

North Yorkshire County Council

Transport, Economy and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 15 April 2015 at 10.00 am.

Present:-

County Councillor David Jeffels in the Chair

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

Other Members present were: County Councillor Arthur Barker

NYCC Officers attending: David Bowe, Corporate Director (BES), John Laking, Policy Development Manager - Integrated Passenger Transport (BES), Barrie Mason, Assistant Director - Highways & Transportation (BES), Chris McMakin, Lead for Admissions (CYPS), Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer (Central Services), Andrew Terry, Assistant Director – Access & Inclusion (CYPS)

Present by Invitation: Dr. Adrian Morgan, Chairman of the Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group

No members of the public were in attendance.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

68. Minutes

Resolved -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2015, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

69. Public Questions or Statements

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

70. Home to School and College Transport: Savings Proposals, Consultation Responses

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service asking the Committee to consider the responses to the consultation on proposals to remove two

areas of discretionary provision from the home to school and college transport policy in order to meet the target saving in the 2020 programme and seeking Members' views for inclusion in the report to the meeting of the Executive on 26 May 2015.

Andrew Terry summarised the report referring to the consultation results on the proposal to cease providing free transport for pupils aged 8-11 who live between two and three miles from their normal school and on the proposal to cease providing free transport for secondary school pupils at a 'critical stage' of their education if they move home and wish to remain at the school currently attended. He also referred to the appendices, which included the record of responses to the consultation, the Equality Impact Assessment and the report to the Corporate Director's meeting with Executive Members on 9 December 2014.

Executive Member County Councillor Arthur Barker explained that the Executive would take account of all comments received when arriving at its decision as to whether to implement the proposals. He went on to refer to paragraph 3.4 of the report highlighting the range of pupils who would be exempt from paying for a school bus pass.

Members made the following key comments:

- Referring to paragraph 3.5 a Member asked if the County Council was responsible for assessing which home to school routes were deemed to be an unsafe walking route of a child, and what criteria was used to assess these routes. Andrew Terry confirmed that the County Council was responsible for assessing the safety of walking routes to schools and used nationally agreed criteria. Members of the public could go to an appeals committee to appeal against officer decisions concerning whether a walking route was deemed to be safe or unsafe.
- The cost of the bus pass represented a significant amount of money for some families. What options were being considered to phase in the scheme over time? Andrew Terry confirmed that only new starters in primary schools from September 2016 would be required to pay for a bus pass if they lived between two and three miles from their normal or catchment school. The proposal to remove free home to school transport for secondary school pupils' transferring to another school at a 'critical stage' of their education would be phased in from September 2015. This meant that pupils already supported in this way would not have their current arrangements disturbed. He went on to note that parents also had the option of paying for a bus pass on a monthly basis at no extra charge.
- The extent to which governing bodies had been consulted on the proposals. Andrew Terry confirmed that all primary schools had been notified about the consultation on the proposed changes and some of the responses had been from governing bodies.
- The proposals represented another 'nail in the coffin' for village schools, threatening their viability; some families would be discouraged from moving to villages whilst others might move away. Some of the consultation responses had highlighted this as a concern. Andrew Terry replied that it was uncertain whether in practice this would happen and reiterated that the cost of a bus pass could be spread out over the year and that less well-off families would be exempted from the proposal to remove free transport.
- In the past when village schools had closed parents had been promised free

home to school transport for their child to their next nearest school. For some pupils, however, their next nearest school had fallen within a distance of less than three miles from a pupil's home. Andrew Terry said that the records would be checked to establish if such agreements had been granted in perpetuity and that this would be referenced in the report to the Executive.

- The distance criterion was a blunt tool particularly in some rural areas. This was because it depended upon which route was taken to travel to school. If a pupil travelled the safest route to their local school it could be over three miles. However if they were to walk on a more direct route on narrow lanes it would be less than three miles. Andrew Terry replied that people could appeal against officer decisions concerning safe walking routes.
- The County Council had made a rod for its own back over the years by exceeding the requirements that were laid down statutorily for free home to school transport. Whilst this might not have been of concern in the past, the Council could no longer afford to be overly-generous in light of the budget constraints that it was facing. Some of the consultation responses acknowledged this.

