
Date/Time

Friday 28th February
13:00 – 16:15

Venue:

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

In attendance:

Richard Wearmouth
Jeff Reid
Malcolm Robinson
Christine Dunbar
John Woodman
Chris Sayers

Advance Northumberland Chair
Leader of Liberal Democrat Group

Martin Knowles

Chair of Board of Governors, Northumbria
University

Present:

Ken Dunbar
Robin Earl

Advance Northumberland Managing Director
Advance Northumberland Chief Operating
Officer

Colin Dickson

Advance Northumberland Chief Finance
Officer

Pat Walker

Advance Northumberland Governance &
Performance Manager

Daljit Lally

NCC Chief Executive

Chris Hand

NCC Executive Director of Finance

Juliemma McLoughlin

NCC Executive Director of Regeneration,
Commercial & Economy

Kim Grant (Minutes)

Advance Northumberland Personal Assistant

Part:

Alex Wiley

Advance Northumberland Marketing Manager

Apologies:

Peter Jackson

Leader NCC

Susan Dungworth

Alison Elsdon

NCC Service Director Finance

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

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

2.0 Apologies for Absence

2.1 The Chair reported that there had been apologies for absence from Peter Jackson, Susan Dungworth and Allison Eisdon.

3.0 Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 31st January 2020 were **REVIEWED** and **AGREED** subject to the following amendment;



5.0 Matters Arising

5.1 Terms of Reference for Nominations and Remuneration Committee to be amended to include minor changes.

6.0 Ratification of Board Decisions Made Electronically

6.1



7.0 Summary of use of Power of Attorney since last Board meeting

7.1 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the summary paper and confirmed that the format had been changed by adding a value column to reflect comments from the last Board meeting.

8.0 Non-Executive Director Appointments Update

8.1 This item was withdrawn from the agenda at the request of the NCC Chief Executive.

- 9.0 **Preview of New Advance Northumberland Website**
- 9.1 The Marketing Manager gave Board a demonstration of the new Advance Northumberland website.
- 9.2 The NCC Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial & Economy asked whether the website showed all the other comments etc from twitter - the answer was no, it simply showed our feed / post from our channel and what we put out.
- 9.3 J Woodman asked whether case studies could be grouped together.
- 9.4 Following a comment regarding personal data payments the Marketing Manager confirmed that payments were only referenced on the website due to GDPR and Data Protection guidelines and that these would be added to the website.
- 9.5 The Marketing Manager confirmed that the website was a live website and would be checked daily.
- 9.6 The Marketing Manager confirmed that a link to the new website would be forwarded to Board Directors and that any feedback would be welcome.

The Board:

- 9.7
 - **NOTED** the new website.

