

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 7 December 2020 at 10.30am

County Councillors Present: Derek Bastiman (Chair), Val Arnold, Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Goodrick, Bryn Griffiths (Vice Chair), Mike Jordan, Richard Musgrave, Tony Randerson and Annabel Wilkinson.

Other County Councillors Present: Carl Les & David Chance

Other Attendees: Andrew Brodie (North Yorkshire Chief Fire Officer); Laurie Norris (National Farmers Union Representative);

Officers: Karen Iveson (Assistant Director Strategic Resources); Neil Irving (Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships & Communities); Odette Robson (Head of Safer Communities); Robert Ling (Assistant Director Technology & Change); Melanie Carr (Principal Democratic Services & Scrutiny Officer); Diane Parsons (Principal Scrutiny Officer);

Apologies: County Councillor Yvonne Peacock & Andy Paraskos

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

In the absence of County Councillor Derek Bastiman, the meeting commenced with County Councillor Bryn Griffiths in the Chair.

125. Minutes

County Councillor Richard Musgrave requested that the draft Minutes for the previous meeting held on 14 September 2020 be updated to record his attendance at the meeting.

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2019 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the amendment detailed above.

126. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

127. Public Questions or Statements

There were no public questions or statements received.

128. Notice of Motion on Sky Lanterns

Considered – A report providing information on Sky Lanterns in response to a Notice of Motion at Full Council on 18 November 2020

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths introduced the item detailing his reasons for proposing the Notice of Motion.

It was noted that the general consensus at Council had been in favour of the Notice of Motion. However, County Councillor Richard Musgrave confirmed that a number of issues had subsequently been raised e.g. understanding the associated contractual issues i.e. where a contract or lease was already in place for land/property owned by the Council, what would be the cost and other implications associated with changing those agreements. In addition, how would enforcement of a ban be managed? It was agreed that further legal advice would be required to consider all of the possible implications.

Members noted that the Legal Team had been asked to give clarity on the wording of the Notice of Motion and as a result had proposed a revision to the wording so that it read: 'on any property and land which North Yorkshire County Council own or lease or have any interest in or control over'.

Andrew Brodie, Chief Fire Officer for North Yorkshire, confirmed that the National Fire Chief's Council was also opposed to the use of Sky Lanterns because of the fire risk to wild life. He gave examples of significant fires caused by their use, outlined the potential for it to happen in North Yorkshire, and the resources it would require in response. For all those reasons, he confirmed that as the Chief Fire for North Yorkshire, he was in favour of the Motion.

Laurie Norris, representative of the Farmers Union endorsed the comments made by the Chief Fire Officer and outlined feedback from Union members detailing their ongoing concerns around risks to their land, buildings and livestock.

It was agreed that a national ban would be the most appropriate way forward, but it was noted there had already been a failed attempt to introduce the necessary legislation. They therefore agreed in principle to lobbying parliament but agreed it should not hold up progression of a County Council ban. Members also agreed in principle to the inclusion of helium balloons in the Motion.

At this stage, County Councillor Derek Bastiman joined the meeting and took over as Chair. He went on to propose that the Committee hold a one-off Task and Finish meeting to examine the issues raised at this meeting, with an invite to the other Overview & Scrutiny Committees to send representatives to contribute to the work, before this Committee agreed a suitable recommendation back to Full Council in February 2021.

County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson suggested the County Council should also consider running a publicity campaign to raise public awareness and dissuade them from using sky lanterns at family celebrations / remembrance events.

Resolved – That:

- i) A one-off Task & Finish meeting be held in January 2021;
- ii) Representatives from the other Overview & Scrutiny Committees be invited to attend alongside officers from Property Services and Legal Services.

129. Investment Strategy Update

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 third 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.

Members noted the pandemic's effect on investment activity, with no acquisitions in the last year, although reasonable revenue returns had still been achieved. There had also been some unrealised capital losses, with provision for that being made.

It was also noted that a cautious approach would be taken going forward, with the property market and investments. Karen Iveson highlighted the new rules introduced by the Government around the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) preventing Council's from borrowing in order to fund commercial investments. Karen Iveson confirmed NYCC had not done this previously and had no plans to in the future.

She also confirmed that the rules going forward, would prevent any council who made a commercial acquisition from accessing PWLB funding for a three year period. As a consequence, work was underway to assess the County Council's Treasury Management and Capital Strategies.

In regard to the business loan to NYNet, County Councillor Richard Musgrave queried why the amount was now over the approved loan figure. In response, Karen Iveson confirmed the higher amount had been approved, and agreed to provide the Committee with a more detailed response in writing after the meeting. She also agreed to provide a written response to the question 'How many of the loans to the County Council's internal businesses were secured against their assets?' Finally, County Councillor Richard Musgrave noted the risk associated with the use of reserves to invest in those Companies, when they were not achieving the levels of profit anticipated.

County Councillor Carl Les drew members' attention to the distinction between what the County Council invested in for a return, and what it invested in, in order to achieve a market position that would otherwise fail. For example, in the case of NYNet, had the County Council not put in the fibre net cables and other infrastructure, many residents across the county would not have an internet connection.

