

North Yorkshire County Council
Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 13 October 2014 at 10.30 am.

Present:-

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair

County Councillors Val Arnold, Bernard Bateman MBE, John Blackburn, Jean Butterfield, John Ennis, Andrew Lee, Tony Randerson, Steve Shaw-Wright, Elizabeth Shields and Tim Swales.

Also in Attendance

County Councillor Carl Les (Executive Member)

Officers: Julie Blaisdale – Assistant Director (Library and Community Services), Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive (Business Support), Jon Holden, Investments and Delivery Manager, Neil Irving, Assistant Director (Policy and Partnerships), Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer and Mary Weastell – Assistant Chief Executive (Central Services)

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Sam Cross and Stuart Parsons

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

32. Minutes

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2014, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

33. Public Questions or Statements

There were no public questions or statements

34. Executive Member Update

Considered -

The oral report of Executive Member County Councillor Les highlighting some of the recent items considered by the Executive since the last meeting of the Committee and identifying some of the key priorities for the coming months.

County Councillor Les mentioned that he was currently attending the present round of Area Committee meetings in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Central and Financial Services. He would be meeting with the new Stronger Communities team shortly and encouraged Members to meet with their respective Stronger Communities Delivery Manager for their district.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

35. Property Planning

Considered -

Jon Holden provided an oral report on property rationalisation further to the request made by Members at the committee's meeting in July.

The presentation outlined:

- The 2020 Property Workstream:
 - Rationalisation
 - Review of Management and Property
 - Review of Traded Services and Income Generation
 - £1.5 million savings
 - Driver for change in service delivery and management
 - Driver for change in the management of property
 - Potential positive impacts arising from disposals

- Strategic Objectives:
 - Decrease overall annual expenditure and increase overall annual property income, demonstrating VFM in all expenditure
 - Create integrated, seamless property management capable of being traded with external organisations
 - Create & manage a non-schools operational portfolio that meets the needs of 2020 North Yorkshire
 - Improve user satisfaction with property and its management
 - Use data, systems & technology to improve decision-making and delivery

- Design Principles:
 - Enhance Service Delivery and Management (through co-location)
 - More shared use of accommodation – links with new ways of working
 - Reduction in property utilised by the Council

- Work Undertaken to Date:
 - Data collection e.g. backlog maintenance requirement £23 million

- Next steps:
 - Work with directorates/services to review property on an area by area basis and around key projects

Jon Holden elaborated on the remit of the 2020 property workstream. He explained that the County Council had three separate property portfolios: schools & pupil referral units, the operational property portfolio and the non-operational property portfolio such as county council owned farms. The 2020 property workstream related to the operational portfolio.

The property rationalisation exercise would be fully integrated with directorates to look at what their service needs were now and in the future. There would be a greater emphasis on shared use of buildings. As a separate piece of work new

ways of working including different uses of ICT would be looked at. Significant changes to the operational property portfolio would not commence until accurate property data was assembled in one place in order to understand investment needs and other costs. The next steps were to engage with directorates to ascertain the impacts on property use-age including staff numbers and office locations. Reviews would be conducted on an area-by-area basis but with county-wide oversight.

Members made the following key comments:

- The Highways Department at Thirsk was a rented building and staffing reductions there now meant that there was a significant amount of unused space. The Member concerned questioned whether this was good value for money and asked if property allocation was looked at on an annual basis. Jon Holden said that the County Council rented property where it was good value to do so. In a given locality where there was over-capacity in some offices and under-utilisation in others the intention was to rationalise property. However the challenge was that in some cases such as highways the building space could not be readily used for other staffing purposes.
- Were audits carried out on the use-age of gas, electric and water in County Council buildings? Jon Holden confirmed that checks were made. However there was a balance to be had between savings in bills versus the cost of updating the equipment. When buildings were refurbished the appropriate efficiency measures were installed.
- Was the County Council looking at sharing premises with other public sector organisations? The example of Selby district was mentioned. Jon Holden said that this was the case and referred to the Better Together programme in Selby. The Member asking the question also suggested that there was space currently in the Selby Police Station buildings that potentially could be used by the County Council or other organisation.
- The Chairman suggested that a one-off task group meeting be held on 8 December in place of the mid-cycle briefing to discuss the issue of property planning and disposals. He suggested that the membership of the group should comprise five members of the Committee including the Chairman.

