

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 2 December 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, Yvonne Peacock, Tony Randerson, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

North Yorkshire County Council Officers: Robert Ling (Assistant Director Technology & Change); Sarah Foley (Customer Services Centre Manager); Karen Iveson (Assistant Director Strategic Resources); Odette Robson (Head of Safer Communities); Jon Holden (Head of Property Services); Vicki Dixon (Head of Finance); Gary Fielding (Corporate Director Strategic Resources); Steve Evans (Head of Strategy & Performance); Louise Rideout (Senior Strategy & Performance Officer) and Melanie Carr (Principal Democratic Services & Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies for Absence were received from County Councillor Angus Thompson and Dr Justin Ives (Chair of the Community Safety Partnership)

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

106. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2019 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

107. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

108. 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.

109. Attendance of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner

The Chair informed Committee members that he had taken the decision in consultation with the Leader to defer the attendance of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner until after the purdah period.

Resolved –

That the attendance of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner be deferred to the next formal meeting of the Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee in March 2020.

110. Update on the Operation of the Customer Portal

Considered –

A presentation on the use of the customer portal and the ongoing work to encourage a channel shift to online services.

Robert Ling (Assistant Director Technology & Change) provided an in depth presentation on the Customer Portal, providing up to date statistics on the numbers of customers now using the County Council's online services. He also provided information on the methods used to support and encourage that channel shift and the ongoing work to identify reasons why some residents were still choosing to contact Customer Services by telephone. In particular, he highlighted:

- The growing focus on the lack of skills of those who have online access but are unable to use it.
- The recent introduction of a new Commercial Vehicle Permit online service
- An ongoing campaign working with NYCC's communication team, to inform residents of the delay in street lights adjusting to the clock change, in an effort to reduce the number of related calls received.
- The ongoing work to monitor issues with webpages and links to services in order to identify where improvements were required
- The number of frontline calls was lower than last year but the average call handling time was going up, in line with the more complex nature of the enquiries being dealt with over the phone
- Work was ongoing to replace pdf forms with online forms
- HAS related call handling times were reducing as staff became more knowledgeable about the questions likely to be asked
- Understanding why calls were deflected was helpful
- New online services to come included, booking a wedding service and reporting of PROW related issues

In regards to arranging an appointment with the nearest available registrar to register a death, Members discussed ways of promoting the online facility, recognising it was a difficult time for residents. Members suggested promotion through Hospitals, Funeral Directors, Doctors Surgeries, and Solicitors. County Councillor Andy Paraskos, Older People's Champion agreed it could also be promoted through 'Dying Cafes' and Care Homes.

Robert Ling stressed that for those who do not want to access services online for whatever reason, there would always be a telephone service available.

Finally, Sarah Foley confirmed that the delivery of customer services was being reviewed and refined all the time based on customer feedback.

Resolved – That:

- i. The report be noted
- ii. A further update be provided in 12 months' time

111. Year 2 Review of NYCC's Alternative Investments**Considered**

An update on progress with the delivery of the County Council's alternative investment framework.

Karen Iveson, Assistant Director for Strategic Resources introduced the report which provided background to the introduction of the framework in 2017, and an update on activity during its second year of implementation.

The report highlighted the categories under which opportunities for investment fell, the limit set on the sums for investment and the targets set on returns so that appropriate assessment of the risks and rewards could take place.

It was noted that unlike other local authorities, North Yorkshire County Council had chosen not to borrow to invest and had instead chosen to invest its cash balances, resulting in estimated annual revenue savings/income of £2.5m.

In regard to commercial property, Members noted the ongoing work to identify an appropriate tenant for the County Council's vacant unit at Harrogate Royal Baths, and the work underway to understand the potential for investment in a solar farm. They agreed that as it fitted with the County Council's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, the opportunity for a solar farm should not be missed.

Gary Fielding suggested it was a good example of where an investment option might be considered on the basis of it being a policy issue even though there may not be a strong business case for pursuing it.

Karen Iveson confirmed the County Council had previously considered the option 3 / 4 years before but it had not proved viable. However, it might prove viable now based on a reduction in the cost of delivery, but it would require identification of the right type of land in the right location. County Councillor Derek Bastiman requested an update report on the solar farm option in the near future.

In regard to housing loans, County Councillor Yvonne Peacock asked what more could be done to encourage Social Landlords to take up the available funding, and it was confirmed that Housing Associations were awash with funding and therefore not interested in the scale of funding the County Council was able to offer.

County Councillor queried whether the loans to NYCC companies were delivering the right returns and it was confirmed that the agreed high level decision framework had been applied in each case.

Finally, Karen Iveson confirmed it was not possible to benchmark NYCC's commercial investments against other Local Authorities, as others had borrowed to invest whereas NYCC had not.

Resolved – That:

- The progress to date be noted
- An update on the Solar Farm option be provided in due course.

112. Bi-annual Update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership**Considered -**

A presentation on the work of the Community Safety Partnership during the last six months, detailing the first Domestic Homicide Review undertaken by the county wide CSP.

Odette Robson, Head of Safer Communities provided an overview of the national picture relating to domestic abuse and domestic homicide and gave an insight into the statistics provided

It was noted that some statistics associated with Domestic Homicide were often forgotten e.g. 25% of the victims were men, and that whilst public awareness of knife crime was rising, the national awareness of the links between domestic homicides and knife crime appeared low.

In regard to intimate partner homicides, Members noted the themes coming out of the national data, and the link to mental health. Members questioned whether there were appropriate resources available to address that key cause and it was confirmed the Health & Wellbeing Board were the appropriate body to investigate that link.

