

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Tuesday, 8 December 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 Stanley Lumley, Janet Jefferson, Derek Bastiman, Annabel Wilkinson, John Ennis and Paul Haslam,

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

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

517. Minutes

Resolved –

That the public Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

518. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

County Councillor Michael Harrison declared two personal non prejudicial interests in regard to Agenda Item 5 - Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring and Budget Report, both of which the Standards Committee had previously given him a dispensation for, enabling him to participate in, and vote at the meeting. The first that he had relatives that worked in Health & Adult Services and secondly, as an employee of a Bank named in the report.

519. Exclusion of the Public and Press

The Chairman confirmed that Agenda item 10 was to be deferred and therefore there was no longer a reason to exclude the public and press from part of the meeting.

520. Public Questions and Statements

There were no public questions or statements.

520. Q2 Performance Monitoring and Budget Report

Considered –

A joint report of the Chief Executive and Corporate Director - Strategic Resources, bringing together key aspects of the County Council's performance on a quarterly basis.

Revenue Budget, Treasury Management & Capital Plan

County Councillor Gareth Dadd introduced each section of the report. In regard to Revenue, he confirmed it was the most uncertain Budget ever faced by the Authority and went on to outline the associated variables and uncertainties. These included:

- The projected overspend of approximately £1.4m – 0.36% of the budget allocation;
- Some central government grant funding not being carried forward into the next financial year. This did not include the second part of the Better Care Fund which would be carried over;
- Normal activity within HAS would have delivered an underspend of £3.6m but some pent up demand was expected post Covid.
- The Care market had needed support, particularly in the Harrogate area, requiring a disproportionate level of additional resource;
- A loss on non-council tax related income through a lack of activity e.g. the Registrar Service

He noted a fund had been built in this year to address a loss in Council Tax income, which would otherwise have affected the budget for next year. In addition, that there had been a delay in achieving savings (£2.4m), in part because of Covid but also due to a number of challenges pre-Covid.

In regard to reserves and the mid term financial strategy, Councillor Gareth Dadd advised caution and confirmed the financial settlement from the spending review was expected mid December 2020.

Gary Fielding, Corporate Director for Strategic Resources confirmed that as part of the spending review, all of the government's one off grants would be carried forward, but stressed this would not negate the massive uncertainties in the coming two years.

In regard to Treasury Management, County Councillor Gareth Dadd confirmed the average rate of return on the Council's cash balances had performed exceptionally well against other benchmarks (0.67%), and a reduction was projected on all external debt by approximately £27m.

It was noted the Government had withdrawn its previous increase in interest rates on Public Works Loan Board loans, in line with their purge on Councils committing commercial investments primarily for yield. It was also confirmed that whilst none of the Council's commercial investments had required PWLB loans, and had instead been financed through the cautious use of cash reserves, those investments would now preclude the Council from accessing PWLB loans for a three-year period. The risk of not being able to access a long term loan was noted.

In regard to the Capital Plan, attention was drawn to the proposal to role £1.8m forward for a future investment in IT Technology.

Finally, Councillor Gareth Dadd drew attention to the excellent work of the street lighting team in BES and the resulting projected savings (£4m) arising from the LED replacement street lighting programme. County Councillors Don Mackenzie and Greg White both added their thanks acknowledging the savings would support future investment in technological improvements.

County Councillor David Chance introduced the section of the report on Quarter 2 performance, which provided an in-depth focus on 'Every adult has a longer healthier and independent life'. He drew attention to the addition of the Council's new ambition of 'Leading for North Yorkshire' with a focus on the Council's leadership role for the county on areas such as Covid-19, local government re-organisation and modern communications.

He also provided a detailed summary of the strengths and challenges in performance across all of the Council's ambitions, which highlighted the following:

- The development of a local outbreak management and prevention plan;
- A decrease in the average cost of a personal budget by £100 between Quarters 1 & 2;
- Assessment completion timescales remained good during the Covid outbreak, with 9,771 completed by September 2020 - an increase of 1,004 from the same period last year;
- 95% of Covid related assessments were completed within 28 days, with 64% completed within 3 days;
- Improved safeguarding outcomes with approximately 80% of safeguarding concerns being resolved at the information gathering stage without the need for progression;
- The Rural Commission had continued to meet throughout the Covid outbreak;
- Council staff's resilience through their continued delivery of council services throughout the Covid outbreak, and an acceleration of the implementation of new ways of working, enabling the Council to meet many of the objectives of its 2020 Transformation Programme;
- An increase in the employee wellbeing offer;
- A large increase in the number of customer portal accounts since the same period last year;
- The findings from the Workforce Survey which showed high levels of staff satisfaction;
- The provision of 30 NEC placements to support young people, and the provision of a gateway service to provide access to another 46 employers;
- The continued rationalisation of the Council's property portfolio;
- Support to local businesses throughout the pandemic;
- The continuing work to deliver a suitable devolution deal for North Yorkshire;
- An increase in the number of care home placements above the Council's approved rates;
- an increase in the number of complex cases coming into CYPS frontline teams and an increase in the number of cases being referred by the Police;
- The number of jobs furloughed across North Yorkshire during the Covid period (88,000), with 32% of the Council's workforce affected;

