

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 May 2011

SCRUTINY BOARD

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Scrutiny Board met on 20 April 2011.

Proposed Joint County/District Scrutiny Members Event

Scrutiny Board has agreed that this event which is scheduled to take place during the autumn will focus on the potential to use Broadband to improve digital inclusion and to take forward the “Big Society” across the County. The objective will be to build up our understanding of the potential that Broadband offers and give us an opportunity to network with colleagues from across the County on this important development.

Scrutiny at Sub Regional/Regional Levels

I continue to attend meetings of Scrutiny Chairs from across the region to share information, best practice and the outcomes of scrutiny reviews in order to make the best use of the scrutiny resources in the region.

I firmly believe we should continue to focus on opportunities for sharing best practice and joint working rather than committing resources to regional scrutiny arrangements.

I do acknowledge, however, that the Scrutiny of Health Committee may become involved in regional scrutiny arrangements such as the consultation currently taking place on proposed changes to children’s congenital heart surgery.

Sharing Papers for Mid Cycle Briefings

Mid-cycle briefings are attended by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Group Spokespersons. The main purpose of the briefings is to plan the Committee’s work programme which might include briefings on emerging topics. At Scrutiny Board we agreed that in future papers for mid-cycle briefings will be circulated to all members of each Committee but on the understanding that any comments or issues they want to raise should be fed through their group spokesperson.

Video Conferencing Facilities

Whilst the last meeting of the Board was held at County Hall we had a trial run of holding the meeting using video conferencing facilities – we split into 2 separate groups in different rooms.

I must say it worked very well.

Over the next couple of weeks or so we are planning to hold a second trial but this time with Members using the video conferencing facilities in 4 separate locations:

North Yorkshire House, Scarborough
David Jeffels, John Blackburn

County Hall
Tony Hall

Westbourne House, Selby
Liz Casling

Jesmond House, Harrogate
Jim Clark, Keith Barnes

If this works we are planning to run the next Scrutiny Board on 6 July 2011 on the same basis.

Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report

Finally I am pleased to attach to this statement the annual report of the chairs of scrutiny. It gives an account of the very positive role scrutiny has in this council and I am sure that the changes proposed will ensure this continues to be the case despite the necessary constraints on budgets.

County Councillor John Blackburn
Chairman of Scrutiny Board
05 May 2011

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, April 2010 – March 2011

Welcome to the new style Scrutiny Annual Report. We now have a reduced number of members having downsized from nine Committees to five. I was delighted to have been appointed to the position of Chairman of the new Scrutiny Board, which I aim to make a more streamlined Committee. It must be remembered that we still have the same amount of work to cover as did the old scrutiny set up with nine committees with fewer members and support officers.

The Scrutiny Board is to take on a different role, concentrating more on the work of the five Committees, in particular with regard to the justification of task groups and their benefit to both the financial and efficient working of the Council.

In his Annual Report last year my predecessor Paul Richardson emphasised the importance of partnership working with district councils across the County, and this I intend to continue, and we will be arranging to meet with the district scrutiny chairs again soon after the district elections in May. It is interesting to note that although the joint task group on flooding has now finished its work, it has now taken on the role of the North Yorkshire Flood Liaison Committee, and I am delighted to have been asked to continue in the role of Chairman. It is my opinion that all task group recommendations should be regularly followed up, and this is something that I want the Scrutiny Board to be doing.

During the year I have attended several regional meetings covering the whole of Yorkshire and Humber, and it is interesting to learn how scrutiny is working over a much wider area. We are of course the only two tier set of councils remaining in the region and many of the unitary and metropolitan councillors find this hard to understand. There have also been discussions on how future legislation, in particular the Localism Bill, will affect scrutiny

I am confident that despite our reduction in numbers, scrutiny has a vital role to play, particularly in these austere times and I look forward to an exciting and challenging year ahead.

**County Councillor John Blackburn
Chairman Scrutiny Board**

Overview & Scrutiny Chairmen



Top left to bottom right
County Councillors John Blackburn, Tony Hall, Liz Casling, Jim Clark, David Jeffels & Keith Barnes

Care and Independence

Scope:

The needs of vulnerable adults and older people and people whose independence needs to be supported by intervention from the public or voluntary sector.

*Supported by Ray Busby
Corporate Development Officer*

“More we understand the more we can help”

We started the year by assessing the Government’s publication on its vision for Adult Social Care. This stresses the importance of putting people at the heart of their own care. Without doubt, this is an important milestone in social care but the message running through the vision is a familiar one - Social Care is not about them, it is about us all. We have been guided by this principle and that of the National Dementia Strategy - the “More we understand the more we can help”.

