

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE AND PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 13 June 2011 at 10.30 am.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Liz Casling in the Chair.

County Councillors Val Arnold, Bernard Bateman, David Blades (substitute for Neville Huxtable), Karl Arthur, Margaret-Ann de-Courcey Bayley (substitute for Geoff Webber), Robert Heseltine (substitute for Phillip Barrett), David Ireton, David Jeffels, Andrew Lee, John McCartney and Stephen Shaw.

In attendance:-

Executive Member County Councillor Carl Les.

Officers:-

Peter Bright (Assistant Director Corporate Property Management), Josie O'Dowd (Manager – Democratic Services), Roger Fairholm (Corporate Asset Manager), Neil Irving (Head of Policy and Partnerships), Jonathan Spencer (Corporate Development Officer), Geoff Wall (Assistant Director Central Finance).

An apology for absence was received from County Councillor Brian Simpson.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2011, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

There were no public questions or statements to be put to the Committee.

40. EXECUTIVE MEMBER'S PROGRESS REPORT

CONSIDERED –

The report of Executive Member, County Councillor Carl Les to highlight some of the recent issues considered by the Executive since the last meeting of this committee and to identify some of the key issues and priorities for the coming months.

Recent significant issues were reported by Councillor Les as being:

- Budget 2 – member involvement
- Cabinet changes, “new faces, same issues”

Councillor Les also highlighted items contained in the Forward Plan as being:

- Changes to the Corporate Procurement Strategy
- Broadband developments
- Q4 out-turn
- Q1 out-turn

Future Issues were identified by Councillor Les as being:

- Communications, internal and external, especially after NYTimes
- One Council – progress and barriers

Councillor Les went on to explain that following the Executive reshuffle on 18 May, in addition to chief executive group services his new portfolio also included lead executive member for children's services, special educational needs and youth justice. Financial services including assets, IT and procurement had transferred to Councillor John Watson OBE.

A Member asked to receive a list of the Executive Members' portfolios.

The Chairman mentioned that the Care and Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee would continue to respond to issues relating to library provision until October. This function would transfer to the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee thereafter, subject to agreement of the Scrutiny Board.

In response to a question, Councillor Les said that the Budget Member Seminars had been well attended. The Chairman noted that the Scrutiny Board would shortly be agreeing the ways in which the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function could be involved in monitoring the impact of the budget proposals on services. This arose from previous discussions at the Committee looking at what had worked well in 2010/11 and what might be done differently in 2011/12 and future years regarding non Executive Members involvement in the budget process.

In response to a question, Councillor Les said that the Authority had received a number of items of correspondence expressing regret at the withdrawal of the NY Times. A Member suggested a way forward in terms of resident communications was to have a joint approach with the Fire and Police Authorities and other interested public sector partners in the county. The Chairman noted that an update on resident communications would be brought to the next Mid Cycle briefing.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Executive Member's report be noted.
- b) That a list of the Executive Members' portfolios be circulated to all County Councillors.

41. PROPERTY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2011

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Finance and Central Services, to consider the Property Performance Report 2011.

(County Councillor David Blades declared a personal interest in this item in respect of his son being a director of a company mentioned in the report)

Roger Fairholm, Corporate Asset Manager, introduced the report, stating that the purpose of the report was to ask the Committee to consider the performance of the County Council in relation to property in 2010/11; the performance of Jacobs Engineering UK in relation to property; the performance of property contractors; and the progress in implementing the Property Improvement Programme.

Mr Fairholm went on to explain that the property portfolio was largely static in relation to the colour coded assessments. There were only two properties, which were priorities for action. These were Richmond School, which was the subject to extensive investment, and Pateley Bridge Library, whose future would be determined by the final proposals for the library service.

Jacobs had exceeded its performance targets in eleven out of thirteen areas assessed.

Client satisfaction with the quality of the service of the Authority's four contractor groups remained high. The groups had achieved good or excellent scores from clients in the vast majority of cases.

Future challenges relating to the property portfolio would be to meet the requirements of the One Council initiative.

The challenge on consultants and contractors would be to remove the niggles that still existed and to maintain standards of service. The James Review of school investment could affect the Authority's arrangements with its consultants and contractors and the workload passed to them, depending upon the Government's response.

The report would be considered by the Executive on 24th June and comments from the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be fed in to that meeting.

