### Advance Northumberland

#### Board Minutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Venue:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 27th September 2019 13:50 – 17:55</td>
<td>Advance Northumberland, Wansbeck Workspace, Rotary Parkway, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8QZ</td>
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#### In attendance:
- Cllr Richard Wearmouth
- Cllr Malcolm Robinson
- Cllr Christine Dunbar
- Chris Sayers
- John Woodman
- Advance Northumberland Chairman
- Chair of Board of Governors, Northumbria University

#### Present:
- Ken Dunbar
- Colin Dickson
- Pat Walker
- Kim Grant (Minutes)
- Alison Elsdon
- Advance Northumberland Managing Director
- Advance Northumberland Chief Finance Officer
- Advance Northumberland Governance & Performance Manager
- Advance Northumberland Personal Assistant
- NCC Service Director Finance

#### Part:
- Pam Robertson
- Michael Black
- John Moran
- Advance Northumberland HR Manager
- Advance Northumberland Director of Investments & Economic Growth
- Advance Northumberland Homes Manager

#### Apologies:
- Cllr Peter Jackson
- Cllr Jeff Reid
- Cllr Susan Dungworth
- Daljit Lally
- Leader NCC
- Leader of Liberal Democrat Group
- NCC Chief Executive
1.0 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed the attendees and declared the meeting quorate.

2.0 Apologies for Absence

The Chairman reported that there had been apologies for absence from Cllr Peter Jackson, Cllr Susan Dungworth, Cll Jeff Reid and Daljit Lally.

3.0 Declarations of Interest

3.1 The Advance Northumberland Managing Director declared an interest with regards to the disposal of [Redacted]. The NCC Service Director Finance declared an interest with regards to loan discussion for Project Approvals.

4.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 30th August 2019 were REVIEWED and AGREED as an accurate record of proceedings, subject to the following amendment;

- The NCC Service Director Finance left the meeting during the discussions regarding loans and asked that the minutes be altered to reflect the fact that the Managing Director had advised the Board that Advance Northumberland had appropriate professional indemnity insurance for staff travelling to China as this was confirmed in previous emails received from NCC.

5.0 Matters Arising

5.1 J Woodman enquired as to the implications if past Councillors were unable to sit as Directors on the Advance Northumberland Board. The Managing Director confirmed that this would be discussed with the Company Secretary as they would be finalising the Terms of Reference once the Operating Agreement was signed off.

5.2 C Sayers enquired whether the Term of Office query had been decided i.e. was the starting point for an individual’s Term of Office Advance Northumberland or was it Arch? The Chairman confirmed that the Term of Office related to the new company (Advance Northumberland) as the Operating Agreement related to Advance Northumberland.

6.0 Ratification of Board Decisions Made Electronically
6.1 ● There were no electronic decisions this month to be ratified by Board.

7.0 Performance Updates

7.1

7.1.1
7.2  Human Resources

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

7.2.2 The HR Manager stated that the current headcount within Advance Northumberland at 31st August 2019 was 121 and labour turnover for the period 2019/20 was 23.2% (12 voluntary leavers – annualised data).

7.2.3 The HR Manager confirmed that the sickness absence rate for the period ending 31st August 2019 was: short term 10.5 days, long term 96 days (of which 82 were attributable to accidents at work) which equated to an average of 4% of working time. The mean number of day’s absence was 0.8 per person. There were 3 people who were classed as being on long term sickness – these were all related to accidents at work. All of were being managed with occupational health support. There had been two incidents of compassionate leave.
7.2.4 The HR Manager stated that recruitment was ongoing with 3 live vacancies, 2 vacancies awaiting approval and 5 posts currently under offer.

7.2.5 The HR Manager confirmed that completion rates for mandatory training on the NCC portal were being monitored and at the end of August 2019 were 88.2%. This figure was lower than previous months as the anniversary date had been reached with two areas requiring annual renewal, GDPR and Fire Safety. Response rates were being monitored and progress chased.

7.2.6 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 Better Health at Work award. Advance Northumberland had now received formal accreditation of “Continuing Best Practice” status.

7.2.7 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

There are 12 managers booked on to Health & Safety training to be delivered by Carneys.

7.2.8 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.

There are currently 3 apprentices within the group studying Business Administration, AAT and IT Practitioner. The Facilities Officer was expected to be enrolled on a team leading apprenticeship in September.

7.2.9 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 the Senior Leadership Team and linked where possible to the outcome of the staff survey and feedback from the employee forum. The first stage was a revamp and review of the reward and recognition policy. This was linked to the company values and was about saying thank you to colleagues rather than financial recompense.