Specifically in regard to the ambition of 'Every adult has a longer healthier and independent life' County Councillor Michael Harrison confirmed that the emergency powers passed early on in the pandemic which would have enabled the Council to set aside some of the requirements of the Care Act if necessary, had not been required. He also noted:

- Staffing levels had remained fairly consistent throughout the pandemic period;
- The move to a 7-day working arrangement in line with the NHS had proved successful in allowing the Council to play its part in regard to hospital discharges and the prevention of admissions;
- Face to face contact had been successfully minimised wherever possible;
- An enormous amount of support had been given to care providers, with the need for a small number of interventions;
- The Council's flagship extra care programme had continued throughout the pandemic, with dates for new schemes coming online;
- A large reduction in front door contacts, and a dip in reablement performance;
- Some delays in the renewal of care plans;
- The pressure on care home costs and its impact on the Council's budget;

Richard Webb, Corporate Director for Health & Adult Services confirmed it had been a year of extremes with a massive shift in focus to Covid related activity, with an impressive level of support given by the Community Support teams. He drew attention to a decrease in long-term care home admissions and an increase in short term placements, in part due to the national pathway with the NHS. He also highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by providers across North Yorkshire.

He noted the significant increase in public health spend due to Covid and the new grants coming forward as a result. Finally, he recorded his thanks to colleagues across Adult Social Care and Public Health, and the wider care sector, for how they had responded throughout the pandemic period.

Following a number of questions on healthy and independent living from John Ennis, Chair of the Scrutiny of Health Committee, Richard Webb confirmed:

- Changes to ways of working were made throughout both the first and second wave in order to address lessons learnt along the way;
- The NHS was meeting the majority of the costs associated with short-term placements;
- Work was ongoing to reassess those placements in light of the regulations that came in to place in September;
- The changes in patterns of behaviour as a result of Covid e.g. some people had adjusted to life in nursing care and were now reluctant to return to living alone;
- Some pent up demand e.g. the potential for an increase in the need for mental health crisis services and an increase in long term health needs as a result of the impact of Covid;

There were a number of further questions from members of the Scrutiny Board on the Council's other ambitions, and in response, officers confirmed the following:

- Council offices had been made Covid secure and safe for the small number of staff who had not worked from home during the pandemic period.
- The need for a further reduction in office space was expected beyond that planned as part of the rationalisation works;
- Work was underway to understand the long term impact on future working practices beyond the pandemic, and plans were being developed to engage staff on how that could be supported;
- Children's Services contacts reduced initially as a result of the pandemic thought to be due to school closures and reduced access to GPs, both of which would normally identify issues and refer in;
- The ability to contact services via telephone had not be removed, with the Contact Centre and the Emergency Duty Teams remaining in place throughout the pandemic;
- There was no wrong door for contacting Council Services, either via the website, the contact centre or for additional support, via the libraries;
- The increase in Police referrals was likely because of their short term response to Covid i.e. they had pushed themselves to ask more safeguarding questions when attending an incident, or as a result of their sharpened attention to hidden harm and domestic abuse;
- The Community Support Organisations had only been commissioned for the duration of the pandemic period, but the community contacts made by them would be maintained going forward;
- Retention of volunteers post pandemic would be the focus of the Communities team;
- SEND budgets had been increased for the first time in many years, and another increase was expected;

- Children whose parents had chosen to go for elected home education during the pandemic had lost their school place;
- The Council had limited powers to intervene on the quality of elected home education;
- Families who chose to go for elected home education lost access to free school meals;
- The attendance of children with SEND was broadly in line with the attendance of other children;
- There had been additional funding for emotional support for children in schools, with training and support being provided in schools. There was also catch-up funding available for those pupils who had fallen behind;
- All Education Health & Care Plans would be reviewed as part of the usual annual review cycle;
- Work was underway to limit job losses as a result of the pandemic, and to support employers with their recovery. As part of the LEPs Post Covid Recovery Plan, new schemes and investments would be brought forward which would help generate jobs, and re-training would be available to enable re-deployment in to other areas of the economy;
- Government advice remained in place that public transport should not be used unless absolutely necessary, although lasting effects on public transport use were not expected;
- Rail patronage was way down with many trains running at only 25% capacity;
- Funding of train operators were being totally subsidised by the tax payer as franchises had been taken over by the Government;
- The Council continued to pay Bus Companies for subsidised bus services, concessionary fares and home to school transport in order to safeguard those services;

County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, Young People's Champion, highlighted a project being undertaken by a Young People's Council on access to rural transport, and requested that the Executive Member for Access consider supporting a future scheme.