Members made the following comments:

- Was best value being obtained when the larger appointed contractors subsequently sub-contracted out work, risking a mark-up on the overall cost of the contract? Mr Fairholm replied that price comparisons showed that the contract costs were competitive and that the tender process used by Jacobs had resulted in substantial savings. Peter Bright, Assistant Director Corporate Property Management, referred to how the Authority was supporting smaller contractors through BuildNorthYorkshire, a network aimed at developing the construction supply chain in the county.
- The challenge was to change the property portfolio to respond to the One Council programme and the budget savings to be made across the public sector. There needed to be a joint solution across the public sector in the county to arrive at the best solution for all, moving to one public estate.

- Investment in new schools was welcomed but the continued existence of temporary buildings on primary school sites was of concern. In North Craven every school site contained a temporary 'portakabin'-style building. In reply to a question about future plans to replace such buildings with more permanent structures/alternative plans to give permanent planning permission for existing temporary buildings on the condition that they were removed if no longer in use, Mr Fairholm said that there was a large number of such temporary buildings in the county. Replacement would be dependent upon government funding, pupil numbers and the capital investment decisions taken by the Children and Young People Services Directorate.
- Concern about the high water use-age of schools due to the existence of high flushing toilet units. Mr Bright confirmed that this was an issue that was being looked into.
- The new build at Gladstone Road School Scarborough was praised by the local Member.
- In responding to a query about the future of West Ayton highways depot Mr Bright said that he would look into this and report back to the relevant Member in due course.
- In response to a question from the Chairman about the effect that the reduction in the amount of resources available for planned maintenance in 2011/12 would have on backlog maintenance, Mr Fairholm said that backlog maintenance had reduced from 2010 and was now in the region of £36m (excluding decoration). Investment in corporately maintained property had been 'switched off' in 2011/12 to support the demands of the budget cuts but the intention was that it would be reinstated in 2012/13.

RESOLVED –

That the Property Performance Report 2011 be noted.

42. AREA COMMITTEES

CONSIDERED –

The joint report of the Manager of Democratic Services and the Head of Policy and Partnerships to invite the Committee to contribute to discussions concerning Area Committees.

Neil Irving, Head of Policy and Partnerships, referred to paragraph 2.1 of the report to correct the date of the Area Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen meeting, which had been held on 18 April 2011. He outlined the reasons why Area Committees had been established and their current terms of reference. A survey had been circulated to all Area Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to gauge their views and the results were considered at their meeting on 18 April. The consensus at the meeting was that the way forward was not to abolish Area Committees but to seek to improve how they worked including exploring further opportunities for joint working with other partners such as district councils. Subject to the comments of the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee a report of the discussions would be submitted to the Constitution Working Group recommending that Area Committees should be retained. The Constitution Working Group would be invited to review the provisions for co-opting additional members to Area Committees; to identify and consider any further opportunities for delegation of decision making to Area

Committees; and to identify and consider the principles that should underpin any possible joint area committee arrangements with district councils in North Yorkshire.

Members made the following comments:

- The Chairman said that whilst she saw the value of Area Committees, improvements needed to be made to the current arrangements. Any such structure needed to encourage and enable wider engagement, including from the public. Area Committee Chairmen were perceived to be the 'gateway' for items on the agenda. The Chairman cited the Community Engagement Forums operating in Selby district as good practice. Josie O'Dowd, Manager of Democratic Services, said that there was scope for greater involvement of co-opted Members to contribute to the development of agendas. There was also scope for current and future issues to be brought to Area Committees in a more proactive fashion than was presently the case.
- Across the year at each Area Committee there could be a themed meeting attended by the relevant Executive Member and Corporate Director with an informal 'question time'. External organisations could also be invited, for example the Environment Agency to discuss flooding. This could help to secure more positive engagement with parish councils.
- Operate an informal question time/'open meeting' prior to the commencement of formal business.
- Community engagement structures in Scarborough and Selby districts have effective local engagement and their informal nature made it easier for the public to interact with Members than Area Committees.
- Members of the public wishing to speak at Area Committees were not always aware of the current requirement to provide their question in writing three working days before the day of the meeting. This subsequently caused frustration amongst those wishing to speak at the meeting and limited the debate.
- Prioritise the order of agenda items: those that have greatest public interest to be placed at the start of the meeting.
- Reports should be relevant to the local area and 'round robin' reports should be avoided.
- Work more closely with district councils to avoid the same report being presented at multiple meetings. This wasted time and public money.
- Invite all County Councillors to comment on Area Committees, including improvements to be made.
- Individual Members can only base their judgment on their experiences of the Area Committee for their district.
- Area Committees could be re-organised according to population size instead of along district council boundaries.
- Experience has shown that Area Committees are well attended by the public if there is an item of particular interest or concern to them. Area Committees have an important democratic function in this regard.

