

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 2 September 2019 at 10.00am at County Hall, Northallerton.

Present:-

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair

County Councillors Val Arnold, Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Goodrick, Bryn Griffiths, Richard Musgrave, Andy Paraskos, Tony Randerson, Angus Thompson, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

Also in Attendance County Councillor Geoff Webber.

North Yorkshire County Council Officers: Ray Busby (Principal Scrutiny Officer, Gary Fielding (Corporate Director Strategic Resources), Marie Ann Freed (Head of Stronger Communities Programme, Policy Partnerships and Communities (CSD)) Deborah Hugill (Senior Strategy and Performance Officer), Michael Leah (Assistant Director Strategic Resources), Keeley Metcalfe (Senior HR Advisor), Vicky Metheringham (Head of Service West (LAC, Leaving care and YJS), Children and Families) and Steve Walker (YJS Planning & Development Officer, Children and Families)

Apologies for Absence were received from Stuart Parsons

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

97. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2019 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

98. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

99. Public Questions or Statements

The committee was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

100. Corporate Volunteer Project Update

Considered

Report providing Members with an update on the Corporate Volunteering Project and outlining progress made to date.

Item 1

Marie-Ann Freed introduced the report. She suggested that the adoption of the strategy by the Executive represented a milestone for the Authority. The review report highlighted the work undertaken to date to meet the strategy's objectives.

Some particular points of note were the adoption of a clearer procedure for volunteers to claim expenses. In response to Members to questions she confirmed that the rate payable was comparable to those for NYCC staff.

The adoption of an ID badge scheme, with a unique volunteer logo, was not only for practical, security purposes but it was also symbolic: the branding emphasised the esteem with which the Authority viewed the volunteer contribution.

Marie-Ann confirmed that volunteers were given the opportunity of maintaining and retaining a record of their involvement with services which amounted to a form of Curriculum Vitae - especially valuable for younger volunteers in terms of their future career options. This centralised record would come to be seen as a sort of "a voluntary passport", essentially a certificate which ensured that the contribution made and skills acquired could be recognised by all service departments.

Resolved –

That the update report be noted and the progress made towards meeting the aims of the Corporate Volunteer Project be welcomed

101. Equality and Diversity (including progress on objectives 2016 – 2020)

Considered –

A report updating Members on equality work in the County Council including progress on equality objectives agreed for the period 2016-2020.

Deborah Hugill introduced the report. She explained the County Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010 regarding under equalities and diversity.

She highlighted the results of a light touch self-assessment by the Corporate Equality Group, against the Equality Framework for Local Government last year. Two main improvement areas had been identified: leadership and vision; and governance of the equality impact assessment (EIA) process.

Management Board had been pleased with the update of the report for two reasons - it makes solid business sense in terms of recruitment and retention ensuring that the Authority is attracting the most diverse workforce, and, secondly, it ensures that the Authority is a forward-thinking employer and service provider which values innovation and is responsive to its communities.

One of the major successes has been the efforts made to embed the compilation and use of Equality Impact Assessments. A work-flow solution had been deployed, making the process not just clearer but also facilitating better collation and presentation of data and information.

Members complimented the progress achieved. They also endorsed the primary role of the Scrutiny Committees in terms of ensuring and maintaining the Authority has a record in respect of equality and diversity to be proud of.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

102. Response to Notice of Motion**Considered**

Report presenting information on Brierley Homes in response to a Notice of Motion at Full Council in July 2019. This information has been provided to enable the Committee to consider the proposal made and draft a response for the Executive's consideration.

County Councillor Geoff Webber addressed the committee in support of his motion.

The Government acknowledges that housing is a priority at both national and local level, recognising that it is a key driver for other strategic ambitions such as growth, education, health and for stronger communities. Britain faces a housing crisis; there is a shortage of affordable homes in many areas, particularly social homes for rent.

Everyone deserves a safe, secure, and affordable place to call home. Quoting from a recent shelter report, adequate social housing provision contributes to the wellbeing of both parents and children. Studies show that children in stable housing do better in school and are less likely to experience disruption in their education due to unwanted moves. Housing also is important to the economic vitality of communities.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths added that social housing and affordable homes can attract and retain employees to our communities, and support the local workforce so they can live close to their jobs. A healthy mix of housing options ensures opportunities for all individuals to improve their economic situation and to contribute to their communities.