10.0 Performance Updates

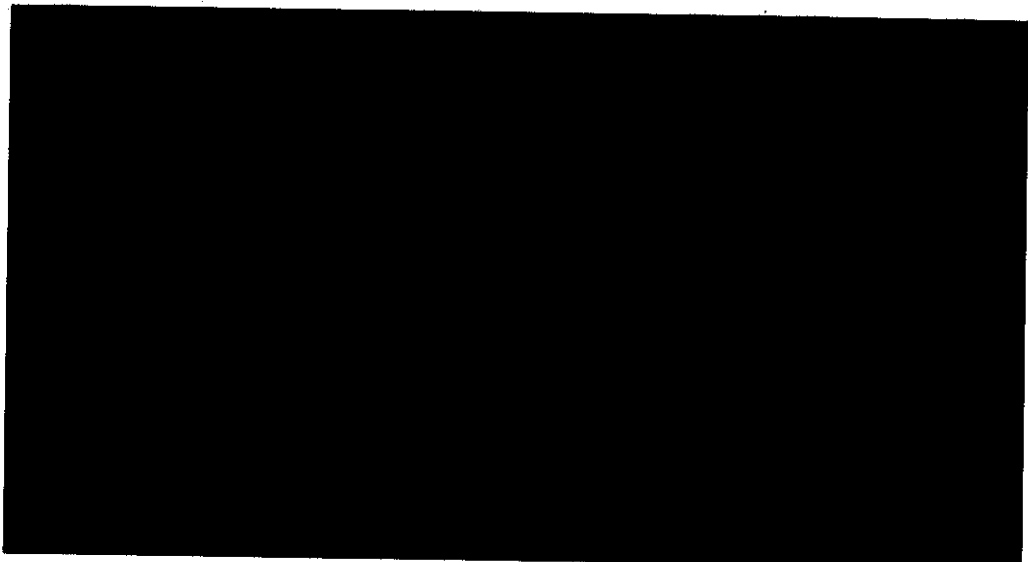
10.1 Finance Update

10.1.1 The Chief Finance Officer introduced the summary report which provided commentary on;

- The financial results up to and including January 2020,
- The forecast to the end of the financial year, and
- Cash flow forecasts for a further 6 months.

10.1.2

10.1.3



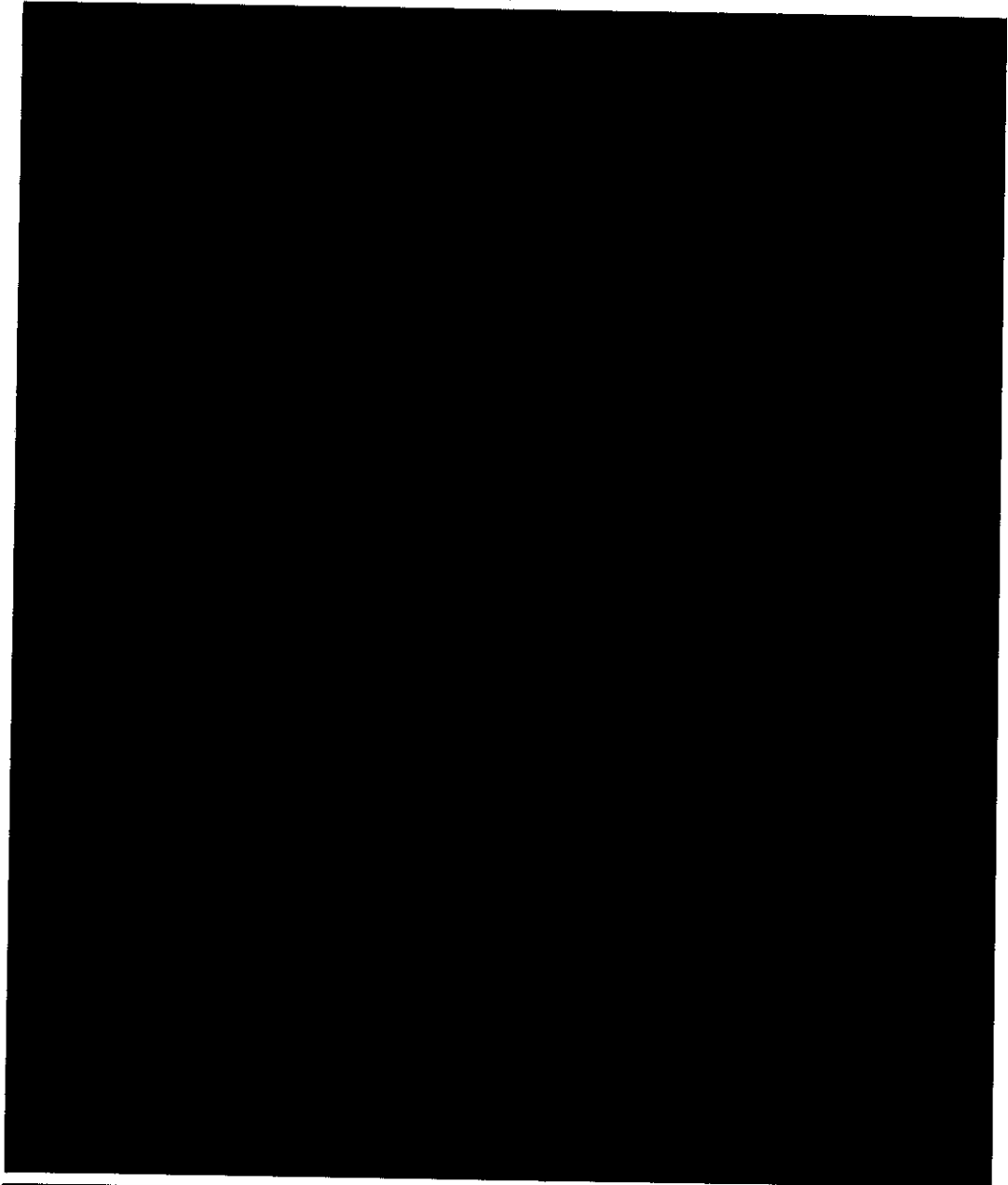
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10.1.5

