North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnerships
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 19 March 2012 at 10.30 am.

Present:-

County Councillor Liz Casling in the Chair.

County Councillors Karl Arthur, Val Arnold, Philip Barrett, Bernard Bateman, Neville Huxtable, David Ireton, David Jeffels, Andrew Lee, John McCartney, Stephen Shaw, Brian Simpson and Geoff Webber.

In attendance:
Executive Member County Councillors Carl Les and John Watson.

Officers:
Julie Blaisdale, Justine Brooksbank, Ian Marr, John Moore, Jonathan Spencer and Tom Jenkinson.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

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73. **Minutes**

   Resolved –

   That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2012, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

74. **Public Questions or Statements**

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

75. **Future delivery of Library Services**

   Considered –

   The report of the Assistant Director (Library & Community Services).

   Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director – Library & Community Services, provided an overview of the matters addressed in the report. These included the three month public consultation; the subsequent decision to remove the standard mobiles but to retain the existing Supermobile/Home Library Information Service; and the creation of three library categories. She went on to provide a progress update in relation to each of these starting with the work with community groups to implement 'community ownership' solutions in Category 3 libraries. The Library Service was also working closely with community groups elsewhere to address the shortfall created by the reduction in 'staffed' opening hours at Category 1 and 2 libraries. She went on to

refer to paragraph 4.9 detailing the campaign to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in libraries; section five of the report detailing resource and performance implications; section six of the report detailing the consultation with local communities and frontline staff to help determine the final 'staffed' hours for Category 1 and Category 2 libraries; and section 7 of the report relating to the Equalities Impact Assessment.

Julie Blaisdale reported that where Members had been actively involved in the consultation process and had been seen to be leading communities, the results had been a lot more positive for the Library Service and local communities alike. She invited Members to comment on 'lessons learned' from the consultation process and to make suggestions for how the Library Service could improve on its future consultation and engagement with local communities.

Members made the following comments about the process:

- Appreciation of the help and guidance that Julie Blaisdale and her staff had provided to Members and community groups throughout the process.

- The invaluable input of the VCS, through the 'Active Communities' project, in providing knowledge, skills and advice to the library community groups.

- The Equality Impact Assessment that had been undertaken for libraries had been comprehensive and used as a 'living document' to inform the resulting service changes made to the library service.

Members made the following suggestions about how the Library Service could improve on its future consultation and engagement with local communities:

- Provide clarity on the rules of engagement from the start to ensure that misunderstandings do not build up between community groups and the County Council. Part of this included providing information on facts and figures etc. about the service at the earliest possible stage.

- Lobby at a national level through the Local Government Association for a change in the law to ensure that community-run libraries do not have to be subject to the same rules as local authorities in having to provide a free library service. Enabling community-run libraries to charge users an annual membership fee would help increase the chances of community-run libraries becoming sustainable over the longer term.

- The Chairman asked if there was a 'Plan B' in case the projected level of savings was not achieved; and the action that would take place in those instances where a community-run library was failing. Julie Blaisdale said that the Library Service was on course to make the required level of savings through implementing the various changes agreed by the Executive. Service level agreements were in place to ensure that community-run libraries would be run in a professional way. Built into the service level agreement was a period of notice, allowing both parties to terminate the service. Before this stage however if either side had misgivings discussions would be held at the earliest possible stage to give time for the situation to be rectified. Service level agreements had been tailored to the needs of individual libraries.

Resolved –

The Committee notes the progress made on decisions taken on the future delivery of library services.

76. Broadband Developments

Considered –

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Performance & Partnerships) and the Corporate Director (Finance & Central Services).

Ian Marr, Project Officer provided an overview of the matters addressed in the report. These included 'Connecting North Yorkshire' and the' Go On Campaign'. He explained that North Yorkshire was one of four Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) pilots in the country. There were two strands to the rollout of broadband in North Yorkshire. The first strand involved procuring a supplier to provide as much super-fast broadband coverage to the county as possible. The second strand involved filling in the remaining gaps with community-led broadband schemes. He then went on to explain the governance arrangements relating to 'Connecting North Yorkshire'; the role of the district champions in promoting community-led broadband schemes; the monthly newsletter; and asked Members for their views on ways that Officers could provide Members with additional help to assist them in promoting community broadband to their communities.

Members made the following comments:

- The possibility of BT or a similar commercial provider taking over Community Internet Service Providers (CISPs) once they were in place. In reply John Moore, Corporate Director – Finance & Central Services, said that this was unlikely in the short to medium term. The County Council was working to ensure that CISPs became economically sustainable. To this end it was likely that CISPs would aggregate over time to cover a larger area but even then CISPs would be low profit organisations.

- A Member referred to the business parks that had been connected to superfast broadband using the NYNet infrastructure. A business park in his Division, which had poor broadband connections, had not been approached. Ian Marr explained that immediate grant funding was not available to all business parks; it depended upon where the NYNet network was. In those instances where a business park had multiple owners each needed to provide their consent before the infrastructure could be installed. Ian Marr went on to note that there was a need to manage expectations to make communities aware that it would take a number of years before super-fast broadband could be rolled out across the county.

- In response to a question John Moore confirmed that parish councils and other interested parties should be referred in the first instance to the local co-ordinators employed in the district councils. An aide-memoire including details of the local contacts would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

- Some district councils seemed to be more engaged in the process than others. Ian Marr confirmed that those communities that had yet to access the Performance Reward Grant monies would be given priority this year. Accordingly it was expected that there would be greater involvement from district councils based in those areas.

