

North Yorkshire County Council

Transport, Economy and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 15 October 2014 at 10.00am.

Present:-

County Councillor David Jeffels in the Chair

County Councillors Margaret Atkinson, David Blades (substitute for Robert Baker), David Chance, Andrew Goss, Michael Heseltine, Robert Heseltine, Peter Horton, Penny Marsden, Bob Packham, Andy Solloway, Richard Welch, and Robert Windass.

NYCC Officers attending: David Bowe, Corporate Director (BES), Darren Griffiths, Team Leader – Traffic Engineering (BES), Douglas Huzzard, Highways Asset Manager (BES), Neil Irving, Assistant Director – Policy and Partnerships (Central Services), Allan McVeigh, Integrated Transport Group Manager (BES), Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer (Central Services) and Mark Young, Flood Management Officer (BES).

No members of the public were in attendance.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

50. Minutes

Resolved -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2014, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

51. Public Questions or Statements

There were no general public questions or statements from members of the public concerning issues not on the agenda.

52. Business and Environmental Services Directorate

Considered -

The oral report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services.

The key issues reported by David Bowe were as follows:

- Work was progressing on implementing the directorate's savings around the 2020 programme. A detailed plan of actions and activities continues to develop.

- All the political approvals from the County Council and the City of York Council had been granted to proceed towards the financial close of the long term waste contract with AmeyCespa for the Allerton Waste Recovery Park. This was on the basis that the contractor could obtain the best borrowing terms and conditions, including exchange rates, in order for the project to fall within the Value for Money Envelope. The boards of the various financial institutions involved in providing the funding for the project were in the process of meeting to confirm permission for AmeyCespa to proceed. It was hoped that the funding options would be in place shortly. Following the extraordinary County Council meeting held on 24 September 2014 a Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency (VEAT) Notice had been published in the European Journal. There had been no challenge received within the standstill period.
- The County Council had given its support to the housing growth proposals set out in the district councils' Local Plans. Four schemes were being funded by the LEP/SEP monies: Catterick, North Northallerton, Middle Deepdale (Scarborough) and Olympia Park (Selby).

Members made the following key comments:

- The Chairman commented upon the funding received from government and the match-funding provided by the County Council to fix potholes. He said that the impression was that the County Council was now winning the battle on mending potholes. David Bowe replied that the County Council was certainly in a better position with regards to long term funding for highways maintenance. It had allowed the service to plan highways repairs more effectively. The funding was not just to mend potholes but would in addition be used to carry out more surface dressing of roads that were in a reasonable condition. This was in order to slow down the pace of their deterioration, which was especially important on the rural network as roads there could often fail quickly.
- The Chairman mentioned that Devon County Council was looking at the possibility of training volunteer road wardens to help fill potholes, trim verges, clean signs and so on. He asked for David Bowe's views on this initiative. David Bowe responded by noting that it was not an initiative he was in favour of in relation to pothole repairs. This was because when road repairs were carried out it was important that the repairs were of a sufficient quality, which was not something that could be guaranteed by the use of volunteers. However where parish councils offered to carry out repairs and fund the work this was not an issue.
- The divergence of views between Harrogate Borough Council and the County Council's highways department with regards to a large speculative housing development in the district. Harrogate Borough Council was of the view that the current road structure in the local area would not support more development. However the County Council had made no objection to the proposal. David Bowe replied that the dilemma for the County Council was that every objection to a planning application had to be looked at on the basis of whether it could be defended on appeal. If it could not the County Council would have to pay for the cost of the appeal and the developer would be guaranteed full control. The issue instead was to try and work with the developer to influence their proposals. It was important to end up with robust local plans and within them to have appropriate housing levels including affordable housing. The County Council sought to work with the district councils to create a robust transport model. A concern was though that the best web-tag transport models which are recognised by the Department for Transport are very expensive.

- The potential for a Harrogate northern relief road to ease traffic congestion in Harrogate town. David Bowe replied that statistical data showed that a large percentage of all traffic going into Harrogate did not then travel on to another destination. A single relief road on the outskirts of Harrogate would therefore have limited impact although there could be other positive benefits in relation to economic development. He noted that research showed that for larger cities the most successful way of easing congestion was to have both outer and inner ring road arrangements.
- A Member noted the poor levels of air quality in parts of Knaresborough and Ripon and asked which tier of local government was responsible for managing air quality. David Bowe replied that in a two-tier end system of local government, managing air quality was the responsibility of the district/borough council. However the issue was more complex in that the County Council could help mitigate air pollution by changing the highways infrastructure. Both tiers had different but related responsibilities but both collectively looked at how the infrastructure in relation to new developments could be designed to manage air pollution levels.