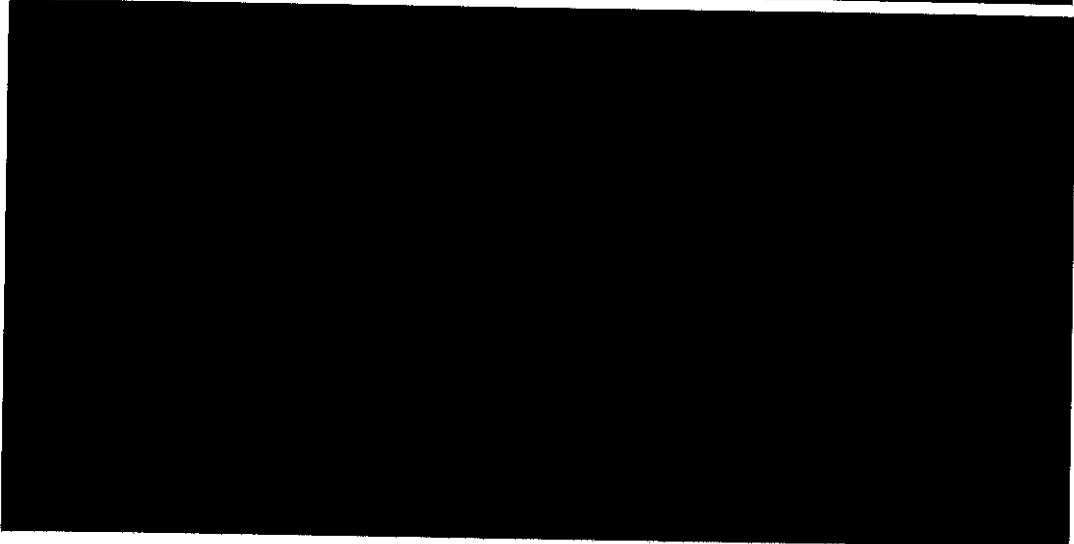


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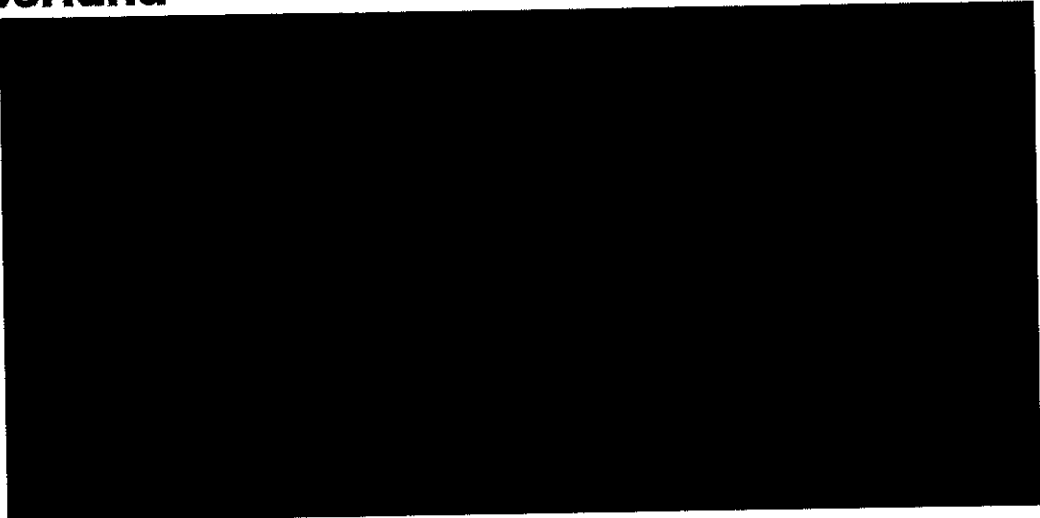
10.1.7

10.1.8



10.1.9

10.1.10



The Board:

10.1.11

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

10.2

Human Resources

10.2.1

The Chief Operating Officer presented the report to update the Board on current HR activities.