On dementia, we have committed ourselves to a “We are listening pledge” to make North Yorkshire a shining example of community leader awareness of this devastating condition so that Councillors can genuinely help people in the communities they represent.

Like many people, I have had concerns about drug treatment in the County. It was heartening therefore when staff and provider organisations told us that the North Yorkshire Substance Misuse Partnership Board has seen through positive and effective changes to governance, staffing and contractual arrangements with commissioners across North Yorkshire.

Evidence from those discussions led us to conclude however that we should look at the balance between commissioning for drugs awareness and treatment and that for alcohol misuse. For a county that in recent years has seen a worrying rise in alcohol consumption, the arguments for public health initiatives to reduce the level of alcohol related harm are overwhelming. Because of the impending change in health structure arrangements, the time is right for the County Council to assume leadership of this agenda.

Local arrangements for safeguarding are subject to scrutiny and challenge. Our focus was to ensure adults are properly safeguarded and their life chances improved. We do this in part by reviewing the efforts of the Safeguarding Adults Board to improve awareness, promote inclusion, and how it ensures people are supported to manage risks and benefits when they are organising or receiving adult social care services.

We found the level of integrated agency commitment to be impressive. We were especially pleased to see much evidence of activity on the ground to bring information to the attention of the public and people who use public services. The Committee can play its part here too by looking at what role community leaders have and how their involvement, particularly on Local Safeguarding Boards, can be made real and effective.

We close the year by cementing our role in what happens next in terms of commissioning and the re-designing of services to ensure they meet the expectations of the new vision. Maintaining the participation and influence of those agencies and individuals we have had great success with already is crucial, anything less would be a waste, not just the knowledge we have gained and the enthusiasm we have shown but also of the partnership relationships we have forged.

**County Councillor Tony Hall
Chairman Care & Independence O&SC**

Corporate and Partnerships

Scope:

The Council's corporate organisation and structure, resource allocation, asset management, procurement policy, people strategy, equality & diversity, performance management, communication and access to services.

Partnership working, community development, community engagement, community strategies and community safety. This Committee shall be the Crime & Disorder Committee for the purposes of Part 3 of the Police and Justice Act 2006.

*Supported by Jonathan Spencer
Corporate Development Officer*

Being a new Committee, we set a fresh agenda. One that was corporate, but nimble enough to adapt to a changing public sector environment. Although less than a year old, we have already considered the implications of the comprehensive spending review, coalition government initiatives, how we as an organisation communicate with the public and the Big Society.

Arguably, our most important project is making the aspirations of the Big Society a reality. The starting point is enabling communities to confidently take ownership of local resources, develop them and then benefit society as a whole.

Our research including visits to social enterprises and community owned initiatives, suggests we should aim to reap the efficiencies around improved access to services whilst maximising community benefit. This means devolving power and responsibility to others by developing plans based upon local knowledge so that communities can shape places for themselves. The Council must prepare and make it easier to open up public services, release control and management and consider different supplier options. We intend to set out the essential building blocks that need to be in place if communities are to take responsibility for land, buildings and services transferred to them to deliver broad ranging community benefit.

The Citizen's Panel is one of the ways we find out what people think about our services, but the cost of keeping it can only be justified if the information received is both useful and of high quality. We concluded it could be more of a valuable resource, but only by adopting changes to practice and making it more responsive to the work of service directorates.

The Committee is the designated Crime and Disorder Committee at county level. It made sense to continue the successful dialogue with strategic leaders of organisations and agencies that contribute to making our communities safe places to live. The Police Authority faces abolition so we took the time to assess what that means for partnership working. Recently we learnt more about the contribution the Probation Service makes and how community leaders might connect with local community payback schemes.

How we connect with communities and individuals is at the heart of the debate on the future of the North Yorkshire Times. Opinions differed on the relative merits of various approaches but a consensus emerged in the Committee that retaining the current arrangement of 12 publications a year was not sustainable. We suggested reducing circulation, changing the print run and exploring closer links with national newspaper groups who own the majority of titles within the County area.

**County Councillor Liz Casling
Chairman Corporate and Partnerships O&SC**

Scrutiny of Health

Scope:

To review any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the County, including Ambulance Trusts and the policies of the Strategic Health Authority.

The aim is to act as a lever to improve the health of local people, ensuring that the needs of the local people are considered as an integral part of the delivery and development of health services.

