

## North Yorkshire County Council

### Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 16 November 2015 at 10.30 am.

**Present:-**

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair.

County Councillors: Val Arnold, Bernard Bateman MBE, John Blackburn, Jean Butterfield, Sam Cross, Bryn Griffiths, Cliff Lunn, Robert Packham (as substitute for Tony Randerson), Stuart Parsons, John Ritchie (as substitute for Steve Shaw-Wright) and Tim Swales.

**Also in Attendance**

County Councillors: Chris Metcalfe (Executive Member), Carl Les (Leader of the Council), David Chance (Executive member).

Officers: Mary Weastell, Assistant Chief Executive (Central Services), Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director (Library, Customer and Community Services), Sarah Foley, Customer Services Centre Manager, Marie-Ann Jackson, Head of Stronger Communities Programme, Neil White, Corporate Development Officer.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors: Steve Shaw-Wright and Tony Randerson.

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

**63. Minutes**

**Resolved that** – the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2015, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**64. Public Questions or Statements**

There were no public questions or statements received.

**65. Executive Member Update**

County Councillor Metcalfe advised that his portfolio covered Library Registration and Archives, Economic Development, Rail and Transport, Trading Standards, Planning Policy and Waste Services.

Councillor Metcalfe commented that there he was involved in a number of partnerships in his role which included the effective Transport for the North which was working to get increased investment into the county. He was keen to develop relationships between the County Council and the District/ Borough Councils to explore co-location and co working opportunities as have been so successfully developed with Selby District Council.

**66. Reconfiguration of the Library Services**

The Committee considered the report from Mary Weastell, Assistant Chief Executive

(Central Services) and Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director, Library, Customer and Community Services which reminded the committee that in July 2015, the Executive had agreed to the proposed reconfiguration of libraries, into seven core, five hybrid and a further twenty one community managed libraries, with the reconfiguration due to come into effect in the Spring of 2017.

Mary Weastell advised that the Executive had also agreed to receive a further report on the progress made with the community groups, highlighting areas of potential risk which was to be considered at its meeting on 8 December 2015. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were being asked to consider the report and pass on any appropriate comments to the Executive.

The Committee noted that this was an extremely challenging programme of change and the Library service together with a representative from Stronger Communities had met with the majority of the councillors with a prospective Community Library in their area as well as most councillors with a Hybrid library.

The officers had also been having meetings with prospective groups, as well as Parish and Town Councils in order to explore different options and to help the groups to understand what they will need to do.

Mary Weastell commented that in the four months since the Executive made its decision, a considerable amount of work has been undertaken in the different communities. Across the County there have been 38 meetings with local groups/town and parish councils and 31 Volunteer Information sessions.

Appendix 2 to the report contained details of the work that had been done and an analysis of progress for each prospective community library, including a current RAG (Red, Amber, and Green) rating. The ratings had been based on whether a group had come forward; whether that group had submitted an expression of interest; whether there is volunteer capacity and whether there is support from the local parish/town council. The ratings were those at the beginning of November 2015 and would change as the individual discussions around each library continued.

The Committee considered the RAG status for each of the Libraries and noted that the intention was to apply the council's resources proportionately to the RAG status of the Libraries with the most resources being focused to those Libraries that had a red RAG status. The Council did not want any of these Libraries to fail and would explore all viable options with the local community to seek an appropriate solution.

The Committee further noted that of those Libraries that were marked as being green it was expected that progress could be made relatively swiftly with the library at Pateley Bridge, having already transferred to community management and is now operated by Nidderdale Plus, in their new premises with the support of volunteers and some dedicated library staffing. There may be some scope for the other libraries to transfer to community management prior to 2017.

The seven amber rated libraries have either an established group in place or have made some progress towards establishing a group and identifying volunteers, but require further support to progress further. In addition to the above, four of the hybrids are currently rated amber on this basis.

Of those marked red, the unique civilian-military community of the Catterick garrison, means that for a community-managed library to succeed all possible routes to sustainability must be considered, including joint proposals across Richmond-Colburn-Catterick. It was noted that for this work to succeed it would require a significant focus by officers over a number of months. However, the local County Councillors were working well together which could significantly help this process along.

In respect of Kirbymoorside Library, this too would require some focused work over a number of months, particularly to resolve the issue of funding the current premises for the community library.

The Committee noted that in respect of Stokesley Library, the Parish Council was potentially considering raising the Parish precept to enable additional support to be given to the community library.

The Committee further noted that there was still some way to go in respect of the other Libraries that were marked as red – Crosshills, Settle, Thirsk and the hybrid library at Pickering and it was hoped that progress may be a little quicker with these libraries to reach a solution.

The Committee welcomed the report and agreed that it would like to be kept informed of the progress being made through an updated Library RAG status list being submitted to the Committee's meeting on 18 January 2016 and a further update report on the library reconfiguration programme of work be submitted to the Committee's meeting on 18 April 2016.

The Committee expressed its thanks to the Library staff for their level of commitment during such a difficult period of change and would like them to know how much it is appreciated.

**Resolved that – (A) the update report on the library reconfiguration programme of work be noted as it currently stands,**

**(B) a updated Library RAG status list be submitted to the Committee's meeting on 18 January 2016, and**

**(C) a further update report on the library reconfiguration programme of work be submitted to the Committee's meeting on 18 April 2016.**

## **67. Customer Strategy**

Mary Weastell, Assistant Chief Executive (Central Services) and Sarah Foley Customer Services Centre Manager gave a presentation on the council's customer strategy.

Mary Weastell advised that the vision for the strategy was that in five years' time the way in which the Council transacted with its customers would be increasingly on-line. The aim was to have 70% of customer contact managed by digital self-service channels with the remainder supported through "assisted digital" channels.

The Committee noted that assisted digital was support for people who can't use or access online services on their own. The support can be someone guiding a user through the digital service, entering a user's information into the digital service on their behalf or providing a location where people can access the equipment and connectivity to get on-line.

Mary Weastell added that the customer strategy aimed to put the customer at the heart of the design and delivery of the Council's services and in doing so would enable the council to achieve the savings of £33 million detailed within the 2020 programme.

Sarah Foley advised that this could be achieved, in part, via an improved customer experience through consistency of services and re-use, supporting customers to be self-reliant so that they could use cheaper means of contact and through a marketing campaign aimed at changing customer and staff behavior.

Sarah Foley added that it was intended for there to be a clear customer engagement in the service design process with a full customer involvement during the testing stage for service changes. Furthermore, priority resources would be given to those projects where benefits delivered from the use of customer components was clear.

Sarah Foley considered that there was a role for the councillors in helping to communicate the customer vision with customers; supporting the consultation on the customer strategy and being ambassadors for the customer theme. It was also intended to create a Customer Members Support Group and Councillors Bateman, Blackburn, Lunn, Parsons and Swales expressed an interest to be part of this group.

The Committee commented that currently 70% of all contact to the council was by phone and that a change to get to 70% online would require quite a bit of work particularly for those older people who do not go online or are unable to get online. It agreed that it would like an update as the strategy developed on the changes in channel switching.

**Resolved - that an update report on the development of the council's customer strategy be given to a future meeting of the committee.**

#### **68. Work Programme**

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Team Leader inviting comments from Members on the content of the Committee's programme of work scheduled for future meetings.

**Resolved - that the content of the work programme report and schedule be agreed.**

The meeting concluded at 12:45pm