlington.

8.7.2 The Managing Director stated that, as part of the ongoing estate management, Advance Northumberland received numerous requests on an annual basis from charities wishing to be based in the centre to undertake street collections. Advance Northumberland as landlord are committed to assisting with requests from charities wherever possible but managed in a controlled fashion as feedback from customers/users of the centre often

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state that too many street collections for fund raising purposes can have a detrimental impact to the overall customer experience.

- 8.7.3 The Managing Director confirmed that, to ensure that all charity requests were dealt with in a consistent manner at Manor Walks and Westmorland Retail Park, all applications were dealt with through Mall Solutions Enterprise Ltd who were Advance Northumberland's appointed Commercialisation partner responsible for the management of bookings and income generation. On average the daily occupational fee for a national charity based within the shopping Centre to undertake street collection was in the region of £140 per day.
- 8.7.4 The Managing Director confirmed that, to ensure an open and transparent selection criteria, all national Charities would continue to be managed through Mall Solutions as part of commercialisation income to the centre. However all local charities would submit an application form to a designated selection committee to include Management Agents Workman, as well as Advance Northumberland's Head of Estates and Advance Northumberland's Marketing and Communications Manager to ensure openness and transparency in the selection process. Applicants would need to demonstrate proof of being a local charity, how they support the local area as well as addressing the criteria set out in applications for sponsorship in line with Advance Northumberland's objectives and values. Successful local Charities would be responsible for obtaining all licences and trading approvals and having funds in place to indemnify Advance Northumberland as landlord in the event of any injury or damage.
- 8.7.5 The Managing Director stated that to enable engagement and raise awareness to local charities, Advance Northumberland would look to ensure a marketing and comms campaign was implemented in conjunction with the Management Agents (Workman LLP), Town Council and other partnership bodies to promote the scheme in an open and transparent way. This would include direct contact with local Charities as well as advertising in the centre and on the Manor Walks website and other social media platforms.
- 8.7.6 The Managing Director asked Board to note that the Management Agents at Manor Walks (Workman LLP) had previously undertaken a tender process/Marketing campaign in conjunction with the Town Council to look to appoint a "local Charity" to work as a preferred partner on an annual basis. This process would ensure that by selecting one major local charity both the Centre and the Charity could maximise their opportunities and would enable Advance Northumberland to align activities closely to the community. All applicants had to be registered with the Charity Commission and have to be within the Northumberland area, as well as it being essential for them to demonstrate how they would support the local community.

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## The Board:

8.7.7

- Requested that the report be brought back to a future Board meeting with the following amendments;
  - o To clarify the purpose of the policy
  - o Ensure only one Charity collection per day
  - o Insurance cover to be confirmed
  - o Addition of paragraph stipulating that there would be no detrimental impact upon National Charities and that it would not conflict with established national charity days.

The Managing Director left the meeting.

### Project Approvals

9.0

9.1

9.1.1

9.1.2

9.1.3

9.1.4

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10.0 AOB

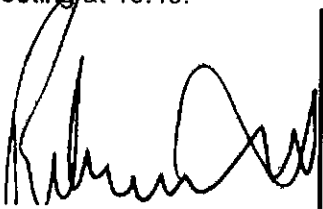
10.1 Board were asked to approve Dormant Accounts for Advance Northumberland during the period where it wasn't trading between January and April 2018

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10.4 The Managing Director advised that he had now received the Operating Agreement from the Council and, subject to legal views, would be aiming to bring a report to the next Board meeting.

10.5 The Chairman thanked the Board for their attendance and closed the meeting at 15:40.



.....CHAIRMAN