10.2.2

The Chief Operating Officer stated that the current headcount within Advance Northumberland at 31st January 2020 was 123 and labour turnover for the period 2019/20 was 11.06% (14 voluntary leavers – annualised data). This was a 4% reduction compared to the same period last year.

10.2.3

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the sickness absence rate for the 10 months ending 31st January 2020 was; short term 384 days, long term 974 days which equated to an average of 5.08% of working time. There was 1 person classed as being on long term sickness. This was being managed through their line manager and occupational health.

10.2.4

The Chief Operating Officer stated that recruitment was ongoing with 4 live vacancies.

10.2.5

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that completion rates for mandatory training on the NCC portal were being monitored and at the end of January 2020 were 97%.

10.2.6

The Chief Operating Officer stated that 18 / 22 of the health surveillance appointments had been completed of these four people had been referred for a Tier 4 HAVS assessment with an occupational health physician which were scheduled for April.

10.2.7

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that 13 people were currently undertaking career pathways, with one successfully completed in February and the individual progressing to Senior Project Manager.

- 10.2.8 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that an employee had been dismissed for gross misconduct, (being under the influence of alcohol at work). The decision to dismiss had been upheld at appeal.

An employee was currently suspended following a negative drugs result in random testing on the 17th February 2020.

- 10.2.9 The Chief Operating Officer stated that forty one posts had been identified as requiring retrospective DBS checks.

- 10.2.10 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that, following a recommendation from the Remuneration and Nominations committee to reduce the mileage rates paid on company business, this had been implemented for all staff recruited from the 1st February 2020. Statutory consultation of 45 days would be programmed in with existing staff to progress this matter.

- 10.2.11 The HR Manager confirmed that the performance management cycle was April to March. Mid-year reviews were due to be completed in October. Training had been delivered to managers to ensure effective use of the system.

Mid-year reviews completion rates:

- Number due – 87
- Number completed – 55
- This equated to 63%

The Board:

- 10.2.12
- **NOTED** the contents of the report.

10.3 **H&S Update & Data Report**

- 10.3.1 The Chief Operating Officer presented the Health & Safety update report and the dashboard which gave an update on current Health & Safety (H&S) issues confirming that there had been no Riddor reportable accidents within the period.

- 10.3.2 The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Health & Safety Manager continued to promote a positive safety culture throughout the business through direct support and advice as well as site visits and investigations. There had been a total of 15 Site audits and inspections undertaken within Ascent Homes, Commercial, Workspace and Business Development areas. These site visits continued to show evidence of high standards and best practice. Any issues of areas of weakness were rectified immediately or were escalated to a Director. Additional support on health and safety queries was also delivered when requested.

- 10.3.3 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that a total of eight incidents had occurred in the period, 2 at NEP1, 4 reported within Advance Northumberland and raised as a result of the proactive vibration monitoring, and 2 near miss incidents at Ashington Leisure Centre.
- 10.3.4 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the Health & Safety Employee Consultative Group, the Ascent Homes Managers Health & Safety Meeting and the Better Health at Work meetings were all held during January.
- 10.3.5 The Chief Operating Officer went on to confirm that Health & Safety audits were undertaken for Ascent Homes at Ellington, St Pauls and Commissioners Quay. No yellow or red cards were issued on Ascent Homes during January. Inspections were also carried out at Bedlington Market Place, commercial properties in Alnwick, Blyth, Bedlington and Cramlington plus Blyth Workspace.
- 10.3.6 M Knowles asked whether the Board had sight of Legionella, Gas & Electric Safety and Asbestos testing and monitoring for Advance Northumberland properties. The Managing Director confirmed that detailed reports on these items were included within the performance reporting to performance clinics.

The Board:

- 10.3.7
- **NOTED** the contents of the report.

