

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

19 MAY 2010

1. The Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met once since my last report to full Council on 30 April 2010.

Committee Meeting: 30 April 2010

Access to Services Strategy

2. Following the in-depth cross-scrutiny review on this topic which was undertaken in 2009, Robin Mair, Head of Access to Services, provided an update to the Committee on the progress so far. Robin outlined the changes that had been made against the specific recommendations from the review. Members were particularly interested in hearing about the opportunities that have been developed for better partnership working and sharing of facilities and sites. The opening of the new facility at Kirbymoorside, where staff from Ryedale District Council and County now work as a 'virtual' pooled team, answering queries for both councils, has been very successful. This has allowed extended hours at no extra cost and the model is being extended to more joint facilities in the Ryedale area. Negotiations are also underway to progress the development of similar models in other areas of the county and members were keen to encourage this as an excellent example of enhanced two-tier working.
3. Considerable work has also been undertaken to publicise the channels of communication to the Council and this is now made available through the NY Times and a standard format has also been included in telephone directories. Feedback from the Customer Service centre has also been valuable in targeting improvements in service and two major service reviews have now resulted in the Customer Service Centre being able to answer more simple enquiries at point of contact. The development of the Access to Services strategy will very much continue as work in progress and the Committee will receive a further update in the future. We would actively encourage any members who have not visited the Customer Service Centre to do so. Robin Mair would be very happy to make arrangements for this.

HR Communication and Work Programme

4. Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive for Human Resources and Organisational Development, presented a paper to members outlining the details of the HR communication plan to support the organisational change and restructuring which is likely to arise in the future out of the need for public sector budget cuts. HR has been very focused on developing resources and communication plans to support staff and managers through this change and members were supportive of the work that has been undertaken. This work will

be a major focus for HR in the future and the Committee will seek further updates as they become available.

Video-conferencing

5. The Committee has had a keen interest in the development of video-conferencing facilities across the County and received a further written update from John Moore, Corporate Director for Finance and Central services. Members were disappointed to note that usage of the facilities has remained fairly static since we received the last report in September 2009. We were supportive of the actions proposed to re-publicise the facilities and to look at the availability of a new room booking system in the future. The proposals for a roll out of desk-top webcams may offer more flexibility and a more appropriate solution, particularly for some members. The Committee strongly encourages members to use the video-conferencing facilities whenever possible for mid-cycle and agenda briefing meetings as it offers considerable scope for reduction of car usage, bringing reduction in cost and carbon footprint.

Future Work and Challenges

6. Given that the County Council will face a period of unprecedented change as the pressures on public sector spending start to hit over coming months, communication will be of the utmost importance. We will continue to focus on this in the future.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARGARET-ANN DE COURCEY -BAYLEY
Chairman
Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall
Northallerton

May 2010