Resolved -

That County Councillors Val Arnold, Bernard Bateman, Derek Bastiman, Elizabeth Shields, Steve Shaw-Wright attend a one-off task group meeting on 8 December 2014 to discuss the issue of property disposals.

36. Workforce Update

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive - Business Support updating the Members on the County Council's changing workforce, presenting key workforce data and details of the Workforce Plan which takes the County Council workforce up to 2020.

Justine Brooksbank introduced the report. Referring to section 2 of the report she said that the County Council's non-schools workforce was inevitably getting

smaller and would continue to do so. Some staff in more frontline roles would be affected. Since 2010 there had been 180 restructures and a third of the workforce had been declared at risk of redundancy, some on multiple occasions. £4.3m had been spent on redundancy to date out of a budget contingency of £5m. Referring to the other workforce data set out in section 3 of the report Justine Brooksbank went on to note that recruitment continued especially for frontline posts. Sickness absence was low at an average of 6.5 days lost per year. Spend on pay continued to reduce. She went on to refer to section 4 of the report relating to supporting the workforce through change. Staff were facing another five years of change and needed support to maintain their personal resilience so that that they could continue to work effectively. A range of measures had been introduced to support staff resilience as listed in paragraph 4.1.

Justine Brooksbank went on to outline the 2020 Workforce Strategy summarised in section 5 of the report and attached at Appendix 1. The Strategy set out the Council's priorities for its staff across five areas: transforming the organisation; managing and developing talent; driving performance; engaging the workforce; and working together.

Executive Member County Councillor Carl Les mentioned that the Pending Issues Provision (PIP) had been used to cover redundancy costs corporately so that directorates did not have to cut back on their services to pay for the cost of redundancy.

Members made the following key comments:

- What actions were being undertaken to ensure that when redundancies were being made remaining staff were not overloaded with work? Justine Brooksbank explained that if it was the case that posts were being removed restructures took place to ensure that the service could adapt to changing requirements. It was inevitable that as the workforce contracted there would be an increased level of expectation for productivity and performance. As each service was restructured the new staff roles were clearly set out in the proposals with job descriptions. Post-implementation of a restructure review meetings were carried out with staff. She went on to refer to the supporting staff resilience measures set out in the report.
- The cost of recruitment and ways to reduce those costs. Justine Brooksbank replied that there were 250 vacancies a month with overlap between months. The staff advertising budget had fallen sharply over recent years due to adverts being placed online and almost all applicants applying on-line. Other costs related to the five posts in the recruitment service and management time spent during the interview process.
- Can we be assured that a consistent approach is being taken by all managers when dealing with potential redundancies? Justine Brooksbank said that the same approach was used by all managers. A restructuring and redeployment policy was followed. Managers used standard template letters and followed a set process. Human Resources staff worked in each directorate to provide support and advice, and UNISON, the trade union, was also involved in any restructures to scrutinise the process.
- Do we make any use of voluntary redundancy and if so how much of the total redundancy bill to date comprised voluntary as opposed to compulsory redundancies? Justine Brooksbank replied that there was no blanket policy regarding voluntary redundancy. All staff could ask for voluntary redundancy and each case was considered on its own merits. Justine Brooksbank undertook to provide more information to the

Committee on the proportion of voluntary redundancies in relation to the overall redundancy cost. In response to a supplementary question she confirmed that exit interviews were undertaken and the responses from exit interviews were collated. Exit interviews were not compulsory so did not provide a total picture as to the reasons why people were leaving their post.

Resolved -

That County Councillors Val Arnold, Derek Bastiman and Elizabeth Shields attend the Workforce Development Group on 3 December 2014 (alongside County Councillors John Blackburn and Tony Randerson) to discuss further the work to date on supporting staff resilience and to consider whether additional measures are required.

37. Council Plan 2014-2015 and 2020 North Yorkshire Plan

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Director - Policy and Partnerships informing Members of responses to the Council Plan consultation 2014 and consulting the Committee on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan.