Resolved –

That the Committee notes the developments relating to broadband in North Yorkshire, in particular activity relating to community broadband schemes.

77.   HR and Communications Unit Work Plan and Focus

Considered –

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Human Resources & Organisational Development).

Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive – Organisational Development and Human Resources provided an overview of the matters addressed in the report. These included continuing HR support to directorate restructures; continuing HR support to staff in a redundancy position; implementing changes to staff terms and conditions; continuing to move all staff/HR processes online; internal and external communications; and the restructuring of Operational HR Services.

Members made the following comments:

- In relation to the move to advertise jobs on-line wherever possible, it was noted that a number of schools were still advertising in the press. Justine Brooksbank noted that the County Council could advise schools on the cost-effectiveness of advertising vacancies on-line but ultimately it was down to the school to determine how best to allocate its budget.

- The County Council's 40p mileage rate introduced from April 2011, for the first 10,000 business miles in the tax year for Officers and Members, now fell below the Inland Revenue's rate of 45p for the same. Fuel prices had continued to rise sharply since then. At the Meeting of the County Council held in February 2011 a motion had been moved, which had subsequently been carried, for Member mileage allowances to be reduced to the Inland Revenue rate (which was then 40p) for the first 8,500 miles per annum. The Inland Revenue's recognised rate had subsequently increased to 45p for 2011/12 onwards for the first 10,000 business miles in the tax year. In response Justine Brooksbank explained that the collective agreement signed with UNISON stipulated the figure of 40p for the first 10,000 business miles per annum. It had been agreed to review the mileage rate at the end of the first year and this had been done. However it had been concluded that there was no scope for increasing the overall mileage rate for the foreseeable future. This was due to the level of savings that the County Council was required to make. Various initiatives had been introduced to help staff save travel costs such as the Green Car Scheme and the Cycle to Work scheme.

- How the success of the newspaper partnership would be evaluated? Justine Brooksbank reported that the articles produced by the County Council were also included in the electronic newsletter, which contained a facility for subscribers to provide feedback. No negative feedback had been received to date about the County Council related articles that had been included in the newspapers. Evaluation was able to be undertaken in those instances where articles invited a response.

- The Chairman noted that a concern of the Committee's One Council Members Task Group was that once the One Council programme had come to an end there would be a risk that the number of posts would proliferate. Justine Brooksbank confirmed that an approvals and authorisation process was in place, enabling every vacancy to be managed and any subsequent requests to fill the vacancy were scrutinised by senior managers within each directorate.

Resolved –

That Members note the ongoing HR and Communications Work Programme.

78.   **Review of Equality Impact Assessment Process**

Considered –

The report of the Assistant Director (Policy, Performance & Partnerships).

Tom Jenkinson, Corporate Development Officer provided an overview of the matters addressed in the report. These included providing the Committee with background information and a commentary on each of the five selected Equality Impact Assessments; conclusions on the effectiveness of the EIA process in supporting decisions; conclusions on the effectiveness in informing proposals for budget savings and identifying cumulative impacts of service changes on people with protected characteristics; conclusions on the effectiveness in identifying adverse impacts before changes are made; and actions to address any identified weaknesses.

Members made the following comments:

- In response to a question Tom Jenkinson confirmed that whilst there was a standard EIA template on the intranet, the challenge was in terms of ensuring that each EIA had the appropriate level of detail for the service concerned. On occasions 'back-office' services impacted on 'front-line' services. More recent EIAs did indicate a growing understanding of interdependencies between back-office and front-line services.

- A Member asked the extent to which the County Council was involved in supporting schools to fulfil their Public Sector Equality Duty and if there were any inconsistencies between schools. Tom Jenkinson explained that schools had been recommended to adopt the Council's model Equality Scheme for schools. All schools had access to the EIA templates on the intranet and could obtain advice from the directorate equality lead in the Children and Young People's Service Directorate. He went on to note that by 6th April all schools needed to have published initial information demonstrating how they were complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty and to have published their equality objectives.

- In response to a question Tom Jenkinson confirmed that only the summaries of EIAs were available on the website but there were plans to pull together all the EIAs on the intranet. EIAs were public documents and so could be requested by members of the public.

- The Chairman asked to be sent details of the Transforming Learning Disability Services EIA and the Home to School Transport EIA.

Resolved –

That Members note the findings of the report.

79.   One Council update

Considered –

The update of the One Council Members Task Group.

The Chairman provided feedback on the workshop held on 5th March at which the project leads and project managers for each of the workstreams had attended to outline the scope of their review and proposed structures. The workstreams were at various stages of development. The Task Group would meet next on 29 March to receive the overall programme plan. The Group would then decide on its future approach in terms of whether to have a strategic oversight of all the workstreams or to focus on particular ones.

Resolved –

That the report be noted.

80.   Work programme

Considered –

The report of the Scrutiny Team Leader.

County Councillor Geoff Webber provided feedback on the meeting of the Alcohol Substance Misuse Review Group held on 10 February. He noted that amongst other things the group had agreed to make housing a major issue for the Health and Wellbeing Board in relation to alcohol abuse. This was in light of the strong correlation between inadequate housing and alcohol abuse.

The Chairman reported that Post Office Ltd. would be making changes to the branch network over the next three years. This would include the introduction of 'Post Office Locals', 'Post Office Mains', and more community involvement in the running of post offices. A senior representative from Post Office Ltd. would be attending the Committee's meeting in June to appraise the Committee about these developments.

Resolved –

That the future work programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.35pm

JS/ALJ