

North Yorkshire County Council

Transport, Economy and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 30 October 2013 at 10.00 am.

Present:-

County Councillor David Jeffels in the Chair.

County Councillors Margaret Atkinson, Bernard Bateman (substitute for Robert Baker), David Chance, Andrew Goss, Michael Heseltine, Bill Hout (substitute for Bryn Griffiths), Robert Heseltine, Peter Horton, Penny Marsden, Robert Packham, Richard Welch and Robert Windass.

In attendance:

County Councillors Gareth Dadd, Carl Les and Chris Metcalfe.

Officers:

Tom Bryant, Transport Projects Officer (BES), David Bowe, Corporate Director (BES), James Farrar, Assistant Director: Economic Partnership Unit (BES), Mike Roberts, Head of Highways Operations (BES), Keeley Metcalfe, HR Advisor: Resourcing & Reward (Central Services), Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer (Central Services), Jane Venn, 14-19 Strategy & Commissioning Manager (CYPS) and Emily Wren, Senior HR Advisor: Resourcing & Reward (Central Services).

Present by Invitation:

David Shields, North Yorkshire Area Director (Welcome to Yorkshire).

No members of the public attended.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

10. Minutes

That the Minutes of the meetings held on 17 July 2013 and 9 October 2013, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11. Public Questions or Statements

There were no public questions or statements to put to the Committee.

12. Business & Environmental Services Directorate

Considered –

The oral update from the NYCC Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services highlighting some of the recent issues considered by the Executive since the last meeting of the Committee and identifying some of the key issues and priorities for the coming months.

The key issues reported by David Bowe were as follows:

- The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and how the County Council was interacting with the development of the Strategic Economic Plan to be submitted to government in December: The North Yorkshire Local Transport Body (LTB) had been established to put forward major schemes for delivery and was in essence the transport body for the LEP. The LTB was chaired by County Councillor Gareth Dadd and County Councillor Chris Metcalfe was a voting member. Neither the LTB or the LEP would deliver the projects; delivery would be the responsibility of the project sponsors. The schemes put forward needed to be appropriate for the Strategic Economic Plan; and ultimately the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills would determine which schemes would go ahead based upon how effective it believed the proposals were.
- Bedale, Aiskew Leeming Bar Bypass: The contracts had been put out to tender with a deadline for returned submissions set for December. The award of contracts would be made in summer 2014.
- Whitby Park & Ride: The contracts had been put out to tender for the Park & Ride Scheme and the awards of contract would be made shortly. There were still outstanding issues to resolve in respect of the Residents Parking scheme and a report would be presented to the January meeting of the Yorkshire Coast & Moors Area Committee.
- County-wide civil parking enforcement: The Executive had approved the process for further parking management measures to be introduced in Hambleton, Selby, Craven, Ryedale and Richmondshire; and had approved the publication of a proposed Traffic Order for the introduction of a charging regime for parking on Northallerton High Street.
- Tour de France: The County Council's programme of highways work was in hand. Highway patching in the Harrogate area would commence early in 2014, subject to the weather. The major works to be undertaken on the A61 and A59 would be carried out between 7pm to midnight in order to reduce disruption.
- Ringway (Highways Maintenance Contract): The County Council was continuing to press Ringway to improve its performance. Performance was improving with 65% of the primary indicators reaching a satisfactory level now compared to 48% in March. However there was still a need to see further improvements. The performance review meeting would be held in November.
- Passenger Transport: The consultation on the proposed reduction to bus subsidy proposals would close on 25 November. To date, of those respondents who had made suggestions for ways to make savings, the highest proportion had called for the introduction of charges for concessionary fares. Other issues raised had been the need to protect rural services in order to avoid increasing rural isolation, and to introduce smaller buses in order to reduce running costs. David Bowe explained that the latter point was more of a practical issue and the County Council had raised this with the bus operators before.

- Waste and regulatory services – Allerton Park Waste Incinerator (AWRP): The Court of Appeal had refused permission for Marton-cum-Grafton Parish Council to appeal against the High Court's Judgment handed down in August 2013. The August judgment had refused a Judicial Review into the AWRP's planning permission.
- The company that had submitted plans for a potash mine in the North York Moors National Park would be submitting a revised planning application. This could include expanding the boundary of the mining operation outside of the national park, which would mean a new planning application would be required to be made to North Yorkshire County Council and the national park authority. In essence this would mean that the planning application as a whole would need to be approved by both organisations.
- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS): The directorate was still on target to meet the savings targets in the current MTFS and was likely to achieve the savings a year ahead of target. The next tranche of savings of £77m in the County Council's budget from 2015/16 to 2018/19 would mean that if the savings were made on a pro-rata basis, the Business and Environmental Services Directorate would see a £16m to £17m reduction in its budget. The directorate's annual spend was £78m with an additional £15m provided in income. Over 70% of the directorate's budget was spent on third party contract delivery. This would mean that there would inevitably be further service reductions.

