

North Yorkshire County Council

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 31 October 2017 at 10.00 am.

Present:-

County Councillor Mike Jordan in the Chair

County Councillors Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Patmore, Robert Heseltine, David Jeffels, Stanley Lumley, Don Mackay, John McCartney, Andy Paraskos and Clive Pearson.

Other Members present were: Executive County Councillor Don MacKenzie and County Councillor Angus Thompson.

NYCC Officers attending: Paul Brennan, Assistant Director Education & Skills (CYPS), Alistair Gourlay, Head of Adult Learning and Skills Service (CYPS), Allan McVeigh, Network Strategy Manager (BES), Graham North, Policy Support Officer (Rail), James Smith, Team Leader – Traffic Engineering (BES) and Jonathan Spencer, Corporate Development Officer (Central Services).

Apologies were received from County Councillors Richard Welch and Roberta Swiers.

One member of the public was in attendance.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

10. Minutes

Resolved -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the sentence on page 9: *'A Member commented that although there were no parking lines outside of schools motorists frequently disregarded them as they were not being policed'* being amended to read: *'A Member commented that although there were parking lines outside of schools motorists frequently disregarded them as they were not being policed'*.

11. Declarations of Interest

There are no declarations of interest to note.

12. Public Questions or Statements

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

13. Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS)

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service updating on the current state of ALSS.

Paul Brennan and Alistair Gourlay introduced the report.

Members made the following key comments:

- Referring to paragraph 3.22 of the report, a Member asked why many adult learners were leaving their courses early and were not completing their qualifications. He also went on to ask if the Adult Learning and Skills Service offered any incentives to learners. Paul Brennan replied that from 2016 there had been a change in focus towards vulnerable learners. This meant that the Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS) was registering the 'harder to reach' learners who were not attending Further Education (FE) colleges and had been out of education for some years. Incentives and pastoral support was in place to support learners to register on courses. However fewer learners were staying on the more intensive courses. The existing management information system had not been flagging up the level of drop-out rates as accurately as it should have been. Alistair Gourlay added that the systems, processes and understanding had not shifted with the new cohort of learners. The whole culture in delivering learning needed to improve. There were initiatives that the Adult Learning and Skills Service could do to support individuals and improve retention rates, for example follow-up without delay when learners did not attend a course session. This needed to happen before they missed the next session.
- A Member asked if the ALSS was at risk of being in competition with the provision provided by FE Colleges. Referring to Appendix 1 of the report, he asked which Elected Members were on the governance group. Paul Brennan said that in his view the ALSS provision did not conflict with FE college provision although there were inevitably small pockets of duplication. The ALSS was increasingly focused on supporting the more challenging learners. Alistair Gourlay noted that local authority Adult Learning Services provided a safety net for local people in local communities to co-design provision that was suitable to their needs. The ALSS tried to provide a targeted approach. However in rural areas the provision often needed to be more general in order to attract sufficient numbers of learners. He went on to note that the Executive Member Portfolio Holder for Education & Skills, County Councillor Patrick Mulligan, sat on the governance group.
- A Member noted that there needed to be incentives for the type of learners that the ALSS was now supporting. This was because they were the learners who had got left behind by more mainstream provision. She noted that often the reason for a learner leaving or remaining on a course was due to the teaching style of the teacher providing the course. Learners needed to be able to relate to their teacher and also to know that they would be contacted if they started missing course sessions. There was a need to look at what provision was being provided by other local authorities including initiatives to retain learners and for a report to be made back to the Committee in 2018 on the progress made in relation to the post-Ofsted priorities Action Plan.
- A Member said that there was a need for learners to have an early assessment to ensure that they were on the right course. Alistair Gourlay said that he agreed and that an initial assessment or induction needed to happen within the first two to three weeks of a learner starting a course. This would avoid the situation of learners struggling on courses that were not appropriate for them.

Getting the right ongoing support in place was also key for example in relation to people who were dyslexic.

- A Member noted that in the pre-assessment there was a need to ensure that learners clearly understood the content of the courses that they were signing up to do and the related requirements.

Resolved -

- (a) That the approach to using the 2016/17 budget surplus to ensure the service makes significant improvements in 2017/18 in readiness for another Ofsted inspection be supported.
- (b) That the comments on the Post Ofsted Inspection Action Plan be noted.
- (c) That an update report on the Adult Learning and Skills Service be brought to the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10 April 2018.
- (d) That the Executive Member Portfolio Holder for Education & Skills be recommended to appoint a Member from the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the ALSS governance group.