She also passed on her thanks to the Corporate Director for Health & Adult Services and his teams and to the Children and Young People's Services in particular the Leaving Care Team and the Virtual School, who had gone above and beyond to help young people throughout the pandemic.

Overall, the Scrutiny Board members thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for their excellent communication and for the sharing of information provided throughout the pandemic.

County Councillor Paul Haslam welcomed the report and raised the issue of the quality of nutrition in care homes, for those suffering with Alzheimer's, and for young children to ensure their best start in life. He also suggested that a shift to a more plant based diet would have a knock-on positive affect on climate change, as it would start a virtuous circle, moving the market and food providers. He went on to ask that the mitigation of climate change start to be more thoroughly integrated in to future reports.

In response, Richard Webb confirmed that as an in-house provider of meals, the Council followed all the associated rules and regulations around menu setting and noted the importance of balancing healthy eating with treats. He confirmed that the Council was unable to instruct care providers to do the same but it did work with them on good practice. Also, that the lessons learnt coming out of Covid would not be lost, particularly around how the Council worked with Care homes going forward, and the issues around nutrition could be included in that.

Executive Members voted unanimously in favour of all of the recommendations within the report, and it was

Resolved – That:

- a. The latest position for the County Council's 2020/21 Revenue Budget, as summarised in the

- report at paragraph 2.1.2. be noted
- b. The position on the GWB, (shown in the report at paragraphs 2.4.1 to 2.4.3) be noted.
 - c. The position on the 'Strategic Capacity – Unallocated' reserve (shown in the report at paragraphs 2.4.4 to 2.4.6) be noted.
 - d. The position on the County Council's Treasury Management activities during the second quarter of 2020/21 be noted.
 - e. The report be referred to the Audit Committee for their consideration as part of the overall monitoring arrangements for Treasury Management.
 - f. The refreshed Capital Plan summarised in the report at paragraph 4.2.3 be approved.
 - g. The proposal to fund the Technology and Change Roadmap 2020-2025 as set out in the report at paragraph 4.2.29, be approved.
 - h. No action be taken at this stage to allocate any additional capital resources (paragraph 4.5.7)
 - i. The performance update be noted

521. Children and Young People's Service - Schools Condition Capital Programme 2020/21

Considered – Report of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Service providing a

County Councillor Patrick Mulligan introduced the report which provided an overview of the capital budget available for school maintenance and refurbishment works , and detailed the proposed £1.8m spend to address a backlog of maintenance issues associated with boilers and infrastructure. The benefits derived from the replacement of the boilers e.g. reduced emissions and running costs were noted.

Jon Holden, Head of Property Services confirmed that consideration had been given to the use of low and de-carbonised technology but noted that the County Council would need to undertake further work to understand the design and operational issues associated with those technologies within operational buildings. He also noted that the County Council's school estate comprised buildings of a broad range of ages and property types and as a result, it was likely that a broad range of solutions would be required. Finally, he confirmed:-

- The Council was actively looking at the potential use of alternative technologies for other projects, and would bring forward such proposals in due course;
- Some of the existing boilers were upwards of 40years old and their replacement with new boilers alongside appropriate training on their use, would reduce both energy consumption and carbon emissions, typically by 15-20%
- Notwithstanding the age of the current boilers the expected lifetime for a boiler was approximately 15 years and therefore within that timescale there would be an opportunity to consider other alternatives for the buildings in the report
- The County Council was committed to working to improve energy efficiency in, and reduce carbon emissions from, the school estate.
- The Schools Energy Team worked with schools to promote energy efficiency and better behaviours within schools around energy utilisation.

It was acknowledged that work was still required to develop the Council's knowledge of the alternative sustainable technologies available, to ensure that as part of future assessments those alternatives were fully considered.

The Executive voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, and it was

Resolved – That:

- i. The proposed addition to the Schools Capital Programme for 2020/21 as summarised in Appendix A be approved.
- ii. The intention that £2.79m, constituting the unallocated element of the additional funding, be rolled forward for inclusion in the Schools Capital Programme for 2021/22 be noted.

522. Annual Complaints Report including LGSCO Complaints

Considered – A report of the Chief Executive providing an overview of performance in relation to complaints and information on compliments received by the Council during the year 2019/20.

County Councillor Greg White introduced the report and drew attention to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual letter to the Council at appendix 1.

A considerable increase in the number of compliments was noted, and it was

Resolved - That the report be noted.

523. Area Constituency Committee Feedback Report

Considered – A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal & Democratic Services) providing an overview of the key issues considered at a recent meeting of the Harrogate & Knaresborough Area Constituency Committee.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

524. Forward Work Plan

Members considered the Forward Plan for the period from 10 November 2020 to 30 November 2021.

Resolved - That the Forward Plan be noted.

525. Potential Purchase of Land within the Harrogate Borough Area

Resolved – That consideration of the report be deferred to a future meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12:42pm
MLC