

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall Northallerton on 10 September 2012 commencing at 10.30 am.

Present:-

County Councillor Liz Casling in the Chair.

County Councillors Val Arnold, Karl Arthur, Philip Barrett, John Fort (substitute for Bernard Bateman), Helen Grant, Michael Heseltine (substitute for David Jeffels), Neville Huxtable, Stephen Shaw and Geoff Webber.

In attendance:

County Councillor Mike Jordan.

Officers:

Helen Edwards (CEG), Neil Irving (CEG), Rob Polkinghorne (CEG) and Jonathan Spencer (CEG).

Present by Invitation:

Assistant Chief Constable Iain Spittal (North Yorkshire Police).

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Carl Les and Brian Simpson.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

90. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2012, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to noting that County Councillor Neville Huxtable had submitted his apologies to the meeting.

91. Public Questions or Statements

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

92. North Yorkshire Police

Considered –

The covering report of the Corporate Development Officer/Oral Report of the Assistant Chief Constable, providing the Committee with an overview and opportunity to seek clarification, as appropriate, on the future direction of North Yorkshire Police, including local policing structures.

Assistant Chief Constable Iain Spittal detailed the changes that had been made to the management structures within North Yorkshire Police Force including senior management positions and at the operational policing level.

He went on to refer to the overall performance of the Force in reducing crime. There had been continued significant reductions over the last 16 months for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), overall crime, serious acquisitive crime and ongoing reductions in violent crime and Killed and Seriously Injured. Incident response times had also improved for both rural and urban areas.

Crimes relating to fraud and forgery had seen an increase of 42% between 2011/12 and 2012/13 to date. Drugs offences had increased by 11% between 2010/11 and 2011/12. Sexual offences had seen an increase of 7% between 2011/12 and 2012/13. Iain Spittal explained the reasons for the increase in these crimes and the action that was being undertaken by North Yorkshire Police.

Recent surveys had shown that victims of crime in the county had recorded higher levels of satisfaction with North Yorkshire Police. Public confidence in the Police, and the other statutory organisations responsible for delivering services to tackle crime, had also increased.

North Yorkshire Police continued to face financial challenges. The budget had been balanced for the current financial year but the level of settlement in the next Comprehensive Spending Review was unknown and based on a worst case scenario funding shortfalls were predicted from 2014/15. From November this year the Force would be working with the Police and Crime Commissioner to develop an approach to bridge the funding gaps. The financial challenges faced by the Force were leading to ongoing reductions in the number of police offices and a small reduction in the number of Police Community Support Officers.

Every quarter the Force reviewed its priorities. This quarter the focus was on organised crime. There were 36 active crime groups in the county. Of this number 10 were classed as a medium threat. The focus was on tackling serious acquisitive crime especially burglary.

North Yorkshire Police Force and North Yorkshire Police Authority continued to work closely together to ensure that the transition to the Police and Crime Commissioner went smoothly. The Police and Crime Panel had held its first two meetings.

Iain Spittal concluded by noting the importance of not losing sight of the need to involve and consult with the public despite the financial pressures faced by the Police Force.

Members made the following comments:

- The public disquiet about the severance package of the former Chief Constable, Grahame Maxwell, and the measures that would be put in place to ensure this did not happen again in the future. Iain Spittal explained that this was a matter for the Police Authority to comment upon. The Police Authority had had to follow national police regulations when determining the severance package.
- The Safer Neighbourhood groups provided a forum for the public to meet with the Police but they should not be relied upon as the only way of listening to people's concerns and issues. Iain Spittal acknowledged that those attending the meetings were not always fully representative of the community as a

whole. However the Safer Neighbourhood groups were just one of a range of ways that the Police were involving the public. The Police were currently exploring social media to engage with people especially young people. Surveys were being developed with volunteers being used to test out the surveys.

- The negative impact that could arise upon attendance rates if the proposal to move Skipton traffic police to Harrogate was approved, particularly for South Craven and for villages along the A59. Iain Spittal said that he wished to reassure the Committee that no decision had been made yet about the changes to traffic policing and that travelling distance would be taken into account. Financial pressures meant that all budget areas were being looked at and it was currently the case that for a large percentage of the time, traffic policing officers were sent to other areas of the county as and when incidents arose. The Force was looking to maintain the attendance rate and whatever changes were made the overall provision would not reduce. A decision would be taken by March 2013. It was unlikely that any change would take effect for the start of the 2013/14 financial year.
- The impact that a reduction in police numbers could have upon restorative justice practices. Iain Spittal said that the Force was working to expand these measures. This was because restorative justice initiatives had proved on the whole to be very effective since their introduction, reducing the likelihood of individuals becoming longstanding members of the criminal fraternity.
- The Chairman asked what monitoring was undertaken to ensure that when policing resources were moved from a lower-crime area to a higher crime area within the county, crime levels did not then rise in lower crime areas. Iain Spittal responded by noting that the Force held a database containing crime data and intelligence going back many years. This allowed the Police to analyse crime patterns in detail by bringing a host of information together including response times. Every month any changes in crime levels were reviewed to help plan the deployment of police resources.
- The Chairman noted that a key concern for many residents living in rural areas was speeding motorists through villages, and asked whether this would continue to be a priority area for North Yorkshire Police. Iain Spittal confirmed that tackling speeding would continue to be a high priority in order to reduce the number of Killed and Seriously Injured on the roads. He went on to note the work that the Police, the County Council, the Fire & Rescue Service and Health were continuing to do through the 95 Alive Partnership. A safety camera van had been introduced about 18 months ago and had already proved to be a success in reducing accidents. A proposal would be submitted to the Police Authority to ask Members to support the continuation of the facility and increase the number of safety camera vans to three. Any revenue raised would be used for wider road safety initiatives. The Fire and Rescue Service and the County Council were also working with the Police by deploying speed assessment equipment including temporary vehicle activated speed cameras chiefly in areas which had a history of accidents.