10.4 **Advance Workspace Customer Satisfaction**

- 10.4.1 The Managing Director presented the report to inform Board of the process and outcomes of the Advance Workspace Customer Satisfaction Survey carried out in November and December 2019.
- 10.4.2 The Managing Director stated that Advance Northumberland had a wide customer base and strove to deliver excellent customer service. There was a need to ensure engagement with customers on a regular basis so that we can ensure we are responding to customer issues that arise. In 2017/18 Advance Northumberland used postal feedback questionnaires to capture customer satisfaction data for Commercial, Homes and Workspace. Whilst some good information was gleaned from the surveys, response rates were quite low. 12% of Commercial tenants responded, 22% of Homes tenants responded and 19% of Workspace tenants responded.

An electronic satisfaction survey was recently carried out for Advance Workspace. The survey went out to approx. 200 tenants via e-mail with replies to be returned electronically.

The rationale behind using electronic/automated processes to capture customer satisfaction data was that it was cheaper and made collecting feedback less labour intensive for the Advance staff and more instant/intuitive for the recipient to complete. Costs were also substantially lower.

The survey was carried out using the email system linked to a Google form sheet. The recipient clicked the link that took them to a Google form that contained the questionnaire, completed it and returned it electronically.

The advantage of using a Google form was when the response comes back, the data was automatically structured at an individual response level and collated as an overall summary. This made the analysis of the returned feedback easier and avoided data errors that could occur when transposing information from paper to spreadsheet.

- 10.4.3 The Managing Director stated that surveys were sent out to 105 Workspace tenants. 40 tenants responded to the survey – a response rate of 38%. This was an increase of 100% from the response rate to the hard copy Workspace survey carried out in 2017/18.
- 10.4.4 The Managing Director confirmed that, once collated, the above results were shared with the Head of Estates and Workspace Manager. Whilst overall results were very positive and highlighted the excellent service and value for money that Advance Workspace provided, an action plan had been formulated to directly address the areas that could be improved to increase our service offer that came out of the survey.
- 10.4.5 The Managing Director informed Board that workspace tenants would be contacted with a “You Said, We Did” newsletter. Hopefully this engagement would assist with buy in on future surveys conducted by Workspace.

The Board:

- 10.4.6
- **NOTED** the contents of the report.
 - **NOTED** the action plan and next steps for review.

10.5 **Corporate Performance**

- 10.5.1 The Managing Director introduced the report to seek approval for an enhanced suite of KPI's to be brought to Board on a monthly basis.
- 10.5.2 The Managing Director confirmed that the Operating agreement required monthly Performance Reports from the Company to be reported to the Council to include:
- KPI's as outlined in the agreement
 - Financial Performance Indicators
 - HR Performance Indicators
 - H&S Performance Indicators
 - Customer Satisfaction Indicators and
 - Risks and Issues.

These reports were presented as part of the Shareholder Liaison Group meeting.

10.5.3 The Managing Director informed Board that Advance Northumberland currently held a monthly Performance Clinic to which an NCC Officer was invited which considered a range of KPI's across the service areas within the Company. It was proposed that Board would now receive the same data that was presented to the Performance Clinics and to the Shareholder Liaison Group.

10.5.4 In addition to the Performance Report presented to the Performance Clinic, the Shareholder has asked that reports be provided on HR, H&S, Finance, Customer Satisfaction and Risks. Board already received HR, H&S and Finance Reports. A Customer Satisfaction report was also presented to the Board this month. Normally, Board would consider the Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. Northumberland County Council was requesting this on a monthly basis. The Chief Operating Officer was discussing the Corporate Risk Register with the Deputy Chief Executive of NCC and would update the Board on those discussions. It was suggested that Board continued to consider the Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis and sooner in the event of amendments.

Chris Sayers commented that the various reports showed some duplication and asked if there could be some way of streamlining and consolidating KPIs and financial reports.

The Board:

10.5.5 • **APPROVED** the new Performance Report.

11.0 Policies

11.1 ICT Policy

11.1.1 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the policy explaining that the aim of the policy was firstly to set out and support employees to understand their responsibilities in relation to the secure use of our Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources, together with the information held within them and secondly to protect Advance Northumberland Ltd and any subsidiary company thereof from threats, whether internal or external, deliberate or accidental.

