

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 19 January 2015 at 10.30 am.

### Present:-

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair

County Councillors Val Arnold, John Blackburn, Jean Butterfield, Sam Cross, John Ennis, Andrew Lee, Stuart Parsons, Tony Randerson, Steve Shaw-Wright and Tim Swales

### Also in Attendance

County Councillor Carl Les (Executive Member)

Officers: Robert Ling, Assistant Director (Technology & Change), Helen Edwards, Head of Communications, Stuart Langston, Shared Head of Health and Safety, Fiona Sowerby, Corporate Risk and Insurance Manager and Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer

Present by Invitation: Joanne Atkin, Area Manager Public Protection, National Probation Service

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### Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

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#### 40. Minutes

##### Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2014, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### 41. Public Questions or Statements

There were no public questions or statements.

#### 42. 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.

Key issues included:

- The financial settlement for 2015/16 was largely as expected.
- The Stronger Communities team was now in place and working on mapping their areas, and attending all Area Committee meetings.
- The first meeting of the County wide Community Safety Partnership had been held in October. Mary Weastell, in her capacity of Chief Executive of Selby District Council, had been appointed as Chair.

Future issues included:

- The partnership with the local newspaper group Johnston Press was due to be reviewed. Since the partnership started in February 2012, the Council had been including one page of information in six local papers each month, at a total cost of approximately £2500. The exact cost was linked to the level of public notices that the Council placed. This partnership was set up as a way of ensuring that residents were kept up to date with important Council information following the cancellation of the monthly Council newspaper NYTimes. The partnership has been kept under review and would be looked at again towards the end of the financial year. Executive County Councillor Carl Les said that he was conscious of the savings requirements for the Council, and was considering whether to continue with the partnership. He was minded to do so as it was innovative and cost effective. The Department for Communities & Local Government had just asked for volunteer councils to come forward for trials on piloting how councils and newspapers could work together to modernise public notices and their publication. He would be looking at whether the Council's work with Johnston Press could become one of those.

Members made the following key comments:

- The current partnership with Johnston Press provided good value for money and should be continued.

**Resolved -**

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the Committee recommends the continuation of the County Council's partnership with Johnston Press.

#### **43. Overview of 2020 North Yorkshire Cross-Cutting Themes**

Considered -

A report and presentation provided by Robert Ling, Assistant Director (Technology and Change) sharing progress of the 2020 programme, managing the programme and the current position of the cross-cutting themes.

The presentation outlined:

- The financial summary of total programme
- Managing the programme
- Project Management Office: Role & Responsibilities
- End Stage Review
  
- Cross cutting themes:
  - Customer – key activities to date and challenges
  - Stronger Communities – key activities to date and challenges
  - Organisational Development – key activities to date and challenges
  - Alternative Delivery Models and Commercial
  - Property – key activities to date and challenges

Robert Ling elaborated on the 2020 cross-cutting themes. He noted that the purpose of the Customer theme was to standardise, simplify and further reduce costs. The current focus was on working with the HAS directorate around the requirements of the Care Act 2014 and the Better Together programme in Selby. Technological changes would be part of the customer theme including greater

use of the internet by customers to 'self-serve'. Digital improvements were not without costs however. The challenge was how to decrease costs of providing customer services whilst working towards achieving customer excellence.

The Stronger Communities theme was a key plank of the 2020 programme. A Head of Stronger Communities and 7 Delivery Managers covering each of the districts were now in place. The current focus was on the library consultation. The team was currently mapping the impact of service changes by geographical area. The big challenge was to understand the cumulative impact of service changes – for example reducing the number of Childrens' Centres at the same time as reducing bus services. There would be no standard approach across the county as communities needed to be allowed to develop something that was right for the area.

The Organisational Development theme was about the County Council becoming a smaller, more innovative Council. A key part of this was ensuring that the County Council employed the right people with the right skills required to move the Council forward. A series of pilots were underway.

The Alternative Delivery Model and Commercial theme was originally two separate workstreams. However it had become apparent that they were one and same. One of the challenges was to understand the long term viability of these models before proceeding.

The Property theme involved greater use of shared accommodation to link in with new ways of working and reducing the amount of property overall. The challenge was to align property requirements with service changes.