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

• Stress Management
• Right to Request Time Off
• Reservists

7.2.11 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 1st 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 reviews would also be uploaded onto this system.

7.2.12

7.2.13 J Woodman asked, with regard to salary grade points, what was happening with the structure? The HR Manager confirmed that NCC were in the process of devising a scheme for Advance Northumberland. Presently NCC were leading on the Pay & Rewards Strategy which would be the alternative approach to the current one of dealing with posts by benchmarking.

7.2.14 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 – 57 (76%)
• Objective Setting – 51 (62%)
Mid year reviews were due to be completed in October with an expectation that these figures would significantly improve.

The Board:

7.2.15

- NOTED the contents of the report.

7.3

H&S Data Report

7.3.1

The Managing Director 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 and one reportable incident relating to a gas leak.

7.3.2

The Managing Director confirmed that the Health & Safety Manager continued to drive forward in the promotion of positive safety management and culture within the business. Site inspections had increased and now included support not only on Ascent Homes sites but Work Spaces and Business Development areas. The site visits continued to show evidence of consistently high standards and best practice with any areas of weakness rectified immediately or escalated to a Director.

7.3.3

The Managing Director went on to confirm that a specific issue that needed to be highlighted from the Health & Safety data report for August 2019 was a gas leak incident identified by the routine CP12 inspection and test. This attracted interest from the HSE following its report as an incident by the Gas Safety Contractor. There were issues not only with the leak but the way in which the pipework had been installed following the contractors investigation within the dot and dab wall. The Advance Northumberland Head of Estates responded and repair work was immediately initiated to rectify leak. This had all been completed and no further communication had been received from the HSE. Discussions continue with previous owners Gentoo regarding properties of similar structure and age in the street and the responsibility of further investigation and potential repair work.

7.3.4

The Managing Director stated that the Homes division continued to focus on the critical safety matters; CP12s and EICR. Access to property was an issue although a strategy had been put in place to manage the situation.

7.3.5

The Managing Director highlighted the risk concerning Asbestos, confirming that a report would be brought to report.

The NCC Service Director Finance enquired as to why the remaining 1% of properties to survey for Asbestos needed to be void. The Managing Director stated that the work required was intrusive and a Health & Safety risk due to the nature of the substance, therefore this work couldn’t be undertaken while the property was occupied.
The Managing Director reminded Board that a large number of policies had been updated and reviewed over the last few months with the following presented to the September Board;

- Pesticides
- Noise

The Board:

NOTED the contents of the report.

Corporate Risk Register

The Managing Director presented the report to update the Board on the Company’s corporate risk register.

The Managing Director informed Board that, as part of the Company’s continuing efforts to improve governance and ensure there was an effective system of internal control, the Advance Northumberland corporate risk register had been updated to reflect changing risk landscape.

The Managing Director confirmed that several risks presented to the Board in June had been deleted and additional, emerging risks identified. It was important that the company operated within an appropriate risk management framework enabling it to achieve its objectives, whilst identifying risk and mitigating actions which could negate or reduce any negative impacts where these were in the control of the company and NCC as sole shareholder.

The Managing Director stated that this paper updated the Audit Committee and the Board on the changes to that strategic risk register as a consequence of the developing Advance Northumberland strategy and emerging Operating Agreement. Notably it presented a change in the methodology used to quantify and assess strategic risk.

The Managing Director confirmed that, for the purpose of maintaining a clear audit trail, the existing risk register would be retained on file and all actions taken would be recorded against the register.

The Managing Director went on to confirm that the September review of the risk register had involved the deletion of risks no longer considered strategic, though these would transfer to an operational risk register and would continue to be monitored.

The Managing Director stated that there were 25 risks identified in the risk register at the time of reporting in June 2019. The revised Corporate Risk Register had seen a reduction of corporate risks to 20. However the number of red risks had increased from 7 to 16.
7.4.9 The Managing Director confirmed that all risks would continue to be managed by the risk owners, reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported to the Senior Leadership Team and Board.

The Board:

7.4.10 • NOTED the contents of the report.

8.0 Policies for Approval

8.1 Corporate Policies – New & Revised

8.1.1 The Managing Director introduced the report explaining that, in line with the requirements of Audit and good practice, Advance Northumberland regularly reviewed its suite of policies. The purpose of this report was to present a suite of new and revised policies to Board for approval.

8.2 Corporate – Amendments to Financial Delegated Authority

8.2.1 The Chief Finance Officer introduced the Policy explaining that it was originally presented to Board in February 2018. Due to staffing changes, it had been necessary to revisit the Policy.