Resolved -

That the oral report from the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services be noted.

53. Local Flood Risk Strategy

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services seeking the Committee's views on the present draft North Yorkshire Local Strategy for Flood Risk Management.

Mark Young introduced the report. He reminded Members that the County Council had a statutory duty to produce a Local Flood Risk Strategy. However the strategy was not about simply ticking a box. The document tied in and complemented other plans and strategies of the flood risk management authorities. Also by setting out a clear strategic direction the strategy was intended to help maximize the scale of inward investment into the county. He then proceeded to summarise the Local Flood Risk Strategy including sections 1 to 8, and went on to set out the timescales for the consultation. The proposal was to bring the finalised strategy to the Full Council meeting in February for approval.

Members made the following key comments:

- The impact that blocked gullies and drains had upon flooding. Mark Young replied that there was a programme of gully maintenance in the county but, as part of the funding objectives set out in the Local Flood Risk Strategy, there would be a more strategic and targeted approach to investment in gully maintenance. He went on to note that there was scope for more community involvement in helping to ensure that gullies and drains did not become blocked by overgrown vegetation etc.
- The extent to which paving over gardens was contributing to localised flooding incidents and what if any action could be taken to limit this. Mark Young replied

that it was a significant contributor. A recent study carried out by Welsh Water had found that within a decade of a new housing development being built 20% of the land had been paved over. Whilst there was legislation in respect of paving over front gardens the difficulty was in policing this. Also the paving over of rear gardens was just as critical in terms of adding pressure on the road drainage and sewer systems.

- Concern was expressed by a Member about previous guidance produced by DEFRA on drainage for new housing developments. He said that he was concerned about the emphasis being placed on having soak-away infiltration systems for rainfall runoff. Mark Young responded by noting that this was one of a number of outstanding changes in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 that had not yet been enacted. This had been due to the complexities of establishing responsibility for who should own and maintain drainage systems on new developments. Consequently there was no definitive answer at this stage. He went on to note that in some areas of the county due to the presence of boulder clay, soakaways were not the solution. The best solution was always to deal with water drainage as close as it occurred from its source as possible to mimic it in its natural state. Unfortunately not all developers were innovative and so often resorted to putting in soakaways.
- Clarity was needed as to which organisation in the county was the ultimate authority for the public to go to in the event of a flooding issue. Mark Young referred to section 6 setting out roles and responsibilities. He said that he hoped that the document would allow people to establish which was the appropriate organisation to respond to their particular flooding issue. If however people did not then genuinely know which organisation to turn to, or where the issue cut across the responsibilities of more than one organisation, the County Council would be able to advise. He said that it was important though that the County Council was not seen as a one stop shop for flooding issues as it was not helpful for an individual to then be passed from one organisation to another.
- Members needed to be provided with a clearer understanding of flood risk in their area. The Member raising this issue referred to the maps in section 4 showing the distribution of flood risk in the county and the pattern of recorded flooding. He asked for more clarity on the types of flooding in an area and suggested that the scale used - 100 and 200 year events - was too long to be meaningful. Mark Young said that the maps were intended to provide a starting point and had been developed since the County Council had taken on its duties as a flood authority. The maps would become more detailed over time as data was built up. The 100 and 200 timescales were based on the information currently available and the same information used by the Environment Agency. The types of flooding related to property and infrastructure. The maps contained inherited data, flooding incidents collected since 2011 and highways data historic sets. The challenge was to ensure that when justifying providing support to communities at greatest risk of flooding, account was taken of areas with a history of flooding incidents and also areas likely to suffer from increased flooding in the future due to climate change.
- Concern that tidal surges had not been taken into account in the strategy. The Member went on to ask what actions the two tiers of local government in North Yorkshire were taking to alleviate the impact of tidal surges. He gave the specific example of Whitby, noting that there were a number of factors there relating to new housing developments and ageing coastal infrastructure which could lead to an increased risk of flooding in the near future. Mark Young

replied that if any development was built correctly it should be possible to control rainfall run-off. Although planning was a function of Scarborough Borough Council the County Council did offer advice on flooding. Scarborough Borough Council and the County Council worked closely together on planning and flooding issues. This was despite the fact that the current legislation did not provide reference to two tier local government in terms of what role each should take to manage flooding or coastal erosion. The County Council did not have a flooding prevention role but had a duty to investigate flooding when it occurred. The County Council as the upper local authority tier did however have voting rights on the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, which included spend on infrastructure projects. The Borough Council had a seat on the Committee but this was in a non-voting capacity.