County Councillor Mike Jordan queried how companies suitable for investment would be identified and purchased without the involvement of the PWLB, and Karen Iveson outlined the process.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths questioned whether a target date had been agreed for the creation of a solar farm, and again Karen Iveson outlined the process that would be followed over the next 2.5 years, noting the importance of identifying the right site for the project. Members agreed this was too long a lead in period and Karen Iveson reassured Members that it was a cautious timescale already affected by Covid and that a full business case was expected in early 2021.

Resolved – That:

- The progress to date be noted

130. Council Plan Development

Considered – An update on what was being considered as part of the 2021 – 2025 Council Plan refresh.

Neil Irving, Assistant Director for Policy & Partnerships introduced the report confirming that this year; only a light refresh was required following the more significant re-write last year. This included updates to each ambition to reflect the ongoing challenges with COVID-19 and the County Council's response, and a refresh of the Growth plan and plan for Children and Young people, to align them with the Council Plan.

He also confirmed the timetable for having the amendments approved and the planned consultation with all members.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths queried the actions and resources required in order to implement the refreshed plan and it was confirmed that the Council Plan was a high level strategic document, with the actions and resources required to deliver, detailed in Directorate and Service Plans.

Resolved – That the draft new and amended priorities under each ambition be noted.

131. Community Safety Partnership Update

Considered - A report on the work of the Community Safety Partnership during the last six months, providing an overview of

Odette Robson, Head of Safer Communities provided an overview of work of the Community Safety Partnership during the last six months and its delivery of its Plan. She went on to summarise the Partnership's role and the agreed priority areas for delivery, as detailed in the report. She also drew Members' attention to the Domestic Abuse Bill expected next year that would bring a new statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities, and the Partnership's ongoing work to prepare for it.

Following a query from County Councillor Tony Randerson, it was noted that domestic abuse figures were considered fortnightly by the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership and compared with previous years. It was confirmed that the number of reported crimes was not significantly different to last year but the demand on commissioned services had almost doubled. The disconnect between the higher national helpline figures and those of local services which were much lower, was noted, alongside the potential higher level of hidden harm.

County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson questioned whether there was capacity to support a higher number of victims identified as a result of the new Domestic Abuse Bill, and what percentage of that capacity was needed for families coming from outside of the area. Odette Robson confirmed that referrals were done nationally in to North Yorkshire refuges, with an unknown number of North Yorkshire families referred outside of the county. She also confirmed work on a strategic needs assessment was underway, and provided an overview of the work carried out to raise the profile of the services available to domestic abuse victims.

Following a query from County Councillor Mike Jordan, it was noted that online safety was a massive area of ongoing work, particularly within hard to reach communities.

Finally, the hate crime figure for the Scarborough Area was noted and it was confirmed that community cohesion work activity ongoing in the area was having a positive effect.

Members thanked Odette for her report and it was

Resolved – That the report be noted and a further update be provided in 6 months.

132. Customer Portal Update

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 a detailed 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 changes in requests for services and changes to service delivery, as a result of Covid, e.g. social isolation access;
- The creation and promotion of the North Yorkshire Buy Local Service launched in April 2020;
- The number of website visits across the range of County Council services;
- The increase in social media contact and the benefits derived;
- Customer Portal uptake and usage;
- The overall increase in digital demand;
- Customer Service Centre frontline and social care response and handling times;
- The impact of good communications on increasing modal shift to online access to services e.g. birth registrations, and general information and advice calls;
- Other Service Improvement works e.g. the 'Contact Us' facility;
- The introduction of Chat Bots
- New Accessibility legislation requiring all public sector apps, websites and intranets and the functionality within them, to meet a required standard;

County Councillor Tony Randerson raised concern about the customer portal and the lack of feedback and sometimes incorrect feedback provided in response to complaints about services. In particular, he referenced problems with feedback on street lighting issues, where the feedback indicated a request had been completed, when in fact it had not. The limited amount of information that could be submitted into the portal was also raised as a problem.

Robert Ling confirmed that the feedback provided via the portal often came via the relevant business works system i.e. an engineer who has been out to a reported problem would add a report into his works system, which was automatically fed through to the Customer Portal. He requested some examples from Councillors in order to follow up on them.

Other County Councillors reported similar issues around misleading feedback to customers. County Councillor Bryn Griffiths also highlighted issues reported by telephone falling through the cracks, with no feedback being provided. It was agreed that Councillors should send their individual examples direct to Robert Ling.

Resolved – That the update be noted

133. 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 2020 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

Members considered the date of the next mid-cycle briefing - 18 January 2021, and agreed it would be a suitable date to hold the additional formal committee meeting required to consider the Notice of Motion on the banning of Sky lanterns.

Members also agreed a second item for the additional meeting, an update on the findings from the recent HMNIP inspection of the Youth Justice Service. The Chair requested that an invitation to the meeting be sent to the young offenders institution at Wetherby, so that they could provide feedback on any improvements since the Committee's visit in 2018.

County Councillor Caroline Goodrick requested an overview of how NYCC employees had been supported throughout the Covid pandemic period for a future meeting.

Resolved – That the work programme be amended to reflect the additional formal meeting to be held in January 2021, and the additional items identified.

Meeting Concluded at 12.23pm