11.1.2 The Chief Operating Officer stated that the implementation of the policy was essential to maintain and demonstrate the integrity and security of the Company's dealings with their customers and other stakeholders. It also ensured all information systems operated by the Company were secure and compliant with the Data Protection Act and the Computer Misuse Act.

11.1.3 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the policy applied to all staff and any person who was granted access to Company ICT systems and equipment. It applied to all employees at any of their sites, irrespective of their status or level, including the Board of Directors. Failure to meet the requirements contained within this policy would present a risk to the

Company and may result in action being taken under the Company's disciplinary process or the law.

- 11.1.4 The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Head of Business Operations was responsible for the implementation of this policy and for the provision of appropriate technology and associated devices to ensure the efficient and effective working of the Company. All employees were responsible for ensuring that they were familiar with all aspects of the policy, particularly relating to the security of information or devices.

The Board:

- 11.1.5
- **APPROVED** the ICT Policy.

12.0 Project Approval – Commissioners Quay

- 12.1 This report was withdrawn and would be presented at a future Board meeting.

13.0 Other Approvals

13.1 Annual Governance Statement February 2020

- 13.1.1 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the report which presented the Annual Governance Statement for approval.

- 13.1.2 The Chief Operating Officer informed Board that under the Accounts and Audit Regulations of 2015, Councils were required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement, AGS. Whilst Advance Northumberland was not required to complete an Annual Governance Statement, due to the wholly owned subsidiary position, the Council had instructed Advance Northumberland to prepare its "service assured" AGS.

13.1.3

The Chief Operating Officer stated that, In completing the AGS, Advance Northumberland had followed the principles of the AGS for Councils, which was required to focus on outcomes and value for money and relate to the vision for the area, whilst providing an assessment of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements in supporting the planned outcomes – not simply a description of them. The annual governance statement should include:

- an acknowledgement of responsibility for ensuring that there was a sound system of governance (incorporating the system of internal control) and reference to the authority's code of governance
- reference to and assessment of the effectiveness of key elements of the governance framework and the role of those responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, such as the authority, the executive, the audit committee, internal audit and others as appropriate
- an opinion on the level of assurance that the governance arrangements could provide and that the arrangements continued to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework
- an agreed action plan showing actions taken, or proposed, to deal with significant governance issues
- reference to how issues raised in the previous year's annual governance statement had been resolved
- a conclusion – a commitment to monitoring implementation as part of the next annual review.

13.1.4

The Chief Operating Officer asked Board to note that the Advance Northumberland AGS contained examples of evidence that demonstrated compliance with NCC principles and sub principles. However the evidence that provided Service (Company) assurance on governance arrangements was specific to Advance Northumberland.

13.1.5

The Chief Operating Officer stated that, whilst the AGS was not a requirement set out in the Operating Agreement, as this would be an annual requirement of the Council with responsibility on the Company to produce this in line with the Council's timetable, it was proposed that the document be referred to Audit for assurance. This may be necessary to meet the Council's requirements for next year's AGS.

13.1.6

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the expectation had been that Audit Committee would review the Annual Governance Statement but due to the 31st March deadline for submission of the Statement and issues raised regarding the content of the Statement this item had been brought to Board for consideration.

The Board:

13.1.7

- **REFERED** the Annual Governance Statement to a special Audit Committee Meeting.