Members made the following key comments:

- A Member queried the ways in which customer experience could be improved whilst reducing the costs of service delivery. Robert Ling replied that one of the ways of doing this was to know the customer better so that the individual did not have to provide information from scratch every time they contacted the County Council. By reducing multiple systems, costs could be reduced.
- The need to take into account the impact that budget cuts in one directorate had upon others. There was also a need to look at the impact that County Council cuts had upon other organisations such as the health service. Instead of taking a silo approach our service planning should be aligned with those of our partners. Robert Ling acknowledged that there were no easy answers when each organisation was under budget pressures. He acknowledged the interdependency of public sector providers, noting the recent increase in A&E waiting times due to bed blocking issues and the impact that this then had upon social care provision. He highlighted the increasing links that were being made between the County Council and the health sector such as through the reablement programme. The Health & Wellbeing Board was also bringing health professionals together. The County Council was also working with some district councils in North Yorkshire on shared services provision.
- Clarity was needed on when the Stronger Communities grant scheme would be up and running, what its precise use would be and the amount available for each scheme.
- Within the authority each director was focusing on their own individual projects so how was progress being tracked to ensure that the savings programme as a whole remained on target? What measures were taken

when there was slippage in the timescales and savings for each project? Robert Ling explained that the different savings programmes in each directorate were being tracked centrally and he went on to explain the governance structure in place including the NY Operations Group and the Programme Board. If there were delays with a project achieving its savings target the Programme Board determined how the savings would be picked up. This would either be from within the same directorate or from elsewhere in the organisation.

- There could be no one size fits all solution across the county to community involvement in the running of services. Each district had its own problems and solutions. Robert Ling confirmed that Stronger Communities in each district would focus on a project by project basis tailored to meet the needs of local communities. He went on to mention about the business intelligence gathering exercise that was being undertaken.

#### **Resolved -**

That the report and presentation be noted.

#### **44. Transforming Rehabilitation - Changes to the Probation Service**

##### **Considered -**

The report of the Area Manager Public Protection, National Probation Service, updating the Committee of the changes to delivery of probation services under the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation agenda.

Joanne Atkin referred to section 2 of the report explaining the background to the changes brought about by the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation agenda, including the introduction of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the creation of the National Probation Service. Purple Futures had won the contract to provide the CRC for Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. She referred to the Appendices 1 and 2 of the report showing the divisional areas for the National Probation Service and the geographical areas of each of the CRCs.

Joanne Atkin mentioned about what the changes would mean in practice. She commented that the National Probation Service remained committed to delivering the highest standards of work and its priorities remained the same. In York and North Yorkshire the Probation Service benefitted from having experts in assessing and managing offender behaviour. Although it had been a busy transition period with lots of new operating procedures to put in place staff were working hard to maintain business as usual.

Joanne Atkin went on to refer to section 4 of the report explaining about the requirements of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014.

Members made the following key comments:

- It was imperative to ensure that very good lines of communication and co-operation would be established between the Probation Service and the CRC in the county if re-offending rates were to be driven down. Of concern from a training and qualification point of view was that CRCs were not required to employ qualified staff. Would a training regime be put in place to mitigate risks? Joanne Atkin replied that all of the companies that had bid for the CRC contracts had been required to include staff development in their submissions. Furthermore in North Yorkshire a number of staff from the

previous Probation Trust had been transferred over to the CRC. There would also be the possibility of other staff in the Probation Service having placements in the CRC. The Probation Service and Purple Futures would be delivering joint training on aspects such as Child Protection. Despite the challenge of the organisational changes and the disruption caused the nature of the work and key priorities remained the same. Some opportunities had arisen by the re-organisation in that the increased geographical coverage of the Probation Service in this area meant that it was easier to deal with offenders on a cross-county basis.

- A Member commented that as a union representative he had been aware of a number of stress-related cases of absence in the Probation Service in the past. He went on to ask what processes had been put in place to support staff in carrying out their duties through this time of change. Joanne Atkin acknowledged that it had been a challenging year with the introduction of new processes. The Probation Service locally had a good staff development structure which would remain. There was also a supportive leadership team in place working closely together to pool resources.
- It was noted that the impact on reoffending rates brought about by the changes would not be known for at least two years. The suggestion was made for a future Secretary of State for Justice to be invited to comment on the impact of the changes in North Yorkshire, particularly if there was not a positive impact on re-offending rates. Disappointment was expressed that a representative from Purple Futures had not been available to attend today's meeting.

#### **Resolved -**

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That a representative from the National Probation Service and a representative from Purple Futures be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee in 2016 to provide a progress report on their joint working arrangements.

#### **45. Position Statement and Performance Report: Health and Safety and Insurance**

##### **Considered -**

The report of the Corporate Director - Strategic Resources providing the Committee with an update on the position statement, updating the Committee on the Council's Health and Safety function, including the most recently available performance data and providing an overview of insurance claims experience over recent years and an analysis of the pattern and costs of Public Liability claims over the last ten years.