Resolved -

That the draft North Yorkshire Local Strategy for Flood Risk Management be noted.

54. Outcome of the 'Initial Phase' of the Temporary Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) Protocol

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services informing Members of the outcome of the 12 month 'initial phase', advising on the feedback from participating communities and reporting the overall findings of the evaluation exercise.

Allan McVeigh introduced the report and introduced Darren Griffiths, the traffic engineer involved in the VAS pilot.

Allan McVeigh noted that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' views on a proposed way forward for the rollout of the Temporary VAS Protocol which would involve inviting additional communities to participate. Referring to sections 4 and 6 of the report he noted that of the 31 communities that took part in the pilot stage, most of the feedback was positive. With reference to section 5 of the report the assessment of the performance of the vehicle activated signs had shown a tangible speed reduction when comparing 'before' speeds with 'during' speeds. As a general rule the higher the 'before' speeds were above the speed limit, the greater the percentage reduction was when the VAS was deployed.

Allan McVeigh went on to note that to date 25 as yet non-participating communities had confirmed their interest in writing to take part in the scheme. No temporary VAS would be deployed around the county however until a decision was made on its future. If the scheme did continue and additional communities took part, an additional stock of VAS would be required to satisfy demand and replace some of the existing units which were showing signs of wear and tear.

The County Council had absorbed the capital costs of purchasing the initial batch of signs in the pilot phase. It had also provided a lot of officer time in setting up and supporting the schemes – far more than anticipated. The total cost to the County Council was significant and it could not justify absorbing these costs on an ongoing basis in light of other budgetary pressures. The proposed way forward set out in paragraph 10.6 of the report was for communities located in category 4 areas (areas with a history of low speeds and low casualties) to fund all the costs associated with the project. Areas identified as category 1 (high speeds – high casualties), category 2 (low speeds – high casualties) would be required to fund some of the costs to varying

degrees.

Prior to today's meeting the Executive Portfolio Holders for BES portfolio had met to discuss the future of the scheme and the costs. Their general view was that the scheme was worth pursuing but the County Council needed to be mindful of the cost and reality regarding budget pressures. The scheme could only be a success if the County Council recouped the actual cost of its delivery.

Allan McVeigh said that a possible way forward was to engage with communities to seek their potential level of interest to participate in the scheme regarding the actual cost of the scheme to them and he sought comments from Members.

Members made the following key comments:

- The Chairman noted that there were speed signs of a smaller size elsewhere in the region and these seemed to be as effective. He went on to ask if they were any cheaper and if so questioned whether these could be used in order to reduce the purchasing/leasing costs to parishes. Allan McVeigh replied that they were a similar cost. Signs that showed the speed a motorist was travelling at, as was the case in North Yorkshire, were the most useful in reducing speed.
- Duplication in protocols with the existence of speed management protocols alongside the VAS protocol, which was causing confusion amongst some parish councils. There was a need for uniformity including with neighbouring local authorities bordering the county. Allan McVeigh replied that at the start of the VAS pilot the decision had been taken to keep the two processes separate in view of the temporary VAS scheme being a pilot. He went on to note that North Yorkshire Police was keen for City of York Council and North Yorkshire County Council to have a single speed management protocol. Accordingly work was now in progress to bring the two protocols together.
- One of the difficulties encountered in the VAS pilot had been that it was more likely that parish councils in wealthier areas and/or those with the potential to raise a larger precept participated in the scheme. There was need to be careful when designing a charging system that parish councils in poorer areas etc. would not be excluded by default.
- The shortage of speed monitors in the county. Allan McVeigh acknowledged that this had been an issue in the past but a procurement exercise was about to commence to purchase more. North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service and North Yorkshire Police were taking a more pro-active approach looking at the lifecycle of the kit and having a maintenance regime in place.
- A Member reported that several parish councils within his Division taking part in the scheme had not understood that the temporary VAS would only be installed in their area for a short period. He went on to ask if communications between the County Council and parish councils could have been made clearer in that regard. He also asked what the policy was in relation to high accident areas where the parish council had not asked for a temporary VAS to be installed such as in the case of Lythe Bank. Allan McVeigh reported that both verbal and written communications with parishes had made it clear about the length of the pilot and the period that a temporary VAS would be deployed in a given parish. The County Council had a statutory duty to investigate accident sites whether or not a VAS had been installed. The Council carried out fatality investigations and looked at more accurate route analysis as part of this. New signage together with an anti-skid surface had been implemented on Lythe

Bank and it was hoped that this would reduce the number of accidents occurring there.