14. Temporary Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) Protocol

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services updating on the rollout of the Temporary VAS scheme throughout North Yorkshire and providing the rationale behind the decision not to allow Parish Councils or other parties to purchase their own temporary VAS signs to install in the highway.

James Smith introduced the report, providing the background to the current protocols for permanent and temporary Vehicle Activated Speed (VAS) signs.

The Chairman invited Executive County Councillor Don MacKenzie to speak.

County Councillor Don MacKenzie explained that since the County Council elections in May 2017 he had received a couple of enquiries from Elected Members questioning the existing protocol. He said that he had been the Executive Member Portfolio Holder since May 2015 after the protocol had been implemented and he wanted to hear the views of colleagues.

The Chairman then invited Angus Thompson (non-Committee Member) to speak.

County Councillor Angus Thompson said that he had brought the item forward through Richmondshire Area Committee, following his election in May 2017. He said that he had yet to attend a parish council meeting within his Division where the subject of speeding had not been discussed. He had done his best to encourage parishes to take up the Community Speedwatch initiative but parishes wanted to purchase their own speed matrix signs to address speeding concerns within their area. The present County Council policy of allowing parishes to hire matrix boards at a cost of £3,500 plus VAT for a number of weeks over four years was not good value to the taxpayer in his view. Speed matrix signs could be purchased outright for £2,500 and he disagreed with the points made in paragraph 4.9 of the report about the level of maintenance that would be required. With regards to the argument that there would be a proliferation of

speed matrix signs if parish councils were able to purchase the signs, he said that the nearest speed matrix board to where he lived was 27 miles away. He asked for consideration to be made about relaxing the rules to allow communities to purchase speed matrix signs. He said that to do nothing was not an option. County Councillors received a lot of criticism from parishes about the current County Council policy; speeding was an issue of great concern to them.

Members made the following key comments:

- A Member said that speeding concerns were voiced regularly by the 16 parish councils within his rural Division. He said that he believed in 'prevention rather than a cure', which rang true here. The current criteria meant that there needed to be a road fatality or a series of people being injured in a local area before that area could qualify. He regularly travelled on the continent and in most villages VAS were present; their presence did focus the mind. He had no concerns about the proliferation of signs because if every settlement owned one it would be of benefit to road safety. It would also provide financial benefits to the County Council as its own resources would not need to be expended upon servicing VAS.
- A Member said that speeding within his Division was also of concern to his parishes and there were at least two to three areas where speeding was a real problem. He believed that the Police had given up responding to speeding concerns. The Police Camera Vans were not being located in villages and surrounding rural roads despite requests from parishes. Whilst people had a greater risk of being Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) on minor roads, the vans were instead being positioned on major roads such as the A19 and Selby Bypass to, in his view, act as a 'cash cow' for the Police. Parish councils were being frustrated in their efforts. The temporary VAS protocol should be relaxed to allow parishes to purchase their own speed matrix signs. In his Division residents frequently travelled into West and South Yorkshire and so North Yorkshire should have the same protocols. Within neighbouring local authority areas not all the sign matrices were the same; some registered speed whilst others warned drivers of road hazards such as sharp bends. He queried if temporary VAS only worked for a short period, why were permanent VAS put in place by the County Council in some areas. James Smith replied that temporary VAS did work for a short period. The installation of permanent VAS in areas with high casualties was in line with DfT guidance when other solutions had been tried. The issue that the County Council would face, if a person was killed or seriously injured in a known high accident risk area and it had tried everything else but had not installed permanent VAS, would be that it would be very difficult to justify why it had not done all it possibly could have. This was even though there was not strong evidence that permanent VAS worked.
- A Member said that Members had a duty to listen to and represent the concerns of their constituents. Most Members had had calls from representatives from villages within their Divisions to do something about speeding. The Member went on to note that she had been a sceptic initially about the effectiveness of VAS but since then VAS had been installed in two villages in her Division, one of which was in desperate need and she could see the value of the VAS. She asked how many permanent VAS were in the county and financially what the exact spend was on all the signs – permanent and temporary VAS. The policy needed to be revisited and ways looked at to help villages. She said that she was prepared to not agree to signs being installed in her Division where there was not a speeding problem, in order to ensure there was not a proliferation of signs. However where there was a

speeding problem she believed that parishes had the right to install speed matrix signs.