To focus on action to achieve health improvement; to examine health care in the context of the wider determinants of health; to examine how health services address the needs of local communities; especially to address health inequalities; to ensure that local health and health related issues are being tackled jointly and in a co-ordinated way across agencies

To contribute to the annual health checks by providing commentaries to the Health Care Commission on the performance of NHS Trusts serving North Yorkshire and on the experiences that the Committee has had with those Trusts.

*Supported by Bryon Hunter
Scrutiny Team Leader*

Being appointed Chairman of the Scrutiny of Health Committee from July 2010 has certainly involved a steep learning curve but it is a role which I find both interesting and enjoyable.

The NHS landscape in the County is complex and there has been a steady stream of developments coming forward in which the Committee has become involved. This has included:

- the Minor Injuries Units in Hambleton and Richmondshire,
- the Hospital at Home model in the Ryedale and Whitby areas,
- Stroke Services and Trauma Orthopaedic Services at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust,
- Out of Hours GP services in Richmondshire.

Added to these very local developments the Committee has been heavily involved in the Transforming Community Services initiative under which the hospitals trusts, from 1 April 2011, took over responsibility for community services from the Primary Care Trust. In each of these developments I have also sought to involve local Councillors in the Committee's work.

As well as the types of service developments highlighted above, which in the main has led to the Committee to work in a reactive mode, there are opportunities for us to work in a more proactive way. A particular example is the work which the Committee completed over the last year on Stroke Prevention, Awareness and Recognition which arose out of the Committee's work on Stroke Pathways in the Hambleton and Richmondshire areas and the publication of a National Stroke Strategy in 2007. The work was led by County Councillor Tony Hall and included a task group drawn from both the Scrutiny of Health Committee and the Care and Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The task group highlighted that there is potential to do more in primary care to identify people with high blood pressure, irregular heart beats and

high cholesterol - all of which increase our susceptibility to stroke. The work contributed to the launch of a "Find the 5,000" campaign by NHS North Yorkshire and York to find the 5,000 people that research by Public Health specialists estimated have undiagnosed high blood pressure. The campaign specifically targeted people over 40 years of age and who have not had a blood pressure check in the last 5 years. The task group's work was an excellent example of how we can work in partnership with the NHS, add value and help to improve health care.

The Committee has also been kept abreast of the proposed changes in the NHS as set out in the Health and Social Care Bill published in January. Whilst at the time of publishing this Annual Report there is now a pause in the passage of the Bill through Parliament significant changes in how the NHS functions are still likely. I am confident that proposals for an enhanced role for Scrutiny will feature in the final legislation so that democratic legitimacy in the NHS is enhanced.

Finally I would just like to highlight the willingness of all NHS trusts locally to engage with the Committee. Whilst at times there have been differences of opinion, their willingness to engage has never faltered and has been commendable.

County Councillor Jim Clark
Chairman Scrutiny of Health Committee

Transport, Economy & Environment

Scope

Transport and communications infrastructure of all kinds, however owned or provided, and how the transport needs of the community are met.

Supporting business, economic regeneration and development and helping people develop their skills, including lifelong learning.

Sustainability, climate change strategy, countryside management, waste management, environmental conservation and enhancement, and cultural issues.

Flood and coastal erosion risk management

Supported by Lorraine Laverton
Corporate Development Officer

The Committee has a wide and varied scope that represents the merging, in Summer last year, of the remits of three former scrutiny committees (Transport and Telecommunications; Economic Development and Regeneration; and Environment and Heritage).

The new committee focuses on three themes that promote the relevant County Council objectives: to ensure good access for all, to promote a flourishing economy, and to maintain and enhance our environment and heritage.

The impact of funding cuts has been at the forefront of our minds and we have considered how this will affect services. We had the opportunity to question the Director of Business and Environmental Services about savings proposals, 50% of which will fall within the first year of the four-year plan. Regrettably this will mean that some services such as road safety will be drastically reduced. With services such as highway maintenance, it will result in a more planned and less reactive

service and there is no doubt that this will be challenging given the effect of the severe winter weather on our road network.

We are keeping a watching brief on the development of the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership which is a public and private sector partnership that will promote local business growth through investment.

The committee heard how businesses in North Yorkshire may soon be able to benefit from high-speed broadband provision if a bid from NyNet goes forward. This would enable it to reach the 19,000 small businesses in the county that are currently unserved and possibly benefit individual households as well.