Odette Robson confirmed that NYCC commissioned IDAS to provide community based Domestic Abuse Services for victims. She went on to detail the recent Domestic Homicide Review undertaken by North Yorkshire CSP, being careful not to share any personal information through the use of aliases etc. The case highlighted the multi-agency approach, and it was confirmed that:

- AADFA (National Charity) provided independent support to the family through the review process
- The family were involved throughout the process and were encouraged to review/input into the final report
- Four Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) took place – A victim focused information sharing and risk management meeting attended by all key agencies
- A wide range of practitioners and professionals had encouraged the victim to leave the relationship

Finally, Odette Robson highlighted the actions arising from the Review and confirmed:

- The excellent working relationship between the relevant agencies, practitioners and professionals across North Yorkshire and beyond its boundaries.
- A number of Domestic Homicide Reviews would be undertaken in the coming year.

Resolved – That:

- i. The update be noted and;
- ii. A further update be provided in six months' time

113. NYCC Property Services – Approach to Rationalisation**Considered -**

A presentation on the rationalisation work undertaken by NYCC's Property Services.

Item 1

Jon Holden provided an overview of the new property management arrangements in place, which included a move to a 'Corporate Landlord' approach, and its drivers i.e. the changes to service delivery models and the changing requirements of the business under the 'Modern Council' programme.

He provided examples in Scarborough where previous rationalisation work had been undertaken, and gave a brief analysis of the work currently underway on the County Hall site which had been facilitated in part through the acquisition of the Courthouse building.

It was confirmed that:

- The cost of purchasing the Courthouse was not included in the savings reported
- The rationalisation works identified to date would result in an expected shortfall of £467K.
- A new asset management system was now in place enabling a better understanding of the costs associated with each asset
- Consideration was being given to how best to utilise the Courthouse once the current staff occupying the building moved back into County Hall.
- A County wide plan and asset register were in development

Gary Fielding confirmed NYCC was working with partners across the county to identify further rationalisation options.

Finally, Members welcomed the opportunity to receive a further update on progress against performance targets in six months' time.

Resolved – That:

- i. The update be noted
- ii. A six-monthly update be added to the Committee's work programme

114. Brierley Group Governance Arrangements

Considered –

A report describing the governance arrangements in place for the Brierley Group.

Vicki Dixon introduced the report providing an overview of how the current arrangements ensured the County Council was able to properly exercise its rights as owner of majority shareholder of its companies.

The report detailed the governance hierarchy and the role and responsibility of each tier. It was noted that each company has produced a business plan and it was confirmed those plans had been presented to the Shareholder Committee for approval.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman confirmed he had attended a number of the Shareholder Committee meetings and had been encouraged to participate in the debates at those meetings. He went on to confirm that his attendance at those meetings had left him reassured that the governance arrangements for the Brierley Group were robust.

It was noted that the agenda and supporting documents for those meetings were in the public domain and that any member of the Committee could choose to attend if they so wished.

Item 1

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Business Plans for the various companies were available via the Council's website as part of the agenda papers for the meetings of the Shareholder Committee held in April and May 2019. She also agreed to add the Scrutiny members to the distribution list for the Shareholder Committee to ensure everyone received notification of future meetings and the items of business.

Resolved – That:

- i. The update be noted
- ii. A further update be provided in 12 months' time

115. Work Programme

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

Resolved – That:

- a) That the work programme be noted
- b) Based on the discussion earlier in the meeting, the following be added to the Work Programme:

TBC	- Update on Potential Investment in a Solar Farm
March 2019	- Attendance for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner
June 2019	- Update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership
June 2019	- NYCC Property Services Performance Update
December 2020	- Customer Portal Update
December 2020	- Brierley Group Governance Update

116. Council Plan Development

Considered –

A report on the refresh of the 2020 – 2024 Council Plan.

Steve Evans, Head of Strategy & Performance introduced the report which confirmed work was ongoing to refresh the Plan, and that a review of progress against the current Plan had been assessed at senior management level. He confirmed that out of those discussions had come the potential for reducing the existing document in order to make it more digestible, and for adding an additional ambition based around 'North Yorkshire as a place shaper'.

He went on to highlight the progress against the current ambitions as detailed in Appendix A, and highlighted a number of future challenges which included:

- The focus on Adult Social Care and the need to keep residents out of formal care and in their own homes where ever possible
- Growth, and the challenge of working with partners to shape the economy
- Affordability of housing

Item 1

Members noted the progress and endorsed the proposal to include a fifth ambition, agreeing it was a good way forward.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths expressed concern around the multi-agency approach to keeping children in formal education, particularly those children from hard-to-reach groups. He confirmed he had raised the issue a number of times but that it had not resulted in any improvements. He acknowledged that school readiness, improving attendance rates generally and reducing permanent / fixed-term exclusions were all important, but felt there was a glaring gap in relation to keeping children from hard to reach groups in school, particularly those in key stages 3 & 4. He therefore suggested that the priorities associated with the Council's ambition to ensure 'Every child and young person has the best possible start in life' should be revised to ensure a focus on children from hard-to-reach groups.

Finally, Members noted officers' intention to circulate by email the draft plan to the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee by 13 December 2019, with a request for comments by 6 January 2020.

Resolved – That:

- i. The report be noted
- ii. The proposal for an additional ambition be endorsed
- iii. The feedback from Cllr Griffiths be fed into the Council Plan refresh

Meeting Concluded at 12pm