Neil Irving introduced the report. He said that the purpose of the report was twofold: firstly to provide a progress on priority actions in the Council Plan 2014-15 and secondly to consult with Members on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. He referred to Appendix 2 setting out the progress on priorities for service delivery in 2014-15. He then referred to Appendix 1 setting out the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. The 2020 North Yorkshire Plan set out the Council's broad priorities over the next five years but would be updated following the County Council election in 2017.

Neil Irving went on to detail the results of the public consultation on the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. Referring to section 3 of the report he detailed the results of the online consultation on the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. The vast majority had given a positive response.

The proposed priorities set out in Appendix 1 were areas where the County Council was intending to provide additional focus and resources. It did not mean that these areas would be provided with additional investment but were areas where the County Council needed to show leadership.

The report was being taken to all the overview and scrutiny committees to invite Members to comment on the proposed priorities to establish if they were the right priorities and which aspects were the most important given that the County Council had got a reduced level of resources.

Members made the following key comments:

- The need to include tourism in the 'Economic opportunity for all parts of the county' priority. Neil Irving confirmed that this would be the case.
- The difficulty in achieving the 'Opportunities for young people' priority in light of service reductions in youth services and bus services in the county. Neil Irving replied that communities that wished to address specific priorities outside of county council run services would be supported to

introduce other imaginative ways to meet the same aim. An example was volunteer car scheme provision in relation to meeting some local transport needs.

- Concern that public health had not been included as a priority area. Neil Irving replied that the proposed priorities were areas where the County Council needed to provide additional focus and leadership. It did not mean that other areas were not important.
- The need for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan to link in with the work of the district councils particularly with regards to one-stop shops.
- The importance of continuing to provide apprenticeships for young people.
- Were all infant pupils in state primary schools in the county now receiving a free hot meal in accordance with the government's Universal Infant Free School Meals policy? If this was not the case what measures would be undertaken to fully implement this policy? Neil Irving undertook to provide information to the Committee on the current position.
- Road blockages during the Grand Depart North Yorkshire stage of the Tour de France, causing disruption to some businesses. What measures were being taken ahead of the Tour de Yorkshire event in 2015 to minimise disruption? Neil Irving replied that the 2015 event would be significantly smaller in scale and there would be a rolling road block to reduce disruption.

Resolved -

- (a) That the responses received to the consultation and implications for the vision, objectives and values of 2020 North Yorkshire be noted.
- (b) That comments on progress against the priorities in the current Council Plan 2014-15 be noted.
- (c) That comments on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan be noted.

38. Task Group Report on Criteria for Categorising Libraries

Considered -

The report of County Councillor Derek Bastiman relating to the work of the task group on the criteria for categorising libraries.

The Chairman recorded his thanks to those Members of the Committee who had attended the task group workshop. He said that the purpose of the workshop had been to seek reassurance that any decisions taken around libraries in the future would be based on sound evidence. Officers had detailed the criteria that they were intending to use as a guide for how future library services might be provided in the future. Members on the task group had suggested that in addition to these, areas to be put forward for closer consideration by officers should be 'accessibility' (transport, use of Section 106 agreement monies/and broadband availability) and future residential developments. The task group felt that any future review of libraries should not just be about closing or transferring libraries but also establishing if they are in the right place.

Members made the following comments

- Greater use should be made of community buildings to house libraries.
- A Member referred to paragraph 5.1.1 questioning why the numbers of people that visit a town should be included as a criterion. Julie Blaisdale said that the library service had found that people used libraries for a variety of purposes. Taking Barlby Library as an example she noted that it acted as a community hub for a range of activities, for example applications for bus passes/blue badge. Mary Weastell added that the criteria would factor in use-age locally. Income generation was important however. Visitors could help generate income, for example by requesting information leaflets about the area - town guides and so on. There were a number of factors to take into account – essential criteria, key principles and other factors - when deciding the future of a library.

Resolved -

That the findings of the Working Group be noted.

39. Work Programme

The future work programme of the Committee was discussed and the items listed within it agreed without amendment.

Resolved –

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm
JS