Following the implementation of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 the County Council is now the lead local flood authority for North Yorkshire and has powers to review and scrutinise the way in which risk management authorities exercise their flood and coastal erosion management functions. Our committee will exercise these powers on behalf of the Council.

A Member working group has been looking at options for reducing street lighting to achieve carbon and cost savings, without compromising public safety, and will report its findings in the summer.

The committee is also keeping up to date with the progress of recommendations from scrutiny reviews carried out by the former committees. We look forward to hearing about changes to the winter maintenance programme (following a review by the former Transport & Telecomms O&SC) and improving habitats for biodiversity (following a review by the former Environment & Heritage O&SC) at our coming meetings.

Finally, councillors can feel that we're doing our bit towards meeting the Council's carbon-saving target as part of the 'Small Steps, Big Difference' campaign, having contributed towards a reduction of 41,544 business miles travelled by Council staff and Members compared with the previous year, resulting in a saving of 13.8 tonnes of CO₂.

County Councillor David Jeffels
Chairman Transport Economy & Environment O&SC

Young People

Scope:

The interests of young people, including education, care and protection and family support.

Supported by Stephanie Bratcher
Corporate Development Officer

This committee covers Education, Youth Services and Children's Social Services. Our work does not normally cover the performance of individual schools, as they are funded by Direct Grant from the Department for Education.

North Yorkshire has a wealth of talented young people with high aspirations but we appreciate that young people are individuals and require differing levels of support and guidance to help them reach their full potential.

Over the past year we have seen a constant flow of policy and development changes from the Coalition Government to do with young people. Some are to do with education, such as academies and free schools, and others relate to the decommissioning of the Contact Point database, reducing child poverty, the reform of Children's Trust and a Review of Child Protection to name a few. It has been a busy and a steep learning curve for the committee, keeping up to date with these many changes and understanding how they will affect North Yorkshire's young people.

A particular focus for the Committee this year has been the financial challenges facing the County Council. In a climate of severe budgetary cuts all services across the Council have been affected. The Committee has requested regular updates from Executive Members and the Corporate Director of the Children & Young Peoples Service (CYPS) on the Savings & Transformation Strategy designed to save £22.7m (21% of the directorate's base budget) by 2014/15. The strategy identified 18 project areas to be reviewed in the light of funding cuts. We heard that wherever possible front-line services were to be protected, and that some of the changes or further improvements being pursued had positive features that would result in better practices and improved services. However the savings to be made are very large so it is important that this scrutiny committee keeps a watching brief and continues to add challenge where appropriate.

The Committee has also been kept informed on the consultation process being undertaken in relation to the review of education provision in North Craven (Settle and Ingleton) and in Upper Wharfedale (Grassington, Kettlewell and Arncliffe areas). The role of overview and scrutiny in these matters has been to examine the decision-making and consultation procedures and to ensure that public consultation meetings have been held in several local venues which are accessible to all; that they were held at times suitable for the local population; that all the necessary information was available in suitable formats and that there were several routes for people to engage with the consultation process whether this was face to face, electronic or written.

Closures, mergers and restructuring of school provision have been keenly debated and challenged in several areas of the county. In the face of falling roles and reduced resources the council has sought to maintain the highest levels of teaching and learning.

The council has received good reports from inspections of Children's Social Services, and the committee has received regular updates on the implementation of the resulting improvement plans.

Our in-depth scrutiny review has been to look into the Health Visitor and School Nurse Service with the assistance of the North Yorkshire & York Primary Care Trust (PCT). Unfortunately North Yorkshire has seen the biggest decrease in the number of health visitors in the Yorkshire and Humber Region and a similar reduction in the School Nurse Service. Changes to working models have been adopted, not without their problems, but we sought, and received, reassurance that these were in the best interests of young families. With service provision across North Yorkshire moving from the PCT to Harrogate Hospital Trust, coupled with national changes to the way the services are commissioned, health visitors and school nurses live in uncertain times. Nevertheless we have been impressed with their skills and dedication in providing a universal service for all children.

The council is fortunate in having hard working, professional staff who are committed to securing the best for the young people of North Yorkshire. In difficult financial circumstances officers present well-considered recommendations to Executive

Members. If I have a concern, it is that Members are often given a single option/recommendation, rather than a range of alternative options, with supporting advantages and disadvantages, from which, after discussion and advice, a choice can be made.

Finally, on behalf of all Members of this committee, may I thank the very dedicated staff who support this committee so well.

County Councillor Keith Barnes
Chairman Young People O&SC