

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 November 2020

STATEMENT OF THE CORPORATE & PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Since my last statement to Council in July 2020, the Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met twice. We met informally in late July, followed by a formal meeting on 14 September 2020.

At our July meeting the Committee received a progress update on the Council's approach to property services and the rationalisation of NYCC's property portfolio. The impact of COVID on the planned work and the issues to be faced post-COVID, including the long term impact upon office requirements, were both noted.

We also received an overview of cyber protection at NYCC, and noted the greatest threat faced by the Council was ransomware, and the cost in productivity associated with losing IT. We recognised that the use of technology being so ingrained in the way the organisation works, creates a real and ongoing challenge, but were reassured by the range of tools rolled out by the national crime agency for local authorities to use and the cyber- security measures in place at NYCC.

At the same meeting, we also received updates on Library Services, use of the Parish Portal and on the work of Safer Communities.

The Committee recognises the important role played by libraries to our communities and were therefore pleased to note that pre-COVID a growing number of Council clients were using IT technology at the Libraries to access council services or to undertake online meetings with council officers etc. We were also pleased to learn that a growing number of libraries had re-opened as a result of work undertaken to ensure they could operate in line with the law in regards to social distancing and the provision of screens/sanitising equipment/PPE, and that the appropriate risk assessments had been carried out.

In regard to the Parish Portal, I can confirm that further work has been undertaken to make the portal more user friendly and comprehensive, with more service request forms being integrated, reporting mechanisms being streamlined and more timely feedback being provided. However we were disappointed to note that ongoing work on the Members' dashboard would not result in us being able to use it as a reporting mechanism or provide an improved/alternative method of communication.

In regard to Safer Communities we were pleased to note there had been no significant rise in the levels of recorded domestic abuse. However an increase in the use of the IDAS Domestic Abuse helpline was brought to our attention although this had not necessarily led to an increase in referrals for support / request for services. We were also pleased to note that work in support of other community safety priorities e.g. hate crime and Prevent was continuing as usual, with no marked increase through lockdown. But expressed concern about levels of possible hidden harm within our hard to reach communities.

At our September meeting the Committee received a presentation on the Youth Justice Service, together with annual updates on equality & diversity; the corporate volunteering project and Stronger Communities; and Locality Budgets.

The Youth Justice presentation highlighted the findings from a recent inspection and the challenges within the system i.e. transition to adulthood; the disproportionate criminalisation of Looked-After children; education access & attainment; county lines exploitation and custodial detention of children

Whilst the Committee were pleased to note the expected overall rating of 'Good with outstanding elements', noting this reflected well on both NYCC staff and on those involved across the whole partnership, they raised a number of questions around the challenges faced by the Service, and in response received an overview of the ongoing work to:

- retain children in school rather than exclude them;
- maintain corporate and individual relationships with children's homes providers;
- develop an agreed model with partners, including City of York Council;

The Committee are now seeking reassurance from the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, that North Yorkshire Police at a leadership and operational level are receiving support from neighbouring and urban forces in relation to the operation of urban gangs across county lines.

As Chair, I will also be writing to the Ministry of Justice, to draw attention to the Committee's concerns about the operation of a 24 Hour reception at Young Offender Institutions resulting in young people being conveyed inappropriately around the country at all times of the day and night, to be taken to an institution like Wetherby.

In regard to equalities and diversity, the Committee was pleased to note that a BAME network had been set up at NYCC. We also suggested that in support of Corporate Volunteering:

- some of the surplus in the apprenticeship levy be used to encourage young people who are not in education and training to take an interest in apprenticeships.
- the statement under the section "Our Principles" regarding enabling and encouraging a wider range of people to volunteer, be elevated to one of a key principle in its own right, and;
- the authority consider developing a scheme for recognising a young person's experience during volunteering.

Finally, the Committee were pleased to note the outstanding work of the Stronger Communities team and conveyed their appreciation for their efforts throughout the pandemic.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DEREK BASTIMAN