The Chairman invited a show of hands for the proposals to cease providing free transport for pupils aged 8-11 who live between two and three miles from their normal school and to cease providing free transport for secondary school pupils at a 'critical stage' of their education if they move home and wish to remain at the school currently attended.

The Committee divided and, on a show of hands, there were 10 votes for the proposed changes and three votes against the proposed changes.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the views expressed by Members on the proposals be included in the report to the Executive at its meeting on 26 May 2015.
- (c) That the Committee recommends to the Executive that the proposals set out in the report to remove two areas of discretionary provision from the home to school and college transport policy be implemented.

71. Business and Environmental Services Directorate

Considered -

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

The key issues reported by David Bowe were as follows:

- Work continued to progress on implementing and mitigating the directorate's savings in relation to the 2020 programme for highways and transportation. Changes to the grass cutting service were in a transitional stage this year. This meant that the actual savings in 2015/16 would be approximately £100k lower than the annual savings target of £500k. Over 30 new parish councils had taken up the opportunity to deliver the grass cutting service themselves. Discussions with Harrogate and Scarborough Borough Councils relating to the

overall funding package for urban grass-cutting were expected to be concluded by the end of May. The savings to the gully emptying service were now projected to be half the projected £300k in the first year of savings. This was as a consequence of the changes to the service being introduced part way through the financial year, rather than at the start as was the intention.

- The construction of the Bedale, Aiskew and Leeming Bar bypass was now well underway. A roman villa and remains of a late Iron Age enclosure had been uncovered on the route of the new bypass. The bypass would cover part of the site but the County Council was working with archaeological partners to gain as much knowledge as possible from the excavations. Information about the finds would be made available to the public. The site had been given scheduled monument consent and would be covered up as found.
- The government had recently legislated to prevent local authorities from charging entry or exit fees for residents using a Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) including any fee regarding the quantity of waste and recycling deposited there. The consequence of this for the County Council was that it was not possible as things stood at present for the proposed 2020 savings of £1.1m to be realised for HWRCs. The directorate would continue to review opportunities to deliver savings for the waste management service.
- A staffing restructure was being undertaken in Countryside Services.
- Construction of the Allerton Waste Recovery Park facility had commenced. A webcam was being installed to allow the public to view progress. The current plan is that Yorwaste would become a Teckal compliant company on or before 1 July 2015; the intention being to get best value for the waste facility.
- The public consultation on the proposal to reduce the annual bus subsidy to £1.5m would commence in May. The impact of the proposed savings reduction would not be as significant as first thought because of several previously subsidised bus services becoming commercially run.
- Trading Standards had introduced a matrix prioritisation of work to allow the service to focus on key areas and make savings overall. Trading Standards were involved in a multi-agency project with the police and the County Council's public health team to tackle rogue traders. The project had two elements: preventative safeguarding and prosecution.

Members made the following key comments:

- Press communications should make it clearer to the public about the reasons why a particular bus service is being withdrawn. There had been occasions where the County Council had "got the blame" for a bus services being withdrawn even though the services had been commercially run. David Bowe said that this was a frustration that he shared, noting that the focus to date in the press had been very much on the County Council reducing costs and less on reporting good news items.
- Anecdotal evidence that in some parts of the county fly-tipping was on the increase, including the illegal dumping of rubble. Were options being looked at for new HWRC sites with local waste operators? David Bowe confirmed that the waste management service was always open to looking at options for new sites. At the same time however

savings had to be found for the waste management service as part of the 2020 programme. This could involve reducing the number of HWRCs in the county in the future, although there was no requirement to do so at present. The County Council would ultimately need to determine where the additional savings should be found. In relation to fly-tipping the County Council continued to work closely with the district councils, including in terms of taking enforcement action in those instances where the perpetrator was known.