- Consider the possibility of joint area committee arrangements with district councils and provide voting rights for parish council representatives.
- The Area Committees' grants scheme should be reinstated as soon as the budget allows.
- Progress reports provided by the Police and Fire Service to Area Committees are valued by Members.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the recommendations in paragraph 5.1 of the report be approved.
- b) In addition the Committee recommends:
- That Executive Members make greater use of Area Committees to consult with members of the public and to respond to public questions relating to their service area/s.
 - That an informal question time be held prior to the commencement of formal business at Area Committee meetings.
 - That Legal and Democratic Services look into ways to address the problems associated with the three working day rule for receipt of public questions for Area Committees, in light of the proposal to introduce an informal question time.
 - That the Area Committees' small grants' scheme be re-instated when the budget allows.

43. COUNCIL PLAN

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Head of Policy and Partnerships to review retrospectively the process of production and approval of the Council Plan, and to consider future involvement of the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the development of future Plans.

Neil Irving, Head of Policy and Partnerships, said that the timescale for production of the Council Plan was dependent upon when the detail of the budget settlement was announced by central government. It had meant that last year the document had been sent to Committee Members over the Christmas period. Therefore the window of opportunity for the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee to help shape the document was limited. A way forward would be to bring the current version of the Council Plan to the Committee's meeting in November. At this meeting Members could look at the current version and suggest improvements that they would like to see included in the next one. The latest draft version of the 2012/15 Council Plan could then be brought to the Mid Cycle meeting on 12 December to allow Group Spokespersons to feed in comments.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the 2011/14 Council Plan be brought to the November meeting of the Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look at the achievements of the past year and to make suggestions for future improvements.
- b) That the latest draft version of the 2012/15 Council Plan be brought to the December Mid Cycle meeting for discussion.

44. PROCUREMENT UPDATE

The report of the Corporate Director - Finance and Central Services updating the Committee on a number on recent procurement related issues.

Geoff Wall, Assistant Director Central Finance, provided an overview of the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2011-2014, which had been submitted to the Corporate Procurement Members Working Group and subsequently endorsed by the Executive to be adopted by the County Council in July. He also referred to the accompanying Procurement Action Plan 2011/12. The work to develop the Strategy and Action Plan had been undertaken in advance of the agreement of the One Council programme. However many of the issues reflected in the 'Procurement and Contract Management Workstream' of the programme were reflected in the priorities that had already been identified.

Mr Wall mentioned about the change to the guidance relating to the sustainability factor in tender evaluation models, introduced in light of experience over the past year or so.

Mr Wall briefly referred to the potential procurement implications that the Localism Bill could have on procurement matters, if enacted. However, he noted that because of the terms of the Bill and the related consultation any final arrangements were far from clear at this stage.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

45. WORK PROGRAMME

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Scrutiny Team Leader to invite the Committee to consider the work programme.

Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer, reported that the monitoring of the One Council programme would come under the remit of this Committee. The programme plan would be brought to the September meeting, with regular reporting back to the Committee on the progress and implementation of the various work-streams.

A revised version of the North Yorkshire Sustainable Community Strategy was being produced. The consultation period would run from 20 June to 16 September and the Committee would be invited to comment on the draft strategy at its September meeting. The Committee would have a watching brief on the implementation of the strategy and relevant partnership indicators.

The Access to Services Working Group would be meeting on 7th July to discuss the review's findings and produce outline recommendations. The working group's report would be submitted to the Committee's September meeting.

Members made the following comments:

- The Localism Bill would see many changes in the way in which local authorities worked with communities and parish councils in terms of planning issues and service delivery. Once the Bill had been enacted, a report on the implications of the Localism Bill should be brought to a future Committee meeting.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report and Members comments be noted.
- b) That the Localism Bill be added to the work programme for a future meeting once the Bill had been enacted.

The meeting concluded at 12.19pm

JS/ALJ