Members made the following key comments:

- North Yorkshire County Council's position on HS2: David Bowe replied that from an officer point of view there was no position statement at present; no report had been submitted to the Executive about HS2. Officers would however be engaging with HS2 representatives in order to have an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the project. County Councillor Chris Metcalfe confirmed that the Executive did not have a policy position on HS2 at this moment in time. He had attended meetings with community representatives in his Division living close to the proposed HS2 phase two extension from Leeds to the East Coast network. He had also had met with representatives from HS2 to try to ascertain what the business case was for the phase 2 extension and the impact that this would have on Northallerton. City of York Council was keen for the extension to go ahead. In response to a further question Councillor Metcalfe confirmed that the Leeds City Region LEP was supportive of HS2. However this was in relation to bringing HS2 to Leeds. The impact of the extension from Leeds to the East Coast mainline and related business case was a separate issue. A number of Members remarked that higher priority should be given instead to reinstating rail connections from the market towns in the county to the East Coast mainline.
- The Chairman asked if the Business and Environmental Services Directorate had any outline ideas about where the further savings. David Bowe said that the £16m-£17m figure needed to be treated with caution at this stage as this figure was calculated on a pro-rata basis. The issue of the actual percentage reduction in the directorate's budget was not known at this stage. Assistant Directors across the organisation had however been asked to provide an outline of what their services would look like based upon two scenarios of a higher or lower percentage reduction in their budget. Any budget reduction would impact upon front line service delivery due to the majority of the budget being taken up in third party costs. It was also important to ensure that at the same time sufficient funding was set aside for the winter maintenance service.

- A number of Members on the Committee had lobbied their local Member of Parliament to introduce charges for concessionary fares so that bus travel corresponded to rail travel in respect of the senior railcard. It was noted that concessionary fares were frequently being used by pass-holders for leisure purposes rather than for accessing essential services. At the national political level, however, there was a reluctance to introduce charges for fear that it would be politically unpopular.
- Raising the age at which a person is eligible to apply to the concessionary fares scheme. David Bowe noted that the retirement age was being increased on a graduated basis and he would ensure that the County Council's concessionary fares scheme complied with the plans to increase the retirement age.
- Concern about the number of potholes on secondary roads and the high rejection rate of pothole-related claims submitted by motorists to the County Council. An increase in Council Tax would help to provide the funding for improving the roads in the county. David Bowe replied that the repairs that the County Council made to its vast road network represented good value and it was important that the Council was robust in its response to insurance claims. County Councillor Gareth Dadd stated that an additional £5m in the highways maintenance budget would not make a significant difference to the state of the county's road network and even then there would need to be an on-going maintenance programme. The strategic routes in the county fared well in comparison with other areas of the country.
- Concerns that Ringway's performance was not improving quickly enough. David Bowe responded by noting that a number of senior members of staff within the company had changed and the County Council had seen improvements as a result. Ringway did take the Council's contract seriously at all levels within the organisation. County Councillor Dadd said that the company was aware of the reputational damage that would arise if the Council reduced the contract term and the Council was using every power to drive up performance.
- The budget used for the accelerated highways maintenance programme on the route of the Tour de France and the implications for road maintenance elsewhere in the county. David Bowe explained that the budget spend was primarily for works that would have been required within the next five years, with the highest proportion being required within the next two years. There would be some impact upon the maintenance programme elsewhere in the county. The Executive had, however, awarded £2m - approximately half the budget - from the corporate pot to re-programme the highways works and mitigate most of the impacts in other parts of the county. Councillor Dadd said that when combined with the £2m from the corporate pot and the additional funding received from government there would be a net positive effect.

Resolved –

That the oral update from the NYCC Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services be noted.

13. Tour de France

Considered –

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services/oral update from the Area Director of Welcome to Yorkshire to provide an update on planning within North Yorkshire for the 2014 Tour de France.

