

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 July 2020

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN OF SCRUTINY BOARD

Members will be aware that Scrutiny Board brings together the Chairs of the five thematic overview and scrutiny committees at the Council and the Older Peoples' and Young People's Champions. It provides an opportunity for a whole council view of scrutiny activity, which avoids gaps and overlaps and helps establish a lead committee for areas of joint interest. It also provides a forum in which the key performance issues for the Council can be reviewed and items for further scrutiny identified.

The meetings of the Council's five thematic overview and scrutiny committees have been postponed since the national lockdown, in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, was announced on 23 March 2020. This decision was taken as all public gatherings were banned and it was not possible to start up live broadcast meetings for all committees at such short notice. Another consideration was that of not wanting to create an additional burden for officers and partners, who were involved in the response to the pandemic, by holding formal meetings that would have demanded updates, briefings and papers.

Instead, the committees have kept running with regular email updates, some briefings and general information. All of the overview and scrutiny committees are now getting ready for the resumption of formal scrutiny work in the early autumn and their first live broadcast meetings. As ever, there is a balance to be struck between enabling officers to get on and do their job, particularly in a time of national crisis, whilst also ensuring that there is good governance in place and transparent and accountable decision-making.

There have been two meetings of Scrutiny Board since my last statement to Council.

The first was on 20 April 2020. At that Skype meeting the management of overview and scrutiny during the lockdown was discussed. The conclusion was much as indicated previously. That is that there was a need to continue to support the committees and keep them informed of significant changes to policy or practice, whilst being aware of not creating any additional burdens for officers of the Council and other organisations.

The second meeting was held by Skype on 26 June 2020. At that meeting members began to outline what approach could be taken to the re-introduction of the overview and scrutiny committee meetings in early autumn and what would be done in the build up to then. A theme throughout the discussions was that of how to support committee members to fully participate in remote meetings and to ensure that the standard of scrutiny remained high. It was recognised that a different skill set was required of those people chairing and/or participating in a remote meeting, particular for larger meetings of more than seven or eight people.

Members of Scrutiny Board are due to attend the Executive Q4 and Q1 Performance Management meeting on 28 July 2020, to raise questions regarding key areas of the Council's performance.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DEREK BASTIMAN
Chairman of Scrutiny Board
30 June 2020