- A Member queried the timescales for filling in potholes and suggested that there was a lack of clarity from his local Area Highways Office about when a pothole would be repaired. Barrie Mason replied that all the Area Offices followed the timescales and criteria set out in the Highway Safety Inspection Manual. The manual allowed Highways Inspectors to adopt a risk-based approach when assessing road defects. Once a pothole was identified as an actionable defect it was repaired within three months. Where it was possible to undertake a permanent repair this would be done. The focus now was also on reducing the amount of unplanned work by undertaking a greater range of planned work within a given area and time period. The County Council had been successful in attracting additional money for pothole repairs but it was essentially not enough to remove all road defects. There would always be a balance to be struck between planned works and unplanned work. Nominally, temporary repairs were expected to last up to three months.
- A Member suggested that the highways department should look again at the distances that it used to display advance warning signs for road and bridge closures. He referred specifically to the closure of Thornton Bridge and commented that advanced warning signs should be displayed further afield than was the case at present and on more roads. Barrie Mason replied that when locating advance warning signs highways staff tried to ensure that account was taken of road users who knew the area and those that did not. In relation to the specifics of Thornton Bridge the phase one work had been completed ahead of schedule. The phase two work would commence in June or July. The County Council had received one complaint about the closure of the bridge. The Area Office would look to see if further improvements could be made regarding the signage. Local Members would be kept informed about the progress of the work and the locations of the advanced warning signs.

Resolved -

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

72. Rail Services: The campaign for the reinstatement of the Leeds-Wetherby-Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton Railway Line

Considered -

The statement from the Chairman from of the Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group.

Dr Adrian Morgan summarised his written statement highlighting the reasons for reinstating the railway line (Cross Gates-Wetherby and Church Fenton-Tadcaster-Wetherby-Harrogate and Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton) but particularly the stretch from Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton. The reasons included:

- York to Northallerton remains the only section of the East Coast mainline between Kings Cross and Dundee without a diversion route since the Harrogate-Northallerton line closed in 1967. Trespassing fatalities and overhead dewirements have caused this section to close for up to 24 hours on average seven times a year for the last five years. This causes all passenger and freight trains to stop causing major inconvenience to passengers and costs to Network Rail of up to £1m on each occasion in late arrival penalty fare refunds. Reinstating the Harrogate-Northallerton railway line would introduce flexibility by allowing diversions to take place with less than 30 minutes extended journey time. It would also reduce fare refunds to £0.5m on each occasion and save Network Rail £0.5m.
- Since the benefit to cost ratio of 1.3 was calculated in 2005 for reinstating the Harrogate-Ripon stretch of the railway line, the Government had modified the technicalities of analysis to the line's advantage, raising this figure to above the Government's threshold of 1.5. Other factors included looking at a through route instead of a stub, a 20% reduction in construction costs of the former Dragon Junction if planned and executed concurrently with Harrogate-York track, and signalling upgrading scheduled in 2019/20.
- Station footfall has grown on the Harrogate Loop by 54% (Harrogate by only 32%) and 65% within Leeds City Region since 2004. Footfall nationally has grown only 39% in the same period. Additionally fares have increased by 27% in the last ten years. There is every reason to believe that had the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton line reopened in 2005, growth would have been similar increasing in revenue therefore lifting BCR above 1.5.
- In the 2005 BCR calculations, the provision and operating costs of five diesel units necessary to operate two trains an hour from Ripon to Leeds reduced the BCR score. The DfT has since announced that the winner of the Northern Rail franchise in 2016 must operate four trains an hour between Leeds and Harrogate from 2017, twice that currently. This slashes the operating costs of Ripon-Leeds trains by 66% when introduced as the Harrogate-Leeds portion is borne by Northern Rail lifting BCR yet again.
- The Electrification Task Force, in its final report published in March 2015, has allocated the Harrogate Loop in the highest priority for electrification in 2019/20, although this has slipped to 2021/22 since publication. If the Harrogate Loop is already electrified when the line to Ripon is reinstated it too would also be electrified during construction. This again would have a compound effect on raising BCR in reinstating this route. Electric trains are 30% cheaper to operate and maintain and due to superior performance only three units would be

required to operate a 30 minute interval Ripon-Leeds service instead of five diesel units.