Tom Bryant, Transport Projects Officer provided an overview of the County Council's planning arrangements for the Tour de France, including the key tasks leading up to and during the event.

He explained that the County Council was working with partner organisations in particular the Police, district councils and the neighbouring highways authorities to manage road closures. Some roads would be closed the day before the Stage 1 event taking place on Saturday 5 July. This was in order to ensure that the race route was protected. The biggest challenge would be in terms of traffic management in the Yorkshire Dales and Harrogate. Two traffic management scenarios had been produced: one based on fine weather and the other on wet weather.

The County Council was also liaising with the Local Enterprise Partnership to contact businesses, and a communications plan was being developed to inform residents, businesses, spectators and parish councils about road closures and parking arrangements leading up to and during the event. Welcome to Yorkshire was working with the County Council to identify temporary car parks and campsites. Work was also being undertaken with Welcome to Yorkshire and the LEP to try to maximise economic opportunities beyond the event itself.

David Shields, North Yorkshire Area Director (Welcome to Yorkshire) said that the Tour provided a once in a lifetime opportunity to promote the county. There had been excellent media coverage to date with a lot of interest from visiting journalists. Welcome to Yorkshire was keen to harness the legacy benefits of the event and to this end was working with businesses to encourage them to make the most of the opportunities that the Tour would bring. Improving customer service particularly in the hospitality sector was important to ensure that customers made return visits to the county. Leading up to the Tour, there would be a 100 day art and cultural festival. Welcome to Yorkshire was promoting all events and festivals held in the period on its website.

He went on to note that 2014 would be the first year ever that the Tour de France had had an official charity. In 2014 this would be Marie Currie and all funds raised would stay in Yorkshire.

Members made the following key comments:

- The extent of co-ordination, if any, between the organisers of the Tour and the Great Yorkshire Show. Tom Bryant explained that there were good links between the two events, and the Lead Officer for the Traffic Management Plan for the Tour de France was also working on the arrangements for the Great Yorkshire Show.
- The arrangements being made to provide secure parking for cycles. David Shields replied that local communities were being encouraged to open up church halls to provide secure arrangements. Some temporary campsites would also be providing lockable containers.
- The security arrangements that were being put in place. Tom Bryant explained that all three police forces for South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire were working closely together to plan for every eventuality. The Policing Plan for the Tour had a single command structure.
- The Quarter finals of the football World Cup being held on the same day of Stage One of the Tour and the potential for there to be crowd trouble. Tom Bryant confirmed that the World Cup was on Police's radar with regards to issues around drinking.

- The potential to make use of agricultural land as temporary car parks. Tom Bryant replied that the County Council was working with the relevant district council and National Park to confirm parking arrangements and in the course of this was approaching parish councils, the National Farmers Union and landowners to ascertain which landowners would be willing to provide temporary parking on their land. This would then be built into the traffic management plan.
- The potential to use Wetherby and Thirsk racecourses to provide a Park and Ride facility. Tom Bryant replied that this was being looked into but the key was ensuring that the buses would be able to have a priority route, and this had to be balanced against keeping a free flow of traffic.

Resolved –

That the Committee notes the update on planning within North Yorkshire for the 2014 Tour de France.

14. Economic Development – 5 Year Strategic Growth Strategy

Considered –

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services to provide an update on the development of a five year Strategic Economic Plan by the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

James Farrar, Assistant Director: Economic Partnership Unit, provided an overview of the development of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and its purpose as set out in section 2 of the report.

He went on to refer to section 3 of the report setting out the priorities and objectives of the SEP and the funding streams that were involved including the Single Local Growth Fund and EU Strategic Investment Funds. The priorities were: profitable and ambitious small and micro businesses; a global leader in food manufacturing, agri-tech and biorenewables; inspired people; successful and distinctive places; and a well-connected economy. The SEP would need to be submitted to government by December 2013.

Members made the following key comments:

- The extent to which, if any, there was a shortage of industrial land in the county. James Farrar said there was not a significant shortage of industrial land in the county. Thirsk, York, Malton and Scarborough had land that could be readily developed. However the key issue that needed to be driven forward was having the right transport infrastructure and supply chain in place in order to attract new companies into the county. Housing, roads, flood alleviation improvements etc. needed to be planned and carried out on an integrated basis
- The poor east-west connections in the county, resulting in ever-increasing travel times, and traffic congestion in and around Harrogate. A northern bypass for Harrogate was long overdue. James Farrar agreed that traffic congestion was a problem in the Harrogate area. The County Council and Harrogate Borough Council were working together to identify the right solutions; however any proposal would not be produced in time to be part of the first SEP.

