

North Yorkshire County Council

18 November 2020

**Transport, Economy and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Chairman's Statement

Committee – 23 January 2020

The Committee met for the first time since 23 January 2020 and this was by using video conferencing technology. The meeting had a mainly economic theme in recognition of the damaging economic impacts that the coronavirus has wrought since we last met and sadly continues to have. It was important for us to explore how well geared up we are as a council to support local businesses to rebuild the economy.

Apprenticeships

We received an update report on the County Council's activities on apprenticeships in the context of the Government's national reforms to apprenticeships.

Prior to the pandemic, the County Council was continuing to deliver and support apprenticeships across its workforce and its maintained schools. With the onset of the pandemic though a number of existing apprentices experienced a break in their learning as it was not possible to continue the development and assessment aspects of their placements. Unfortunately whilst that was going on the County Council's levy contribution was not paused so that money was still being removed from its payroll even though the council was not able to continue with the apprenticeship developments in the way that it had been pre-covid; that continues to be the position.

We were pleased to hear that in terms of the new government announcements to support young people into employment, in particular the Kick Start Scheme, the County Council will be an officially recognised broker for the Kick Start Scheme for smaller organisations including local businesses.

We sought confirmation though that arising from the covid crisis there will also be opportunities for older working age people to take up apprenticeships with the County Council and local businesses. This is happening and the County Council has seen an increase in applications from people in their 40s, 50s and 60s looking to re-train and to look for different types of work. The prediction is that this will continue, as more people made redundant from their previous jobs will view apprenticeships as a way of re-training and changing their career path, particularly if they have been employed in those sectors hardest hit by the pandemic.

There remain structural problems with the existing national government apprenticeship scheme, which for instance does not make it attractive to small

employers including our small schools. However a more recent benefit introduced from 2019 is that all levy payers such as the County Council are able to transfer up to 25% of their unspent levy to other businesses and organisations so that they can use that to support their own apprenticeships. The County Council is working with the LEP to do this in relation to the unspent allocation committed towards some of our small schools that have not been able to take on apprentices.

Most of our district councils are working closely with the County Council to market the County Council's offer to transfer some of its levy to local small and medium sized businesses. Separately Scarborough Borough Council and Hambleton District Council are actively delivering their own levy transfer strategy

Refresh of North Yorkshire County Council's Plan for Economic Growth

This was also a very timely item. The plan was over three years old and so the purpose of bringing the report was for us to hear about some of the key successes delivered to date. More importantly it provided an opportunity to discuss how the refreshed plan, with its seven 'enablers', will set out how we work with local businesses to respond to the current economic crisis, as well as to other impacts providing both challenges and opportunities such as Brexit. We provided comments on the proposed amendments in the plan and the suggested time-period for when the plan should be reviewed again.

No-one can be in any doubt that that the pandemic has caused an economic as well as a health crisis like no other. Where we have seen significant impacts locally is in terms of North Yorkshire's leisure, tourism, retail and hospitality sectors. We have a higher than national average proportion of jobs in those areas and so consequently there has been a high use of the furlough scheme.

The outcome of our discussion was that we agreed with the suggested amendments to the relevant 'enablers' in the refreshed document so that they could focus more strongly on economic recovery as well as capitalising upon some of our strengths in the tourism economy, the green economy and more recently broadband connectivity thanks to previous investments made.

North Yorkshire is a good place to do business and we should highlight this. Ways to support the high street remains more important than ever and we heard about some of the existing initiatives as well as planned ones in that regard such as pedestrianising streets if there is local support primarily from the businesses operating there. Covid has accelerated the need for good connectivity including 5G in order to capitalise on attracting companies into the county and providing associated opportunities for growth. Rural and remote businesses also need to be supported in that regard.

We agreed that the timescale for the refreshed plan should be a maximum of three years before it's revised again. The future is more uncertain than ever and so to try to predict what's likely to happen beyond three years is a bit of a wasted exercise. We asked to receive an annual update on the plan so that we can see whether it needs to be reviewed before the end of those three years.

Highways Maintenance Contract

The Committee was provided with the results of the Evaluation Panel held in May 2020. Ringway met all but one of the Primary Performance Indicators and met six out of 10 Secondary Performance Indicators in 2019/20 (there were three fails and another target could not be scored due to the absence of available data).

The gully-emptying target (secondary performance indicator) had not been met again so we wanted to explore why this was the case. A GIS mapping system was introduced last year to help identify where the gullies were, which had been expected to lead to further improvement this year. It was acknowledged by Ringway and by our Highways department that whilst there had been a 10% improvement on the previous year's performance they would have liked to have seen a bigger improvement. The mapping system has taken time to bed in. Local records are kept of hotspot problems and operatives are encouraged to do more gully emptying than normal in those areas if there is more capital work that could be done at the same time to deliver better performance and reduce revenue costs. We feel though that there remain improvements to be made in that regard and we gave a local example at the meeting to illustrate this. At the same time though it has to be noted that Ringway responded to a lot of unscheduled gully emptying this year beyond the planned programme of work.

We acknowledged that it has been an unprecedented year for both Ringway and our highways team caused by the flooding at the start of this year followed by the protracted covid pandemic. Despite those challenges both organisations have managed to provide as close to a business as usual service as possible. With the improvements in performance that there has been it is hoped that a set of conditions have been created for NY Highways, the new teckal company, to take forward and improve upon yet further.

20mph speed limit policy task group

The task group's report with recommendations was approved by the Committee for submission to the Executive on 24 November 2020.

We concluded that the existing County Council policy on 20mph speed limits allows a degree of flexibility already. However, we recognised that the policy would benefit from some updating in particular being more explicit in considering 20mph speed limits around schools. By extending the area of 20mph speed limits beyond the immediate area around schools, it would give parents and pupils greater confidence that more of the roads, especially in urban areas, would allow more home to school journeys to be undertaken safely using active travel such as walking or cycling.

Accident statistics should continue to take precedence on informing whether an area is suitable or not for 20mph speed limits together with the function of the road. However, the policy should reference links to the wider policy agenda in relation to driver education, supporting alternative modes of transport and shaping the built environment. This is so that the wider policy focus is not exclusively constrained by historical accident statistics in determining 20mph

speed limits, if an otherwise strong case could be made alongside reducing road traffic casualties, such as for 'quality of life' reasons.

Single Use Plastics Task Group

Since my previous statement, the task group has met to receive a briefing from staff in our procurement and property services on North Yorkshire County Council's supply chain and the initiatives undertaken to date, put in place to reduce the council's use of single-use plastic. The task group also examined the policy statements, commitments and action plans produced by local authorities that have taken the lead to date on reducing their use of single-use plastic. The task group met again to discuss with a representative from the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the LEP's work on promoting the circular economy including examples of good business practice. A report together with recommendations is due to come to the Committee in due course.

Committee – 21 January 2021

The following items are planned to be brought to the next committee meeting on 21 January 2020. The meeting will have an economic theme, in light of the profoundly negative impact that the pandemic has and will continue to have on the national and local economy and particularly for younger people:

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| York and North Yorkshire LEP | Annual update on the work of the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and a briefing on the LEP-led Covid Economic Recovery plan for York and North Yorkshire |
| North Yorkshire County Council's Air Quality Strategy | To be consulted on North Yorkshire County Council's Air Quality Strategy |
| Road casualties | To advise Members of the road casualty figures in 2019 and initiatives being undertaken by the work of the 95Alive Partnership |
| Highways England | Regular annual update |

County Councillor Stanley Lumley
Chairman

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6 November 2020