

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Tuesday, 3 November 2020 commencing at 11.00 am.

County Councillor Carl Les in the Chair, plus County Councillors David Chance, Gareth Dadd, Caroline Dickinson, Michael Harrison, Andrew Lee, Don Mackenzie, Patrick Mulligan, Janet Sanderson and Greg White.

Other Councillors Present: County Councillors Derek Bastiman, Jim Clark, Caroline Goodrick, Paul Haslam, Janet Jefferson, Mike Jordan, Geoff Webber & Annabel Wilkinson

Officers present: Richard Flinton, Barry Khan, Gary Fielding, Richard Webb, Karl Battersby, Stuart Carlton, Steve Evans, Melanie Carr & Daniel Harry

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

503. Introductions

Members of the Executive and Corporate Management Team introduced themselves, and County Councillor Carl Les welcomed other County Councillors present at the meeting.

504. Minutes

Resolved –

That the public Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2020, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

505. Declarations of Interest

Barry Khan, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal & Democratic Services) provided advice for those Executive members who were dual-hatted. He clarified the concept of pre-determination, confirming that they could vote at both levels as long as they were open minded at meetings to any proposals under consideration. He also confirmed that in regard to disclosable pecuniary interests, dual-hatted Councillors were not required to register their membership on the County Council or the district council, allowing them to take part and vote on the matters being considered at the meeting.

County Councillor Michael Harrison declared that he had an interest in that he had relatives that worked in Health & Adult Services. It was noted the Standards Committee had previously given him a dispensation, enabling him to participate in, and vote at the meeting.

506. Public Questions and Statements

There were no public questions or statements.

507. To approve the submission of a unitary proposal for North Yorkshire to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Considered –

A report of the Chief Executive Officer, seeking approval for the submission of a proposal for a single unitary Council in North Yorkshire. Also for the delegation of power to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Leader, to make any amendments considered necessary to the Case for Change in advance of its submission to the Government, and to submit any additional information that is considered appropriate prior to the deadline of 9th December 2020.

Richard Flinton - Chief Executive Officer, introduced the report, which provided the background to the proposal on the future shape of local government in North Yorkshire. He confirmed the proposal was for a single unitary authority for North Yorkshire based on the current county boundaries, to replace the county, district and borough councils, leaving intact the City of York as a separate council.

Richard Flinton drew members' attention to the Case for Change, which detailed the challenges facing the county of North Yorkshire, the limitations of the current structure of local government i.e. the fragmentation between services, duplication and inefficiencies in current arrangements.

He confirmed how the proposal would enhance the delivery of local government and services in a joined up way for the public of North Yorkshire, based on evidence from existing service provision. He highlighted the County Council's strong record of accomplishment for delivering outstanding services, confirming those models and best practice would be utilised to ensure delivery of a local government system that was stronger and simpler, local and effective, and efficient and sustainable. This would include delivering:

- the greatest value for money and savings, with the potential for additional savings through a programme of transformation and collaborative working with the City of York Council – a breakdown of the potential savings was provided (as detailed in the report);
- greater economies of scale;
- the greatest simplicity for partners and the public;
- essential services without disruption, managed locally through a network of local hubs;
- a greater level of localism and local accountability, with 90 councillors (one per ward) and through increased delegation to Area Constituency Committees e.g. planning, licensing and highways matters;
- community networks tasked with understanding local key issues, advising and helping Councillors and providing robust challenge;
- the empowerment of parish and town councils;

On the issue of credible geography, Richard Flinton confirmed the North Yorkshire brand was valued by local businesses and recognised nationally. He also noted the Government had confirmed in writing that the County Council was within scope in terms of their requirements regarding scale and size.

Finally, he confirmed the intention to submit a further addendum to the Case for Change detailing the good deal of support for the proposal from residents, businesses and partner organisations across the county.

County Councillor Carl Les thanked officers for their detailed work on the Case for Change and highlighted the issues of timing and size. He confirmed his view that the timing was right as the

proposal would support the County's recovery post COVID through the significant savings it could achieve. He also confirmed his view that the geography of North Yorkshire was appropriate and within scope, drawing members attention to the wording of the schedule provided by Government i.e. *'The area of each unitary authority was a credible geography and within the range of 300K – 600K, or such other figure that having regard to the circumstances of the authority including local identity and geography, could be considered substantial'*.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman thanked officers for their presentation on the proposal at a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Board, and provided feedback from Scrutiny Board members e.g.:

- A reorganisation of local government was the right way forward and the timing was right particularly from an economic point of view, post Covid;
- This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to drive out large-scale savings, which should come back to local government and not be clawed back by central government
- A move to a unitary authority provided an opportunity to drive forward the levelling up agenda;
- Communities should not be split as a result of a review by the Boundary Commission, and local Councillors should be consulted;
- One Councillor per electoral division was the right way forward for the sake of public accountability;
- Using the constituency boundaries within the unitary North Yorkshire proposal, created confusion;
- Changes to Council Tax should happen over a number of years to limit its impact;
- Parish Councils should not be pressured to take on extra responsibilities, with the delegation of extra responsibilities taking place gradually through a clear framework and with checks and balances;
- Parish clusters may be an appropriate option moving forward
- Scrutiny should be involved in the development and implementation of the proposal;
- The shortages in social and affordable housing needed addressing;
- There should be local access to services and decision making
- Consideration should be given to the costs associated with the running of the Area Constituency Committees
- The implications on elections and council staff needed careful consideration

County Councillor Caroline Goodrick raised the issue of planning and concern about the proposal for a single Local Plan for the whole of North Yorkshire. In response, it was confirmed the seven current Local Plans would be inherited and layered under one over-arching strategic Plan as a separate chapter for each district area. The expertise from within the current Local Plan teams would be consolidated into one corporate team tasked with delivering each Plan.

County Councillor David Chance confirmed his view that strategic planning issues such as the Mineral & Waste Plan should remain the remit of the County Council with local planning applications, licensing and scrutiny functions being undertaken by the appropriate Area Constituency Committee.

In relation to the Local Plan and the issues raised by Cllr Goodrick, Karl Battersby, Corporate Director for Business & Environmental Services confirmed his experience of working in unitary authorities, and how they had been able to combine a strategic vision for the area whilst

maintaining local aspects, views and values.

In response to a query from County Councillor Mike Jordan, it was confirmed that a unitary council would be best placed to address the driving factors behind the County's deep-rooted areas of deprivation, and Richard Flinton drew attention to the work already underway by the District Councils and the County Council. County Councillor Mike Jordan also queried the proposed number of Councillors, and it was confirmed that 90 was considered the appropriate number and that those Councillors would be better resourced going forward.

County Councillor Paul Haslam confirmed his view that the proposed changes in governance needed to take place rapidly in order to maintain the focus on post-Covid recovery and climate change. It was agreed that tackling climate change would be much easier through an improved localism agenda.

Executive Members agreed that the timing was precisely right because of Covid, with the savings that it could deliver being absolutely necessary at this time. They went on to individually voice their support for the proposal recognising that splitting the county would be a retrograde step that would be detrimental to their individual portfolios e.g.:

- The benefit of not breaking up and dividing the delivery of those services considered nationally as excellent;
- Being able to tackle large scale issues across the county, both strategically and at a local level
- In regard to health and wellbeing, not losing the influence on wider determinants;
- Maintaining the economies of scale;
- Maintaining the excellent working relationships built up with partners over many years and not diminishing the Authority's level of influence on them;

County Councillor Gareth Dadd confirmed that Unison was in favour of the proposal. He also confirmed it would enable the continued care of the County's most vulnerable residents.

Richard Flinton left the meeting at 12pm.

County Councillor Geoff Webber, Leader of the Opposition confirmed he fundamentally agreed with the comments made at the meeting, and welcomed the opportunities that unitary would bring to tackle entrenched deprivation in the county by enabling a greater focus upon the provision of social and affordable housing.

Gary Fielding, Assistant Chief Executive (Strategic Resources) confirmed the added value per resident that the proposal could deliver would provide opportunities for future investment, which otherwise may not be possible.

Barry Khan, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal & Democratic Services), outlined the next stages of the process and confirmed there would be no immediate change to local Government, which would happen at the earliest in April 2022.

Finally, County Councillor Carl Les thanked everyone for their contribution and welcomed ongoing engagement with the Group Leaders and all Councillors to further refine the proposal over November, ahead of the submission of the final proposal in early December.

Executive Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations and it was

Resolved – That:

- i. The strategic Case for Change for a single unitary council for North Yorkshire be approved and recommended to the County Council at its meeting on 4th November for its endorsement and submission for consideration by the Government.
- ii. The Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Leader, be authorised to make any amendments and actions considered necessary to the Case for Change in advance of its submission to the Government by 9th November 2020, and to submit any additional information that is considered appropriate prior to the deadline of 9th December 2020.

The meeting concluded at 12:20pm

MLC