- The need to make the A64 a dual carriageway from York to Scarborough in order to attract more businesses to locate in and around Scarborough and thereby create more sustainable employment. It was noted that the Highways Agency would be called to a future meeting of the Committee to explain about their plans for the A64. It was also noted that one of the potential schemes to be submitted to the Local Transport Board for potential inclusion in the SEP was an aspirational package of improvements to the A64 York to Scarborough.
- The need to incorporate quality of life and environmental issues into the SEP priorities and the need to incorporate baseline figures into the outcomes for each of the priorities so that their success could be measured over the lifetime of the SEP. James Farrar replied that benchmark figures would be incorporated into the outcomes for each of the SEP priorities.
- The closure of Claro army barracks at Ripon could provide an opportunity for the site to be developed to attract new businesses. James Farrar noted Harrogate Borough Council was currently undertaking an appraisal of the impact of the closure however the location of the site could be problematic for anything other than housing development. In addition there was uncertainty as to when the Army would be moving out.
- In respect of the South Skipton Employment Zone there needed to be upfront public investment to fund the provision of essential site infrastructure, in particular flood alleviation measures and the construction of access roads. The current economic climate meant that the development would not happen if commercial enterprises were expected to fund the site infrastructure including flood alleviation. James Farrar acknowledged the difficulties of the current situation adding that the LEP was currently working with the Environment Agency to address the flood alleviation issues. A developer was in place to progress some of the site once the flood alleviation work was complete. A bid could then be submitted through the LEP plan to provide funding for other infrastructure developments required for the South Skipton Employment Zone.
- The longstanding prevalence of a low wage economy in the county and how realistically this could be tackled by the LEP in light of its smaller budget in comparison with the former Regional Development Agency. James Farrar noted that median wage in the county was lower than every area in Yorkshire except Wakefield. The LEP recognised this and under the SEP priority of 'Inspired People' was working to try to increase the productivity and profitability of businesses so that higher wages could be paid to staff. Part of this included investing in workforce skills development to build a competitive advantage and encouraging businesses to enter new markets in order to expand. The funding available for skills development was not inconsiderable and the benefit that the LEPs had over the former Regional Development Agencies was that they could tailor their plans to their local area.

Resolved –

That the Committee notes the draft Strategic Economic Plan and the strategy and progress of the LEP.

15. Apprenticeships

Considered –

The report of the Senior HR Advisor (Resourcing & Reward) and the 14-19 Strategy & Commissioning Manager to provide an update on the County Council's progress in supporting apprenticeships in North Yorkshire.

Jane Venn, 14-19 Strategy & Commissioning Manager introduced the report by touching upon the range of apprenticeship programmes in the county that were external to the organisation. She explained that there had been a degree of turbulence nationally due to changes in how apprenticeship programmes were delivered. Apprenticeship programmes were now much more employer-driven. The County Council continued to work closely with the National Apprenticeship Service. In North Yorkshire the challenge was not in terms of there being insufficient apprenticeship opportunities but in terms of increasing the uptake, notably in Harrogate. To this end NYBEP Ltd. was working with schools in Harrogate to raise the profile of apprenticeship opportunities. The 16-18 year group remained the key priority group.

Emily Wren, Senior HR Advisor: Resourcing & Reward provided an overview of the apprenticeship initiatives that the County Council had led on detailed in paragraphs 7 to 12 of the report including NYCC Executive-funded apprenticeships, NYCC apprenticeships, Supporting North Yorkshire Employers, Work Experience/Traineeships, Graduate Recruitment and Additional Support for young people. She referred to Annex A of the report which detailed the range of employers who were providing the NYCC Executive-funded apprenticeships and their progress to date.

Under the 14-19 NEET ESF Contract the Council was delivering a funded programme to support young NEET people into employment or formal learning. 50 young people had been supported between 2011 and 2013. Engaging with the young people seeking support through this initiative had been challenging due to a range of factors. To address these difficulties Youth Mentors had been tasked to meet with each young person on a one to one basis.

Emily Wren went on to explain that more generally the Council was supporting other North Yorkshire employers to introduce apprenticeships.