- The Government's approach to railways has changed. Connectivity is now the key buzzword with a number of the political parties at national level supporting the expansion of rail links across the North to boost its regional economies. Improving rail connectivity is now seen as key to generating residential, employment and leisure opportunities.
- The population of Ripon has increased from 8,600 in 1961 to 17,000 in 2011 and expected to be 22,000 by 2025. There remains an imbalance between population and employment in Ripon now before expansion, with 68% of working age residents travelling daily along the A61 to Harrogate and Leeds to work. Current levels of bus provision south of Ripon are good but are heavily subsidised and journey times are not competitive with the car. North of Ripon, bus services to Northallerton are very limited and again are not competitive with the car. Journey time by rail would be cut by as much as 55 minutes between Harrogate, Northallerton and the North. Passengers would also no longer need to travel via York in order to change trains there.
- Reinstatement of the railway line would reduce driver-only car journeys on the A61 by 7.3 million vehicle kilometres annually where there have been 24 fatalities and 118 serious injuries since 2000. Tonnes of carbon dioxide and carcinogenic diesel exhaust particulates would be removed by the modal shift to rail. The projected reduction in vehicle kilometres would be more than twice the saving of 3.0 vehicle kilometres in the 2013 Harrogate Loop Electrification study.

Dr Morgan went on to refer to Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group's submission to the Commons transport Select Committee. The Executive summary had been endorsed by the select Committee and published in September 2013 as part of a submission on rail transport poverty in North and West Yorkshire.

Dr Morgan requested that North Yorkshire County Council funded in part or all the £15,000 (excluding VAT) required to professionally update the 2005 study and to include the through strategic route. The Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group had maintained contact with Leeds based consultants JMP about the revised outline BCR calculation. The BCR figure was now thought to be in the region of 4.6 to 4.7. The Association of Train Operating Companies in their 2009 report 'Connecting Communities' had calculated BCR for the Ripon line reinstatement at 4.3.

John Laking said that the case for reinstating the railway line needed to be looked at in terms of the extent to which it would provide a strategic through route, rather than looking at it as a local route. Factors to consider in this regard included the impact that reinstatement of the line would have upon improving journey times from West Yorkshire to the North East and Scotland, and as an alternative route for the East Coast Main Line at times of disruption. There was a need to fully understand the potential impact the re-opening of the line would have upon other rail services and connectivity at York. The additional trains to be introduced between Harrogate and Leeds as a result of the Northern Rail franchise bid did not necessarily mean that these would be available to travel to Ripon and on to Northallerton in the event of the line reopening. There would be additional operating cost in trains and staff costs in sending trains to Ripon which would need to form part of the business case. Electrification of the railways was specifically for the existing network, with no work by the Electrification Task Force currently referencing any line re-openings.

John Laking went on to note that today's discussion was timely and relevant to discussions that the County Council was having at regional level concerning rail provision in North Yorkshire. This included discussions with Network Rail regarding its long term planning process for the next control period (2019 – 2024) and building the railway up to 2043. As part of this there would be studies for the East Coast Main Line and a Northern Route Study. The County Council could in the meetings that it was having with Network Rail raise the re-opening of the Ripon Line as a strategic option. The County Council was also in the process of developing its next Local Transport Plan, which could provide the potential option to develop new rail links.

Members made the following key comments:

- What if any research had been done on the economic benefits of reinstating the railway line and had funding been sought from the Local Enterprise Partnerships in the region for the feasibility work and from other local authorities? Dr. Morgan replied that the government expected that for every £1 it put into railways it should get £1.50 back in benefits. The outline work produced so far by the Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group, in conjunction with JPM Consultants, was that for every £1 put in there would be over £4 of benefits to the surrounding local economies. As part of the feasibility study JPM Consultants would work out the full economic benefits to the towns and surrounding hinterland on the reinstated railway line. Over the course of two years the Leeds Northern Railway Reinstatement Group had tried to meet with the two LEP's in the region but neither LEP had taken up this request.
- Had any approaches been made to other local authorities along the route of the railway line to provide funding? Dr Morgan said that approaches had been made but had not met with success in the past. However he would be attending a joint meeting with Network Rail and West Yorkshire Combined Authority in May as they had now expressed interest in the proposed reinstatement. In order to obtain the highest BCR measurement as possible the feasibility study would need to look at the Leeds-Wetherby-Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line as a whole. However the main part of the study would concentrate on the Harrogate to Northallerton stretch, which was why the County Council was being approached for funding.
- The cost of reinstating the line would no longer be feasible due to the extent of the work involved in reinstating bridges and reinforcing embankments, the risk of subsidence in the Ripon area caused by gypsum and the fact that houses had been built on the original route in places between Harrogate and Northallerton. It was also questionable whether Northallerton railway station could accommodate additional trains. Dr Morgan replied that off line diversions had been identified. One such one was at Wormald Green. Reinstatement would be half the cost per mile than the Bedale, Aiskew, Leeming Bar bypass, quoting £280m for 31 miles of the almost completed Edinburgh-Galashiels railway line. Gypsum was not a problem in 120 years of operating a railway through Ripon. In relation to Northallerton station, Network rail was planning to introduce a new generation of Inter City trains on the East Coast mainline with cab signalling allowing an increase in line speed from 125mph to 140mph. This would allow a driver to run their train at the optimum safe speed helping more trains run faster and recover from delays quicker. The opportunity would be taken to install a junction for the line from Ripon when this work was done. John Laking explained that the County Council would be discussing with Network Rail the options for increasing capacity at Northallerton railway station. However the County Council currently understood that at present Network Rail had no firm plans to provide additional platform capacity at the station.

- The benefits that reinstatement of the railway line would have in reducing peak times road congestion in the Harrogate and Ripon areas. Traffic congestion would only get worse over the next few years in light of proposed housing developments to be built in the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton corridor.
- The success of high speed rail links in the form of HS2 and HS3 in creating the 'northern powerhouse' would not be realised whilst there was a convoluted fragmented rail infrastructure in place. There was a need therefore to invest in branch lines, including reinstating some of those that were presently closed, to ensure that the rail network as a whole could work more efficiently. Getting the regional rail infrastructure right should be the first priority in order to revitalise local economies. The role of Members in this regard should be to lobby MPs to invest more in the local rail infrastructure. North Yorkshire County Council had helped to commission the feasibility study for reinstating the Skipton-East Lancashire railway line, which represented a similar project to the reinstatement of the Leeds-Wetherby-Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line. The Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership had successfully obtained the support of all the significant parties and local MPs and this success could be replicated in other parts of the county.

Resolved -

- a) That the statement and presentation be noted.
- b) That the Transport, Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in principle supports the scheme to reinstate the Leeds-Wetherby-Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton Railway Line.
- c) That the Transport, Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Executive that it considers providing a financial contribution towards the cost of the feasibility study for reinstatement of the Leeds-Wetherby-Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton Railway Line.

73. Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services seeking the Committee's views on the draft Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy prior to it being submitted to Executive and then County Council for adoption.

Barrie Mason provided an overview of the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy. He noted that the policy would support the new regime implemented by the Department for Transport, involving the local authority completing a highway efficiency self-assessment questionnaire. The outcome of the self-assessment process later in the year would in turn determine part of the County Council's highway maintenance capital allocation for 2016/17. The policy demonstrated how it supported the County Council's strategic objectives. The policy would be presented to the Executive and then go to the County Council for adoption.

Resolved -

That the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy be noted.

74. Work Programme

Considered -

The report of the Scrutiny Team Leader inviting the Committee to:

- (a) Note the information in the report.
- (b) Confirm, amend or add to the areas of work shown on the Work Programme schedule (attached as Appendix A to the report).
- (c) Approve the scope of the Residents Parking Scheme Policy review (attached as Appendix B to the report).

Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer, sought the Committee's approval of the proposed scope of the Residents Parking Scheme Policy review.

Resolved -

- (a) That the items listed in the future Work Programme schedule be agreed.
- (b) That the scope of the Residents Parking Scheme Policy review, attached as Appendix B to the report, be approved.

Record of Thanks

At the end of the meeting the Chairman informed the Committee that it was likely to be his last meeting in 2015 as Chairman of the Transport, Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He placed on record his thanks to Members on the Committee for their hard work over the years and for working together constructively on a cross-party basis. He also placed on record his thanks to the range of officers in the Business and Environmental Services Directorate who had assisted the Committee over the years and to Jonathan Spencer for his advice and guidance.

The meeting concluded at 12.09pm

JS