- 13.2 **Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests and Data Protection (DP) Issues**
- 13.2.1 The Managing Director introduced the report to inform Board of FOI requests, data breaches and near misses dealt with by Advance Northumberland over the preceding month.
- 13.2.2 The Managing Director stated that the Freedom of Information Act 2000 provided public access to information held by public authorities and normally there was a twenty working day response time. There were certain circumstances that a request could be refused but the grounds for refusing a request were tightly regulated and before a refusal could be agreed, consideration must be given to the public interest test and the prejudice test.
- 13.2.3 The Managing Director confirmed that during January, Advance Northumberland received one request under the FOI Act regarding plans for the driving range to Bedlingtonshire Golf Club. Advance Northumberland had until the 28th February to respond to the request and the response would be reported to Board in March 2020.
- 13.2.4 The Managing Director stated that the Data Protection Act 2018 provided a comprehensive and modern framework for data protection in the UK and sets new standards for protecting general data in accordance with the General Data Protection regulation (GDPR). The right of access, commonly referred to as subject access, gives individuals the right to obtain a copy of their personal data as well as other supplementary information. Advance Northumberland are required to comply with a request within one month of receipt of the request.
- 13.2.5 The Managing Director confirmed that Advance Northumberland had received no SAR's during January 2020.
- 13.2.6 The Managing Director stated that GDPR introduced a duty on all organisations to report certain types of personal data breaches to the relevant supervisory authority. This must be done within seventy two hours of becoming aware of the breach where feasible.
- 13.2.7 The Managing Director confirmed that there had been one reportable data breach to date which was the subject of a separate report to the Board. There had been two near miss data breaches. The implications were risk assessed using the NCC Breach Severity Tool which concluded that the issue would not impact negatively on the data subjects and therefore did not need to be reported to the ICO.
- The Board:**
- 13.2.8
 - **NOTED** the contents of the report
- 13.3 **Data Breach January 2020**
- 13.3.1 The Managing Director introduced the report to inform the Board of a data breach, subsequent reporting to the ICO, the ICO response and Advance

Northumberland's proposed Action Plan to mitigate against reoccurrence of the incident.

13.3.2 The Managing director confirmed that two rent statements were put into the same envelope addressed to a tenant. Upon opening the envelope the tenant realised that there was a rent statement belonging to her neighbour in the same envelope and too it round to her neighbour. The neighbour subsequently reported the data breach. The complainant was contacted, an apology was issued and he was informed that a breach severity assessment would be carried out. This was done and it was concluded that this was a reportable incident. The ICO's online reporting tool was used to notify the ICO on the 23rd January of the breach.

13.3.3 The response from the ICO was that no further action would be taken on this occasion. Their decision was based on the information they had recorded about the breach.

The Board:

- **NOTED** the contents of the report
- **APPROVED** the action plan

13.4 **Future Recording Arrangements for Advance Northumberland Board**

13.4.1 The Managing Director presented the report to propose an alternative method of recording and publishing the Advance Northumberland Board Agendas and Minutes from April 2020.

13.4.2 The Managing Director stated that currently redacted copies of the Board minutes were published on the Advance Northumberland website. Due to the commercially sensitive nature of sections of the minutes, this could result in entire pages published being redacted. This approach created a significant administrative burden and presented a risk that commercially sensitive or confidential information may be published inadvertently.

13.4.3 The Managing Director stated that according to the Operating Agreement agreed with NCC, Advance Northumberland Ltd was a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council set up under section 95 of the Local Government Act 2003 as a Local Authority Trading Company. Under section 6 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Advance Northumberland was classed as a company wholly owned by a local authority and hence subject to the provisions of FOIA. As such, the ICO recommended a public authority should publish minutes of senior level policy and strategy meetings, e.g. board meetings and any background documents which were referred to in the agenda or minutes were circulated in preparation for the meeting.

13.4.4 The Managing Director confirmed that it was proposed that the Advance Board Agenda was refreshed to divide the business of the meeting into Agenda Items and Confidential Agenda Items. Prior to items being placed in the Confidential section of the Agenda, the items would be reviewed to ensure they met the necessary requirements of the exemptions within the

Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations. A set of public minutes or summaries of the minutes suitable for publication will be published that cover confidential items on the agenda.

The Board:

- 13.4.5
- **APPROVED** the proposal that the Advance Northumberland Board Agenda was refreshed to divide the business of the meeting into Agenda Items and Confidential Agenda items and;
 - That a set of public minutes or summaries of the minutes suitable for publication would be published that covered non-confidential items on the agenda.

14.0 **AOB**

14.1 **Coronavirus**

14.1.2 The Chief Operating Officer presented the report to invite Board members to help shape the Company's Coronavirus impact mitigation plans and to seek Board approval for actions which may become necessary.

14.1.3 The Chief Operating Officer stated that there was a risk that a widespread outbreak may occur in the UK and that this would have an impact on Advance Northumberland.

The biggest impact would arise if a significant portion of the workforce fall ill and/or are quarantined at the same time. Longer term there is a significant risk that the Coronavirus outbreak and/or the mitigation measures introduced by health authorities globally will have a negative impact on the economy. Therefore there may be a longer term impact on the Company arising from an economic slowdown e.g. increased rent arrears, reduced demand for new homes, and reduced demand for commercial properties.

