

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21st February 2007

TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Transport and Telecommunication Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met once and undertaken several visits since the last full Council meeting. The Committee meeting in January provided an opportunity for the Corporate Director Finance and Central Services and Business and Environmental Services to update us on the key priorities for 2007/08. It also allowed us to clarify any matters of particular concern or interest.

Committee Meeting – 17th January 2007

1. Business and Environmental Services

The Committee was pleased to welcome the Corporate Director Business and Environmental Services; Gordon Gresty and the Executive Member County Councillor Peter Sowray to the meeting.

The Director emphasised that highways was not just a matter of roads; the Vision of the Local Transport Plan referred to “Better Access and Sustainable Communities for All” and did not actually make any mention of roads! The Committee received an extremely detailed presentation from Mr Gresty, to give a flavour of the issues covered I have included brief details below:

a) Gershon Savings

We were informed that one of the major issues affecting the Directorate for the coming year would be Gershon Savings, of around £2½ m, similar to the current year. A consequence for the Directorate would be a requirement for it to save 37% of the total of the County Council’s savings in the next financial year.

b) Consultancy Arrangements

The Director referred to the changes that had been made in the Consultancy arrangements during 2006 with regard to the Engineering, Estates and Property Services Units which would bring about savings of £8.3m per annum, with Jacobs UK having commenced this contract in October 2006. There had been a smooth changeover and a Contract Monitoring Unit had been established.

c) Winter Maintenance

The Committee was advised that Winter Maintenance had cost £6.34m during the last year and that this was an area that was over-spent every year due to the extremely high standard of maintenance in the County.

d) Street Lighting

Throughout the County there are 48,000 lighting units, of which 22,000 were constructed of concrete which was susceptible to corrosion. It had been planned to renew 60% of these within a period of ten years but the Committee was pleased to hear that this time scale has now been reduced to six years.

e) Local Transport Plan 2 (LTP2)

Members congratulated the Corporate Director on receiving an excellent response from the Department for Transport on the County Council’s second local transport plan. LTP 2 will run from 2006 – 2011.

f) City Regions

City Regions is a key issue for the Directorate and is of particular relevance to both Economic Development and Regeneration O & SC and to the work of this Committee. The Leeds City Region will have to deal with traffic congestion, a matter with which North Yorkshire County Council would need to be involved and which would be extremely important in the future.

g) Road safety

The Committee was encouraged by the success the Directorate had achieved in reducing the number of people killed on the County's roads. We feel that one death is one too many but it is reassuring to know that the Directorate is working diligently to reduce road deaths and casualties.

h) Information for Councillors

In response to a question from the Committee, the Director reassured us that he intended to carry out a survey of Members with regard to transportation and communication issues, to ensure that we are kept informed of highways schemes in our own areas.

2. Finance and Central Services

The Committee was pleased to welcome the Corporate Director Finance and Central Services; John Moore and the Executive Member County Councillor Carl Les to the meeting.

The Committee received a detailed verbal report from Mr Moore, to give a flavour of the issues covered I have included a brief outline below:

i) NYnet (North Yorkshire Net)

The main focus of the report was inevitably the possible development of a county wide network that would be open for Internet Service Providers (ISP's) to purchase and sell on to both the public and private sectors of North Yorkshire. The Committee eagerly awaits the decision of the Executive as it considers NYnet at its meeting on the 6th February 2007.

The aim of NYnet is to create a world class, high-speed communications infrastructure across North Yorkshire that will enable the sub region to be at the forefront of the next wave of technological advancement, and thus transforming the economy of the sub-region, making it a better place to live and work.

Subject to the Executive approving the project at its forthcoming meeting we look forward to further updates on progress from either County Councillor Carl Les or County Councillor John Watson.

j) Video Conferencing

The updating of telephony is currently in process on 120 sites (of the County Council's 400 sites, excluding schools) when this is completed the Committee was informed that compatible video conferencing could be put onto any of the sites. Possible sites are currently being investigated with a list of eight possible locations at which to install video conferencing, including for example North Yorkshire House in Scarborough and Jesmond House in Harrogate.

The Corporate Director emphasised that it is not necessarily the financial savings that were the major consideration, but rather a reduction in people's time. It would be more productive both for officers and Councillors if time did not have to be spent travelling to and from informal meetings.

k) MUGIT (Members' User Group for I.T)

As Chairman I reminded Members that the MUGIT group meetings are open to all County Councillors and that detail of future meetings will be sent out via email. County Councillor Carl Les informed Members that the MUGIT group had drawn together Members from all Political Parties, from all areas of the County, and from all spectrums of IT ability.

3. Disability Awareness Session

The Committee received a presentation from Simon Cox of Diverse Matters and County Councillor Paul Richardson as the County Council's Champion for people with physical and/or sensory impairment. As a Committee, we resolved to bear in mind any issues that may be related to improving services for people with disabilities in considering our future work programme.

4. Airport Consultative Committees – NYCC Representatives

County Councillor Michael Heseltine presented the Transport & Telecommunication Services O & SC report on NYCC representatives for Airport Consultative Committees to the Executive on 23 January 2007. The Executive agreed that there should be representation from the County Council on the Airport Consultative Committees of Durham Tees Valley and Robin Hood Airports. I understand letters have been sent to the secretaries of both Committees and we await their response.

5. In-depth Scrutiny review – 'Let's get on the bus!'

As part of our in-depth scrutiny review 'let's get on the bus!' we have undertaken several visits to both commercial and community bus operators. We all agreed that we learnt so much more than just reading a written report and would encourage our colleagues to 'get out and about' and use public transport whenever possible.

We have also undertaken 'mystery shopper' bus trips in our local areas and been very impressed with the service we have encountered; helpful and courteous bus drivers and reliable, clean buses.

This is just a taster of what the Committee has looked at in this review...if you want to know more look out for the final reportwe expect that it will be presented to the Executive in May 2007.

**County Councillor Eric Broadbent
Chairman
Transport and Telecommunication Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
February 2007**