- The potential for the existing temporary VAS be installed in high risk accident areas pending a decision being taken about the future rollout programme. Allan McVeigh replied that the County Council was looking to do this for category 1, 2 and 3 sites at no capital cost to the local community.
- Support in principle for the continuation of the Temporary VAS protocol as it provided useful reassurance to communities concerned about speeding in their local area

Resolved -

- a) That the report be noted including the proposed VAS treatment of Category 1, 2, 3 and 4 areas set out in paragraph 10.6 of the report.
- b) That a questionnaire be sent out to all parish councils to ascertain if they would be interested in installing temporary VAS in their area if they were required to fully fund all associated revenue and capital costs should the parish be classified as a Category 4 area.
- c) That a follow-up report be brought to the Committee regarding the results of the questionnaire.

55. Highways and Transportation Overview

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services updating Members on road safety, winter and highway maintenance.

Allan McVeigh introduced the report. He referred to section 2.0 of the report setting out the personal injury accidents and casualties data up to end of December 2013. A more detailed report on the road casualty statistics for 2013 and an update on the future of road safety service delivery would be provided at the committee meeting in January.

Allan McVeigh referred to section 3.0 of the report providing an update on the winter service including the gritting programme. The directorate, as part of the 2020 savings proposals, was reassessing its grit heaps/bin provision, leading to a reduction in some areas.

Referring to section 4.0 of the report and Appendix 1 Allan McVeigh provided a summary of the additional funding from government and the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership. In line with the 2020 North Yorkshire programme a series of cuts and efficiency savings were being made across highway maintenance activities which included an approximate 10% reduction in the basic maintenance budget such as grass cutting, gully emptying, winter maintenance and urgent pothole repairs.

Members made the following key comments:

- A Member asked to be supplied with statistics covering the entirety of the A64

with regards to the number of killed and seriously injured in the last four years. Another Member asked for statistics on the number of motorcyclists killed in Craven in 2013. Allan McVeigh undertook to provide this information.

- The picture with regards to the number of vehicle collisions with cyclists, in particular those involving lorries, following a general increase in cycling due to the Grand Depart Tour De France. Allan McVeigh replied that vehicle collisions with cyclists had increased. This was not surprising due to the increase in cycling. Data was not available at this stage but there had been a significant increase in cycling on roads. The County Council continued to work with local cycling organisations on road safety issues and it was hoped that in time motorists would become more aware of cyclists. Visibility blind spots in lorries posed a problem but innovations to improve visibility were being introduced in new vehicles.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

56. Grass Cutting Reduction

Considered -

The oral report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services updating Members on the grass cutting reduction within the county.

Douglas Huzzard Members provided an oral report. He explained that as part of the directorate's savings there was a target to reduce the annual budget for the highways grass-cutting service from £1.1m budget to £700,000. The highways grass cutting service did not include amenity grass cutting. As a consequence the County Council had a number of service level agreements in place with Harrogate Borough Council and Scarborough Borough Council whereby the County Council paid them the same amount that it would have cost the County Council to cut the grass on a set number of occasions – six times a year for a full width urban cut. However where SLAs were in place the highway verge tended to be cut a minimum of twelve times a year by the contractor. The intention was to remove the bulk of urban cuts and concentrate on providing urban visibility cuts. In rural areas grass would be cut at junctions in order to provide forward visibility. The width of the cut would be reduced from three metres to 1.5 metres but the existing grass cutting regime would be retained on Safer Routes to Schools. The directorate was currently finalising the plans to send to parish councils and Harrogate and Scarborough Borough Councils. Presently they were being assessed by the County Council's legal services and risk insurance sections. Discussions were also taking place with the highways contractor.

Members made the following key comments:

- The need for the maps to be sent out to parish councils as soon as possible especially as they were in the process of setting their budgets for the next financial year. Douglas Huzzard confirmed that parish councils would be provided with this information by the end of October.
- The requirements of parish councils/other community groups choosing to do the grass cutting service themselves and the guidance, if any, that they would be provided with. Douglas Huzzard replied that all the current contractors were required to have Public Liability Insurance and the County Council would

provide appropriate guidance to those who might wish to cut highway grass.