14.1.4 The Chief Operating Officer stated that the mitigation strategy approach would have the following goals;

- Reduce the risk to staff
- Reduce the risk to our tenants and the general public
- Maintain our service delivery

14.1.5 The Chief Operating Officer went on to state that, whilst Advance Northumberland would be able to do little to impact on the likelihood of a widespread outbreak, the approach to mitigating the risks would therefore be based on;

- Minimising infection risk by promoting good hygiene practice amongst staff
- Identifying staff who may be at higher risk (due to travel to high risk areas or association with infected individuals)
- Making the Company more resilient by taking measures to slow the spread of infection amongst staff

14.1.6 The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that, as the Coronavirus situation was changing rapidly, the Company would continue to monitor advice from

the relevant authorities and take actions as advised.

14.1.7

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that staff who fell ill due to Coronavirus would be entitled to sick pay in line with the existing Advance Northumberland policy. Staff who are quarantined but well would be expected to work from home. Some staff, however, would not be able to work from home and legally these staff would not be entitled to be paid. However Advance Northumberland believe that they need to avoid anything that would incentivise staff to breach quarantine as this would put more staff and potentially third parties at risk. It was therefore proposed that for staff who are quarantined under the advice of relevant medical authority and therefore unable to work would be paid at full basic pay for the duration of any quarantine period advised by relevant health authorities.

The Board:

14.1.8

- **NOTED** the proposed steps to mitigate the impact on the Company of a possible Coronavirus epidemic;
- **COMMENTED** on the approach and proposals;
- **APPROVED** payment of basic pay to staff members who are instructed by medical authorities to self-quarantine and who are unable to work safely from home.

14.2

Building Disposal – Old Remploy Unit 13

14.2.1

The Managing Director confirmed that a virtual approval request for the disposal of Unit 13, Jubilee Industrial Estate would be circulated to Board for approval.

14.3

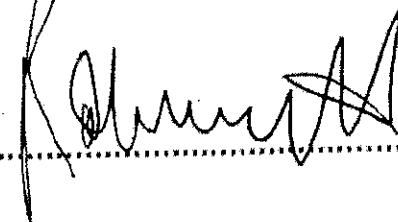
Director of Commercial & Infrastructure Resignation

14.3.1

The Managing Director informed Board that the Director of Commercial & Infrastructure [REDACTED] had tendered his resignation. The Chairman asked that the Managing Directors pass on the Board's appreciation [REDACTED] for his work and commitment to the organisation over the years.

13.0

The Chairman thanked the Board for their attendance and closed the meeting at 16:15.


.....CHAIRMAN

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS	
Minutes from Previous Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD to provide commentary around [redacted] reversion comment on Page 3. • [redacted] • Residential Rent Increases report to be circulated virtually to Board for approval.
Power of Attorney	RE to pick up with Juliemma McLoughlin regarding reference to [redacted] followed by a note to Board.
Preview of new Advance Northumberland Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to the website to be circulated to Board. • Area based link (possibly within the case studies section) to be considered.
Finance Performance Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hirst feedback at next Board meeting under Matters Arising. • [redacted] • Board to have sight of the business plans in March. • Historical (lessons learnt) reports to be sent to MK. • PV panels – bring back to Board with more detail regarding dealing with maintenance issues. • Allerburn plans – report required for April Board. • [redacted]
H& S Performance Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance Northumberland to check all projects to identify anywhere where there may be a similar problem to ALC with glass screens shattering. • Assurance required regarding Legionella Policy – note to Board on why this has been delayed and what is being done.
Corporate Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [redacted] • [redacted] • [redacted] • Strip out void figures for the Hirst versus Affordable voids. • Page numbers required on Performance Clinic report. • Explore how the performance report could be consolidated.

ICT Policy	Board approved subject to formatting issues being corrected.
Project Approvals	CQ Report to go to March Board.
Other Approvals	DL to write to Chair, RE & JW with concerns regarding the Annual Governance Statement. Audit Committee meeting to be arranged for 10/11 th March to discuss followed by discussion at March Board.
AOB	