Stuart Langston provided an overview of the health and safety section of the report. With reference to Section 3 of the report he referred to recent health and safety developments at the County Council including the co-ordination of H&S planning and reporting processes. There had also been an on-going programme of reviewing directorate health and safety procedures. Continued assistance was provided to directorates and schools to implement the findings of legionella risk assessments and other relevant audits.

With reference to section 4 of the report Stuart Langston referred to the developments in the management of health and safety. A review of the County  
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Council's approach to health and safety and the health and safety risk management function was carried out in 2014. The main purpose of this review to evaluate how well the County Council performed against legislative standards and best practice. Arising from this review the County Council had now entered into an agreement with City of York to employ a Shared Head of Health and Safety overseeing health and safety at both Councils. This would have mutual benefits for both councils by sharing best practice and working more efficiently. The findings of the review had been used to develop an improvement action plan.

Stuart Langston went on to refer to Section 5 of the report relating to health and safety performance data. He reported on the reductions in serious employee reportable accidents from 2006/07 to 2013/14. There had been a slight increase in accidents in schools.

Fiona Sowerby provided an overview of the insurance section of the report, providing a position statement as at 30 September 2014.

Referring to section 7 of the report and Appendix B she provided a summary of the motor claims experience for each Directorate over the last three years.

Fiona Sowerby went on to refer to sections 8, 9 and 10 of the report and Appendices C and D relating to general liability claims experience, employers liability and public liability. As public liability claims are the greatest cost to the County Council she highlighted the further analysis provided in Appendix D.

Referring to section 11 of the report, Appendix D and Appendix E she highlighted that the figures for Business and Environmental Services remained the highest for the County Council in relation to public liability claims. One of the most common causes of claims is due to the surface condition of the highway such as potholes. The increase in the number of claims received were linked to the weather conditions during the three winters of 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2012/13. However the County Council has a strong record in repudiating public liability claims. The current repudiation rate for pothole/road surface claims was approximately 84% for each insurance year up to insurance year 2012/13. The defence of these claims was supported by various actions taken by officers in Business and Environmental Services, as set out in paragraph 11.12 of the report.

Fiona Sowerby referred to section 12 of the report relating to the recent tender exercise for the County Council's liability insurance. The latest premium was higher due to the increase in public liability claims across all local authorities. The insurance provider had been changed and the individual excess level had been increased from £100k to £250k.

Members made the following key comments:

- A Member queried why the 'fee for intervention' referred to in paragraph 5.9 of the report not been recharged to schools and what was the cost? Stuart Langston replied that it related to issues at some schools. As the schools were community schools the employer is County Council and as such the council is liable for the cost. However this had been taken up with the schools and a reminder sent to all schools.. The fee for intervention was about £160.
  - The decrease in reportable accidents/incidents amongst employees was pleasing to note however account needed to be taken of the fact that a number of services had been contracted out and so did not reflect in these figures.
  - A Member commented on an incident relating to a primary school in his
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division in Selby district. Asbestos had been uncovered in the school building, which had then resulted in the school's closure on 13 and 14 October 2014 to allow for investigations to be completed. He asked why the County Council had not communicated the reason for the school's closure to parents when it happened. Stuart Langston replied that colleagues from the County Council had attended a meeting for parents and carers on 14 October to provide information and advice about the incident. A press release had gone out the Monday following the incident stating why the school had been closed. He acknowledged however that the timeliness of communications could always be improved and to this end would be working with the Council's Communications Unit. The Member concerned went on to ask what if any action would be taken against the first contractor for allegedly not reporting the discovery of asbestos. Stuart Langston said that he would report back on this after the meeting.

- A Member queried if the County Council was getting value for money by paying such a large premium for £250k excess. She asked if consideration had been given to covering large claims only. Fiona Sowerby said that the local authority had looked at what was the most cost-effective level of excess based on the claims record. When the Council had undertaken its insurance tender exercise it had invited quotations based on excess thresholds of £100k, £250k and £500k. A £250k level of excess had proved to be the most cost-effective.

**Resolved -**

- (a) That the Health and Safety performance in 2013/14 be noted.
- (b) That the areas where further efforts should be made to improve the Health and Safety performance of the County Council be noted.
- (c) That the information provided in relation to insurance claims be noted and that any further action be taken as required.

**46. Work Programme**

The future work programme of the Committee was discussed.

**Resolved –**

That the items listed within the future Work Programme schedule be agreed without amendment.

The meeting concluded at 12.20pm