8.2.2 The Chief Finance Officer stated that this Policy would apply to Advance Northumberland group of companies (Group) which for the avoidance of doubt, would include Advance Northumberland Ltd and any subsidiary company thereof which formed part of the Group and which would be referred to throughout the Policy as the Company.

8.2.3 The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Company was required to maintain high standards of propriety and financial management in order to demonstrate prudent, effective and economical use of the public and other funds and property for which it had responsibility. This Policy was the agreed financial delegation of authority which were applied by the Company in the operation of day to day business and provided the means to ensure that all of the standards required by the Company would continue to be met.

The Board:

8.2.4 • APPROVED the Amendments to the Financial Delegated Authority Policy with the following amendment:
  • Correction to job title in 6.1 to read Chief Finance Officer

8.3 Corporate – Travel & Subsistence Policy

8.3.1 The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that the Policy provided guidance to all employees, including Directors and Non-Executive Board Directors, who may wish to claim reimbursement of expenses properly and necessarily incurred in connection with legitimate business.
The Managing Director confirmed that the Policy also set out the procedures and re-imbursement levels in relation to claiming travel and subsistence expenses to ensure that:

- A reasonable approach was taken to achieve value for money as per the Group's financial regulations and procedures.
- Full reimbursement in a timely and effective manner for all necessary and reasonable travel, accommodation and other expenses. This included attendance on approved training courses and conferences.
- The level of reimbursement would be sufficient to provide a standard and quality, which would adequately meet needs from the viewpoint of comfort, safety and acceptability for the effective delivery of business.

The levels of expenditure could only be varied at the sole discretion of the Group.

The Board:

- APPROVED the Travel & Subsistence Policy with the following proviso;
  - The NCC Service Director Finance queried the mileage rate and advised that NCC uses HMRC rates. (NCC Service Director Finance to advise Advance Northumberland Chief Finance Officer of the rates used by NCC).

Corporate – Keeping Customer Safe Policy

The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that Advance Northumberland was committed to maintaining safe communities and the Policy aimed to provide staff with the tools to enable them to offer support and assistance to Customers where necessary and understand where and how to raise concerns where they encountered issues.

The Board:

- APPROVED the Keeping Customer Safe Policy with the following amendment;
  - Definition required regarding the "Customer".

Corporate – Customer Feedback Policy

The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that Advance Northumberland embraced feedback and would ensure that complaints and suggestions were treated seriously and properly investigated in an unbiased, non-judgemental, transparent, timely and appropriate manner.

The Managing Director confirmed that the policy had been developed to ensure that both Advance Northumberland staff and their customers understood how to provide feedback, were confident that feedback would be dealt with effectively, and that lessons learned would be fed into services.

The Managing Director went on to confirm that in addition to the Policy, a Complaints Procedure had been developed and was presented to Board,
along with standard letter templates. Following approval of the Policy, similar procedures would be developed for Compliments and Suggestions and rolled out to staff across the business.

The Board:

8.5.4

- APPROVED the Customer Feedback Policy

8.6

Corporate – Procurement Policy

8.6.1

The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that it had been developed in partnership with Northumberland County Council’s Procurement section. The Policy aimed to guide and support staff to ensure all procurement was fair and transparent and in accordance with Financial Regulations and the public sector legal framework.

8.6.2

The Managing Director stated that, following approval, a comprehensive procedure would be developed to further enable staff to navigate the procurement processes effectively across all expenditure bands.

The Board:

8.6.3

- APPROVED the Procurement Policy with the following proviso;
  - Build something into the Policy to ensure that the processes are being followed.

8.7

Corporate – Manor Walks Charities Policy

8.7.1

The Managing Director reminded Board that the Charities Policy was originally brought to Board on the 26th July 2019. Board had requested that the Policy be brought back to a future Board meeting with the following amendments:

- To clarify the purpose of the report
- Ensure only one Charity collection per day
- The Managing Director confirmed that insurance cover was in place.
- Addition of a paragraph stipulating that there would be no detrimental impact upon National Charities and that it would not conflict with established national charity days.

The Board:

8.7.2

- APPROVED the Charities Policy.

8.8

H&S – Noise Policy

8.8.1

The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that loud noise could be described as unwanted, distracting or annoying sound which had the potential to cause physical damage to the body for example, temporary or permanent hearing loss.
8.8.2 The Managing Director explained that The Control of Noise at Work Regulations were intended to protect against risks to health & safety from exposure to noise, risk of hearing damage and other risks, such as interference with the employee’s ability to hear instructions or warnings.

8.8.3 The Managing Director stated that the regulations introduced action values at which employers must control noise exposure. The regulations also included a new limit value which must not be exceeded. The requirements for noise risk assessment and the provision of suitable control measures had been revised, though they remained broadly similar to previous requirements. However, the requirements for suitable health surveillance were more stringent since regular exposure at or above the upper exposure action value would pose a risk of hearing damage.