Members made the following key comments:

- Concern about the low level of take-up of apprenticeships in the Harrogate district and reasons why. Emily Wren said that possible reasons could be that young people were leaving school with unrealistic expectations about the world of work, and transport was an issue in rural areas. Jane Venn also mentioned that the recent transfer of responsibility for providing careers information and guidance from the local authority to schools had created some disruption.
- The County Council should continue to sustain its level of investment in apprenticeships as judging by recent results they provided a sound investment for the North Yorkshire economy. County Councillor Carl Les said that he hoped the current level of investment could be sustained. Any unemployment was a waste of an individual's capacity but in his view where young people were concerned it was a tragedy. However funding for apprenticeships had to be balanced against other competing priorities.

- The extent to which the Council as a Corporate Parent was working with care leavers to assist them into apprenticeships. Emily Wren said that carer leavers were more vulnerable people and to this end the Youth Employment Service provided care leavers with specific support. There was always more that could be done to help care leavers get into employment but the funding needed to be justified. The Council had however set up four apprenticeship posts in the Children and Young People's Services Directorate for care leavers.
- The success rate of apprenticeships being completed. Emily Wren said that only a very small number of employees had not gone on to complete their apprenticeship. To date no employer had terminated an apprenticeship. The Skills Funding Agency stipulated that an apprenticeship should be for a minimum duration of 12 months.

Resolved –

That the Committee notes the information in the report.

16. Winter Service 2013/14

Considered –

The presentation by the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services to provide an overview of the Winter Service 2013/14.

Mike Roberts, Head of Highways Operations explained about the winter service. He noted that the County Council routinely treated the highest proportion of network of roads in the country. It also had the highest number of salt bins and heaps. Lessons had been learnt nationally as a result of the salt shortage occurring in 2010. A countrywide extreme weather protocol had been produced which codified many of the practices that the County Council had used in the past. The County Council had also helped to secure changes in terms of how HMRC treated the use of red diesel when agricultural vehicles were being used when gritting. There were limits to what the County Council could do in terms of keeping the entire road network open and following a successful pilot in 2010/11 the Winter Community Partnership was being rolled out to all interested parish councils. The purpose of the scheme was not to replace County Council treatment but rather to provide a supplementary or enhanced service.

Members made the following key comments:

- The ways in which the Winter Community Partnership was being promoted to parish councils, and the need to encourage parish councils to precept for additional salt bins. Mike Roberts said that all parishes had been notified about the Winter Community Partnership and further information was available on the County Council website and from the Highways Area Offices. He went on to note that there were also opportunities available to communities to purchase additional salt bins. Members could help play an important role in working with parish councils to promote the scheme. If a parish council had not applied a precept in the current financial year it could still purchase the equipment now as long as it committed to precept next year.
- The importance of protecting the winter maintenance budget from cuts as it provided a vital service to communities from both a safety and economic point of view. County Councillor Dadd said that protecting the winter maintenance budget was one of his highest priorities. However there could be no guarantees that the budget for winter

maintenance would not be cut; this service had to be considered alongside a range of other directorate front-line services.

- A Member raised concerns that despite public concerns a steep hill in North Craven located on a bus route had again not been prioritised for gritting. The County Council had a statutory duty to grit footpaths and roads and so the onus should not be placed on parish councils to step in. Mike Roberts replied that the demarcation between roads that constituted priority one and two routes had to be applied consistently across the county. The County Council's statutory duty was to maintain the highway and clear it of snow within the criteria of 'reasonableness'. The priority scheme was used to ensure that the strategic routes in the county were prioritised above other types of road. These other routes were then gritted but if it continued to snow it meant that the gritters needed to re-grit strategic routes in advance of priority two and three roads. Each autumn the Corporate Director in discussion with the Executive Member considered and approved gritting route amendments, and the vast majority of the applications made by the public were rejected. Mike Roberts went on to note that where schools were located on routes that were not on priority one and two routes, they were given early priority on priority 3 routes.

Resolved –

That the overview of the Winter Maintenance Service 2013/14 be noted.

17. Work programme

Considered –

The report of the Scrutiny Team Leader.

Asking the Committee to:

- (a) Note the information in this report.
- (b) Confirm, amend or add to the areas of work shown on the work programme schedule (attached at Annex A).

Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer reminded the Committee that an extraordinary meeting of the Committee would be held on 19 December 2013 to consider the results of the public consultation on the proposed reductions to bus service subsidy. Members of the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend in view of the proposals affecting post-16 home to school and college transport.

Resolved –

That the work programme report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 1.03pm

JS/ALJ