

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
SCARBOROUGH & WHITBY AREA CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE
20 MARCH 2020

RURAL COMMISSION UPDATE

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services)

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update the committee on the work of the Rural Commission, and to initiate a discussion about whether the committee wishes to consider submitting a report as part of the Commission's 'call for evidence'.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's Rural Commission was established in October 2019. The purpose and aims of the Rural Commission are as follows:

- Recommend the actions that local partners should take over the next ten, 20 and 30 years in order to maximise the sustainability of the super-sparse rural communities in North Yorkshire.
- Improve the evidence base and arguments that will enable local partners to make the case successfully for increased government support to maximise the sustainability of the super-sparse rural communities in North Yorkshire.

- 2.2 The Commission is an independent group which is self-governing, impartial and non-political. The Commission is not a part of, or aligned to, the County Council or any other partner organisation.

- 2.3 The Rural Commission Panel is made up of 8 independent members and it is chaired by the Very Rev John Dobson DL, Dean of Ripon. The panel is aided in its work by a reference group of key stakeholders. This includes: the leaders of the district councils in North Yorkshire; the two national park authorities in the county; and North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership.

3.0 RURAL COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

- 3.1 The work programme of the Commission is extensive and wide ranging. The Commission agreed in their inaugural meeting that they would tackle the main part of the task on a theme-by-theme basis. The Commission also recognised the interplay between the themes and acknowledged a number of additional cross-cutting themes, largely but not exclusively linked to the wider socio-economic and material environment and the distinctive demographic characteristics evident in North Yorkshire.

- 3.2 The themes to be examined in-depth are:

- Farming and Food
- Economy and Jobs
- Housing
- Education, Schools and Training

- Transport
- Accessibility - Digital Broadband and Mobile
- Energy and Environment

3.3 The overall approach developed by the Commission includes a programme of evidence sessions; a separate public call for written evidence from people and organisations who would like to submit written material to support the work of the Commission; a programme of external visits across the county that will allow Commissioners to explore and observe the lived reality of people from the most rural communities in North Yorkshire; and additional appointments with MPs as part of a programme of engagement with key political figures and central government officials.

4.0 DATA & ANALYSIS

4.1 One key feature of the work of the Commission is to assemble and interrogate a wide range of data and intelligence that will make up the evidence base and underpin the conclusions and recommendations made by the Commission. The main source of information for the evidence base will originate and grow from the core work programme set out above, including a schedule of evidence sessions, the call for evidence, a programme of visits and additional rounds of engagement.

4.2 The Commission is supported in its work by a secretariat of County Council officers, who help to organise the various meetings of the Commission and manage the communications and media that is generated from the work of the Commission. The secretariat also supports the Commission to bring together and organise the evidence base and to help with the collation of the extensive information that is made available to the Commission – but not with the interrogation or the analysis of the data, which is the responsibility of the Commissioners.

5.0 PROGRESS TO DATE

5.1 The evidence sessions have been scheduled to run monthly from December 2019 up until June 2020 (see table below). Each evidence session includes discussions with small groups of participants and the Commission, which includes introductory presentations from contributors and a question-led discussion which is overseen by the Chair of the Commission. The main focus of the debate at the evidence sessions is centred on the critical issues and challenges identified by the participants and any ideas and thinking from the participants about the best ways the Commission might wish to tackle the problems they have raised.

Programme of planned evidence sessions of the Rural Commission	
Date	Evidence Session
18 th December 2019	Farming and Food
23 rd January 2020	Economy and Jobs
26 th February 2020	Housing
26 th March 2020	Education, Schools and Training
22 nd April 2020	Transport
20 th May 2020	Accessibility – Digital Broadband and Mobile
17 th June 2020	Energy & Environment

5.2 The three evidence sessions held to date and heard from 26 participants speaking on issues affecting farming and food, the rural economy and jobs, and rural housing. During this time the Commission has recorded eight hours of audio from these sessions and

generated more than 10,000 words of key notes from conversations with participants. The Commission has engaged with 18 different organisations and received 14 separate written submissions from individuals and agencies who have responded to the call for evidence. Many other reports have also been made available to the Commission, in order to inform thinking, including academic research papers, government reports or government commissioned research, and scientific reports on specific topics.

5.3 Involvement of County Councillors & Others

County Councillors can be actively involved in the work of the Rural Commission in a number of ways. They can suggest the topics they would like to see debated by the Commission, under the agreed themes, and inform the Commission about the key challenges in their local areas (some County Councillors have already started to do this). It would also be helpful if County Councillors could encourage local people, businesses and organisations with views and practical ideas about the issues that affect our most rural communities to contact the Commission directly.

5.4 Written submissions on any issue can be sent by email at any time up until May 2020, to: ruralcommission@northyorks.gov.uk .

5.5 Further information on the work of the Rural Commission is available via the following link - <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/north-yorkshire-rural-commission>

REPORTING LINES

6.1 The Commission provides updates on its progress and achievements to a Reference Group that was set up to encourage and counsel the Commission, and to act as a sounding board for the Commission, but the Commission is not accountable to the Reference Group. The Reference Group is chaired by the Leader of the County Council and includes the Leaders of the District Councils, the Chairs of the National Park Authorities, and Chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

6.2 The report of the Commission will be presented to the County Council, and it is intended that the key findings and recommendations considered by Executive members and by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

7.0 OUTCOMES & OUTPUT

7.1 The recommendations of the Rural Commission will be informed by the wide ranging and extensive evidence base assembled by the Commission. All of the evidence that is submitted to the Commission will be made available to the public.

7.2 The main output will be a report of key findings and recommendations, to be published in Autumn 2020. The report will summarise the results of the work of the Commission, their conclusions, and perhaps most importantly, it will set out the Commission's recommendations about the actions that local partners should take over the next ten, twenty and thirty years, in order to maximise the sustainability and future prosperity of the most rural communities in North Yorkshire.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial, legal or equalities implications associated with the recommendation in this report.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 To have a discussion about whether the committee wishes to consider submitting a report as part of the Commission's 'call for evidence'.

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7 February 2020

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Background documents: None

Appendices: None