Resolved –

That Members note the future direction of North Yorkshire Police.

93. Social Media

Considered –

The report of the Head of Communications, providing Members with information on social media, specifically the activity currently undertaken by the council and the opportunities for communication and democratic engagement using social media.

Helen Edwards, Head of Communications, explained that social media represented another form of communication and engagement, bringing with it additional opportunities for the County Council in this regard. There were risks with the use of social media but these would exist regardless of whether the Council took a passive, reactive or proactive approach.

She referred to Section 3 of the report detailing the County Council's current use of social media, noting that it already had an active presence on social media channels. Social media monitoring was in place to enable the Council to see who was saying what about the council, where and to whom. This also helped the Council to identify how successful its own social media activity was.

Social media enabled the Council to get messages out to people quickly and reliably, which was particularly useful during adverse weather and in other emergencies. The Communications Unit co-ordinated and managed these communications.

Governance arrangements were in place. Access to social media on County Council equipment was regulated by the use of the IT filtering system and anyone wishing to access social media was required to go through an authorisation process. The Council also had a social media policy, setting out how an employee should use and respond to social media.

Helen Edwards went on to note that there were a small number of County Council Members who used social media to communicate with their electorate. The Council could provide Members with training and support in social media.

County Councillor Mike Jordan provided a practical demonstration of the benefits to Members of using social media and having a webpage. He noted that social media provided Members with a way of re-engaging key audiences in local democracy, allowing them to reach a wider audience than just relying upon leaflet drops, surgeries, newsletters etc. New rules would be coming into place to allow social media reporting of council meetings.

Members made the following comments:

- A Member expressed concern about the County Council's use of social media and pointed out the downsides and potential for damage to the Council's reputation. Other Members noted that an increasing number of people used social media as their first port of call for information and so the Council needed to be a part of it for the sake of democratic engagement.
- The Chairman suggested that all Members be given the opportunity to have some practical training on the range of social media available, including setting up a webpage. The training could take place at the start of the next Council to allow any new Members to be included.
- Training for Members on social media was important but the County Council needed to continue to use a range of communication methods with the public.

This was particularly so in relation to the higher percentage of people over 65 years who had never been on-line or did not have access to a computer.

- A Member referred to paragraph 4.2 of the report, noting that the social media policy also applied to employees when using their own equipment and in their own time. He said that he was concerned that this could impinge upon the right to free speech. Helen Edwards confirmed that the social media policy was linked to the Council's code of conduct which meant that employees were under a general duty of care to avoid, wherever practicable, a conflict of interest arising and should not undertake to criticise, damage or act in any way against the best interests of the County Council.

Resolved –

- a) That Members note the report on the council's current use of social media.
- b) That all Members be given the opportunity to receive practical training on the range of social media available, including setting up a webpage.

94. Annual Report on Partnership Governance 2011/12

Considered –

The report of the Assistant Director (Policy and Partnerships) to enable the Committee to review the annual report on the governance of partnerships involving the County Council for the financial year 2011/12.

Neil Irving highlighted the array of partnerships that the County Council was involved in. He referred to Appendix 1 of the report which identified those partnerships that had a significant impact on the County Council, for instance in terms of its reputation or financial commitment. He went on to refer to the arrangements in place to monitor the partnerships. The annual report on partnership governance had been presented to the Executive on 19 June and would be considered by the Audit Committee on 27 September.

Members made the following comments:

- Partnership governance risks arising due to the changes in personnel resulting from the One Council change programme. Neil Irving responded by noting that each of the partnerships listed in Appendix 1 had had been scored according to risk. Governance procedures were regularly checked to ensure that they were robust, in particular for those partnerships that were judged to have a high overall risk score. Each partnership had an identified lead officer. There were also partnership champions in the directorates able to provide Officers and Members with advice on governance issues etc. Accompanying guidance had been produced, providing information on the County Council's legal obligations and advice for improving the effectiveness of the working arrangements of partnerships.

Resolved –

- a) That the annual report on partnership governance 2011/12 be noted.
- b) That the annual report on partnership governance be removed from the Corporate and Partnership's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

95. One Council update

Considered –

The joint oral report of the Chairman of the One Council Members Task Group and the Organisational Change Programme Director.

Rob Polkinghorne noted that the task group had met in July and August. The Task Group would be meeting at the rising of the Committee to discuss the customer access and management & supervision workstreams. Gary Fielding and Rob Polkinghorne had attended the Audit Committee to discuss aspects of internal control around One Council and assurance work was due to commence shortly. The changes implemented to date by the One Council programme had saved £2.89 million out of a total savings expectation figure of £7.6m.

The Chairman reported that the purpose of the Task Group's meeting with the Chief Executive in July had been to iron out the concerns of the group about the progress being made by the One Council programme and to hear his ideas about phase two of the programme. The group was reassured to hear that the planning that had gone into implementing the programme was now being realised and that the programme was largely on track. The Chief Executive had demonstrated to the group that he had a clear vision of the changes that needed to be made to the Council. The meeting in August had focussed on financial savings at which the group had scrutinised the first of the programme's monthly highlight reports including the risk register.

The Chairman noted that the challenge would be for the Council to make savings in the next few years that went well beyond the level of savings that would be realised by the One Council programme. To help inform this process the task group had suggested that Members in the current Council could do some 'blue-sky-thinking' about what services the Council should deliver after 2014/15. This idea was being taken forward by the Chief Executive and the Leader.

Resolved –

That the progress of the One Council programme and the work of the One Council Members Task Group be noted.

96. Work Programme

Considered –

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

Resolved –

That the work programme report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.38pm

JS/ALJ