Proper provision of social housing is, therefore, at the heart of what we, as a local authority, are trying to achieve in terms of the welfare of the population we serve. While housing is a responsibility of district councils, a lack of council houses impacts on a number of county council responsibilities, such as education, public health and social services.

County Councillor Geoff Webber concluded by saying that the county council shares a common purpose with all local authorities and housing associations to find ways to stimulate and support social housing initiatives. What is stopping us is a lack of political will. Adopting the motion in order that the county council pursues the course of action proposed would ensure that we are doing our bit.

Michael Leah reiterated the advice in his report.

The substance of the motion and the implications of adopting it were deliberated upon at great length.

Members expressed concern at the likely effect of adopting the motion on the business operation of Brierley Homes and the Brierley Group. They referred to the intention for any profit generated to be initially reinvested into the business to allow it to grow, and any future dividend distributions are to be used to subsidise Council business therefore partially offsetting the need to reduce frontline services.

It was also recognised that the business is still in early stages of its own development. Were any profit be used in the manner advocated in the motion, this may disrupt the company's capacity to grow in-line with its approved business plan.

Resolved –

For the following two main reasons, members concluded (by majority vote) that the Executive be advised that the Committee does not support the motion.

- a) Members acknowledged the laudable intentions underpinning the motion - that of improving the availability of housing bearing in mind its key role in promoting health and opportunity. Local government is at the heart of the housing solution. And, like all local authorities, the county council has a role to play in promoting housing activity - across all tenures - and ensuring delivery to meet the housing market needs of their local population. But the county council does not have a statutory duty for housing. In a two tier area the responsibility in relation to the provision of social housing remains with district and borough authorities. Any intervention into this arena must not prejudice the council's interests.
- b) Members were mindful of committing Brierley Homes, so early in its business plan and development, to a course of action the effect of which would be to restrict and most likely impair the Group's ability to achieve its primary objectives.

103. Brierley Group Annual Report for 2018/19

Considered -

The Committee considered the Annual Report of the Brierley Group for 2018/19.

Michael Leah drew attention to the successes achieved so far as listed in the report.

In response to a questions, Gary Fielding explained that the £8m loan from the Authority to the Group had been set at commercial rates.

Some Councillors were unconvinced that the "good year" the report appeared to be representing was a realistic impression to give. Quoting examples from the corporate, commercial world a number of Members posited that without strong leadership and governance the recorded £1.6m profit could potentially change to a loss making position – especially bearing in mind the spread of services the Brierley Group was responsible for, and the variable financial position of those component companies.

Members emphasised that the governance arrangements and the accountability of the Brierley Group to the rest of the Council and Scrutiny in particular ought to be a matter of interest to this scrutiny committee.

Resolved -

- a) The Annual Report of the Brierley Group be received.
- b) The Committee schedule in its Work Programme a report on the Brierley Group's governance arrangements.
- c) The committee is looking for reassurance that there is sufficient challenge and scrutiny no just written into the arrangements but evidenced by practice.
- d) The committee would want to consider what might be its role in this accountability relationship.
- e) The timing of such a report be subject to discussions between the Chairman, Group Spokespersons and officers supporting the Brierley Group. It was likely that the optimum time for this would be when the Group is looking at performance towards the end of the financial year, and refining its objectives for the next.

104. Annual Update on Implementation of Youth Justice Strategic Plan**Considered -**

Steve Walker introduced a presentation on implementing progress against the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2018-20. This outlined structural changes in the Youth Justice Services and practice changes, the principle benefit of which was making space and time for staff to do more work with children, young people, their families and carers.

Members noted that feedback from parents and carers was suggesting they felt more positively supported by their Youth Justice Service Worker.

Members Asked about Skill Mill. Steve explained that this is an access to employment project for young people aged 16-18 in the Scarborough area. It supports young people who have missed out on normal opportunities because of previous difficulties in their lives, by giving them a first experience of paid employment by undertaking a wide variety of unskilled labour tasks, for a very competitive daily rate.

Members suggested that information about the scheme should be made more widely available to councillors in order that they could promote its benefits. It might be that some councillors would consider it an appropriate use of their localities grant. Steve agreed to circulate the information to Members more widely.

Resolved –

That the report be received.

105. Work Programme

The report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Draft Work Programme for 2019/20 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

Resolved -

- a) That the report be received.
- b) The subject of the earlier discussion on the accountability relationship and governance of the Brierley Group be added to the Committee's Work Programme