The Board:

8.8.4 • APPROVED the Noise Policy.

8.9 H&S – Pesticides Policy

8.9.1 The Managing Director introduced the Policy explaining that pesticides contained chemicals that kill pests or drive them away. They were designed to cause harm to living organisms and were therefore potentially harmful to people, animals and the environment. Pesticides included:

• Herbicides
• Fungicides
• Insecticides
• Molluscicides
• Lumbricides
• Growth Regulators

8.9.2 The Managing Director stated that pesticides could be found in everyday products that were used to combat fungi, mould, insect pests and to destroy weeds. Pesticide legislation aimed to exert control on both the products and the people using them whilst at work. Very strict rules applied to handling poisons. These required additional control measures, such as a higher level of training or the need for two members of staff to be present, for example when using phostoxin for the control of vertebrates, such as moles and rabbits. Detailed risk assessments were also required.

The Board:

8.9.3 • APPROVED the Pesticides Policy.

8.10 HR – Reservists Policy

8.10.1 The HR Manager introduced the Policy explaining that the aim of the Policy was to support the Company’s employees who were members of the Reserve Forces with a commitment to train regularly and who may have a liability to be mobilised for a period of full time military service.
The HR Manager confirmed that the Company would continue to treat the contracts of employment of employees mobilised for Reserve Service as operable throughout the period of such service and there would be no loss of continuous service or service related benefits.

The Board:

- APPROVED the Reservists Policy.

HR – Right to Request Time off for Training

The HR Manager introduced the Policy explaining that Advance Northumberland recognised the importance of learning and development and it was intended that this Policy would complement the Company’s Learning & Development Policy. The Policy applied to any member of staff who had worked at Advance Northumberland continuously for 26 weeks at the time the application was made.

The HR Manager confirmed that eligible employees had the right to make a formal request for training and the Company had a duty to consider such applications seriously. However, there was no automatic right to insist on time off as there may be circumstances when the Company was unable to accommodate an employee’s request. The employee had a responsibility to think carefully about their desired training and its potential impact on their department and to make an application well in advance of the date they would like to undertake the training. The Company was required to follow the procedure as outlined under duties to ensure that requests were considered seriously and consistently.

The HR Manager went on to confirm that employees had a right to request time off for training but do not have the right to have their request agreed. Employees do not have the right to be paid for the time spent training where a request was agreed. Depending on the details of a request, the Company may agree with the employee that they would work flexibly to make up the time spent training or that they would take unpaid time off to train. Employees would not be paid for the time spent training for any request made under this policy.

The Board:

- APPROVED the Right to Request Time Off Policy.

HR – Stress Management Policy

The HR Manager introduced the Policy explaining that it outlined the commitment to promote wellbeing and prevent the factors which were known to cause stress in the workforce. It described the process for managing the risks associated with workplace stress and other psychological difficulties that employees may experience at work. It also gave guidance on how to prevent and manage stress as well as outlining
the support services that were available for those experiencing mental health problems including the effects of stress at work.

8.12.2 The HR Manager stated that Advance Northumberland was committed to promoting the psychological wellbeing of its employees. It was the responsibility of the Company to minimise as far as possible those risks to mental health which arose from a person’s work and to support those who were experiencing psychological problems as a result of work related issues. The Company acknowledged that employees could experience stressful situations in their personal lives which may impinge on their working lives and would provide support wherever possible.

8.12.3 The HR Manager went on to state that a healthy workforce and the psychological wellbeing of employees was crucial to the success of the Company. The Company recognised that by reducing stress in the workplace and promoting positive mental health in employees, this would improve not only the quality of employee’s working lives but also the quality of services to their customers. The overall effectiveness of the organisation would also be improved by reducing the costs associated with mental health related sickness absence in employees, high levels of staff turnover and complaints from customers.

The Board:

8.12.4 • APPROVED the Stress Management Policy.

The NCC Service Director Finance left the meeting.

9.0 Project Approvals

9.1

9.1.1

9.1.2

9.1.3
The Managing Director left the meeting.
The Managing Director rejoined the meeting.
The NCC Service Director Finance rejoined the meeting.

10.0 Other Approvals

10.1

10.1.1

10.1.2

10.1.3

10.1.4

10.1.5
11.0    AOB

11.1    The Managing Director informed Board that a date would be provided for a Nominations and Remuneration Committee meeting.

11.3
11.4 The Chairman thanked the Board for their attendance and closed the meeting at 17:55.

........................................CHAIRMAN