- The impact on wildflowers in areas affected by grass cutting reductions. Douglas Huzzard replied that the county contained a rich stock of special verges. The current timing of grass cuts on special verges allowed wildflowers to compete against the grass and weeds. In future, those areas which were not cut at least twice a year would result in wildflowers disappearing due to weeds taking over. In response to a supplementary question Douglas Huzzard confirmed that the County Council would continue to remove ragwort from highways verges as it had a legal responsibility to do so.
- Concern was expressed by a Member that in some rural parts of Scarborough some grass verges were becoming overgrown. He went on to note that at present it was not clear if Scarborough Borough Council would be able to step in to fill the gap left by the County Council's service reductions in grass cutting in the district. However parish councils were already contacting the Borough Council to ascertain if this would be the case. There was a pressing need for Members and relevant officers at Scarborough Borough Council to be given an indication by the County Council about what its detailed proposals were and the cost implications for the Borough Council. Douglas Huzzard assured the Member concerned that the County Council was in continual dialogue with officers at both Harrogate and Scarborough Council about the proposals and had worked with both councils to ensure that the maps were accurate. He reiterated that the maps would be shared with parish councils by the end of October.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

57. Council Plan - 2020 North Yorkshire Plan

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Director - Policy and Partnerships informing Members of responses to the Council Plan consultation 2014 and consulting the Committee on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan.

Neil Irving introduced the report. He said that the purpose of the report was twofold: firstly to provide a progress on priority actions in the Council Plan 2014-15 and secondly to consult with Members on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. He referred to Appendix 2 setting out the progress on priorities for service delivery in 2014-15. He then referred to Appendix 1 setting out the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. The 2020 North Yorkshire Plan set out the Council's broad priorities over the next five years but would be updated following the County Council election in 2017.

Neil Irving went on to detail the results of the public consultation on the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. Referring to section 3 of the report he detailed the results of the online consultation on the proposed vision, values and objectives of the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan. The vast majority had given a positive response.

The proposed priorities set out in Appendix 1 were areas where the County Council was intending to provide additional focus. It did not mean that these areas would be provided with additional investment but were areas where the County Council needed to show leadership.

The report was being taken to all the overview and scrutiny committees to invite Members to comment on the proposed priorities to establish if they were the right priorities and which aspects were the most important given that the County Council had got a reduced level of resources.

Members made the following key comments:

- The importance of highlighting the interrelated link between creating opportunities for young people and improving the economy.
- The need to reflect that transport played a key role in relation to the other four priorities.
- The importance of the County Council engaging with the voluntary sector to help deliver the priorities.
- The importance of recognising that for some young people university is not the best route. There is a need therefore to ensure that young people have the opportunity to be equipped with practical skills to then go on to have successful careers.
- The need to ensure that the wording in the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan did not raise public expectations. This was because it was unlikely that by 2020 the County Council would be able to fully deliver the proposed priorities – the wording needed to reflect that they were aspirational.

Resolved -

- (a) That the responses received to the consultation and implications for the vision, objectives and values of 2020 North Yorkshire be noted.
- (b) That the comments made by the Committee on the proposed priorities for the 2020 North Yorkshire Plan be noted.

58. Access Needs of Communities in North Yorkshire and How These Might Best be met using a Range of Transport Options

Considered -

The report of the Scrutiny Task Group asking the Committee to:

- a) discuss and note the information in the draft final report on the access needs of communities in North Yorkshire and how these might best be met using a range of transport options; and
- b) asking the Committee to consider for approval the proposed recommendations to the Executive as set out on page 34 of the report (Annexe A).

The Chairman of the Task Group, County Councillor Robert Heseltine introduced the task group report and commended the recommendations. He went on to add that the County Council had already made a £2m reduction in public transport investment of contracted bus services and was intending to make a further reduction of £900,000 from 2016/17 onwards. He said there was a need for Members to consider if the additional £900,000 could not be found from elsewhere in the County Council as such a cut would in particular prove very damaging to rural services. He went on to thank everyone on the task group for their involvement and moved the recommendations.

Richard Owens said that it had been an interesting exercise with fruitful discussions held with community transport and bus operators. The concerns of the bus operators had focused on funding issues in relation to the BSOG grants and concessionary travel.

Members made the following key comments:

- The wording of recommendation 11 be reworded to read: “Continue to press government to reform the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme by introducing the opportunity for concessionary pass holders to contribute to their fare when using a bus pass.”

Resolved -

That the final report of the Task Group including the recommendations to be presented to the Executive be approved subject to recommendation 11 being reworded to read: “Continue to press government to reform the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme by introducing the opportunity for concessionary pass holders to contribute to their fare when using a bus pass

59. Work Programme

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Development Officer inviting 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 as Annex A to the report).

The future work programme of the Committee was discussed and the items listed within it agreed without amendment.

Resolved –

That the report and work programme schedule be noted.

The meeting concluded at 1.26pm
JS