- A Member said that the reason why the item had been brought to the meeting was because there was a lot of concern by parish councils about speeding. In his own experience VAS did work. In his Division the County Council came in for criticism when signs were only located in villages for a short-time and he was often queried why. He went on to note that Skelton, a village and civil parish in the City of York but bordering the county had a smaller-sized permanent VAS that was fitted on to a lamp post and questioned why these could not be made available to parishes within North Yorkshire County Council's administrative boundaries. He asked if a parish council wanted to install a sign that was not on county council land was there anything to stop the parish from doing so. James Smith confirmed that the parish council would need planning permission from the relevant district council and would need to make sure that there was no danger to road users. North Yorkshire County Council as the local highways authority would also be a consultee. The district council could accept or disregard the advice given by the County Council.
- A Member commented that in Durham and Darlington matrix boards there kept in the same place and were very effective. Parishes did not have to buy six weeks use and then move the signs. Allan McVeigh said he understood that Members and parishes wanted to be seen to do something and this was why the temporary VAS protocol was introduced. The existing protocol allowed Members and their parishes to do something proactive for their communities where speeding was not necessarily a problem. A clear distinction needed to be made between permanent and temporary VAS. Permanent VAS was there to address speeding in areas where people had been killed or seriously injured. Whilst it was important that the County Council listened to communities, it was equally important to take into account the evidence that VAS lost their effectiveness over time. When drivers first see the sign they slow down but after the sign has been in situ for a while the effectiveness wears off. Even when the signs have been removed there is a legacy effect but this wears off and so that is why the temporary VAS is later reinstated. There was a tried and tested process to go through with the Police, Fire and Rescue Authority and County Council working together to co-ordinate activity through the Speed Management Protocol. This included parish councils that had been deemed to be in a Category 4 area to be offered a series of solutions, including if available temporary VAS. Neighbouring parish councils could become involved to spread the cost of the temporary VAS more widely.
- A Member mentioned about a recent vehicle collision that had occurred in his Division. The parish council had tried a long time to get warning signs installed. Allan McVeigh replied that in areas where there was a good level of evidence of need and where other engineering solutions had been looked at, permanent VAS were installed. He went on to note that the experience of parishes is that the signs get damaged easily. The County Council absorbed these replacement costs and believed that six weeks was the optimum period for a sign to be located in any one area.

The Chairman invited County Councillor Don MacKenzie to comment.

County Councillor Don MacKenzie noted that most of the Members on the Committee felt that a change in the protocol would be advisable. He mentioned that together with Sweden, the accident statistics in the United Kingdom were the safest in Europe and that North Yorkshire had some of the lowest KSI rates in the country, with the latest

figures showing a further reduction. He said he was concerned that a change of policy to allow parish councils to purchase their own speed matrix signs meant disregarding the advice of road safety professionals and the evidence presented. It would also mean that the signs would be located in areas where the parish councils could afford to pay. He said that he believed that in general, parish councils were not aware of the potential costs on top of the £2.5k to pay for the purchase of the signs.

Resolved -

- (a) That the Committee notes the update regarding the current position of the Temporary VAS rollout.
- (b) That the Committee notes the reasoning behind the current position of not allowing communities to purchase and place their own VAS.
- (c) That the Committee recommends to the Executive Member for Access, including highways, road and rail transport, public transport; broadband, mobile phones; public rights of way, that officers be asked to look at producing a policy on how parishes could purchase their own Vehicle Activated Speed signs.
- (d) That officers provide the Committee with the real life costs to a parish of purchasing and maintaining a Vehicle Activated Speed sign.

15. Passenger Rail Update

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services updating on short term rail priorities for North Yorkshire, providing an overview of the current Northern and TransPennine rail franchises and also providing an overview of the rail industry to aid an understanding of the railway structure.

Graham North introduced the report.

Members made the following key comments:

- Referring to Appendix A of the report, a Member queried why the Knottingley-Goole line did not feature in Northern's Station Improvement Plans for North Yorkshire by December 2019. Graham North noted that this line was not on the list for upgrades because of the limited use-age of the line.
- A Member commented that there was little mention in the report regarding railway electrification plans. Graham North replied that electrification was a means to an end, the end being quicker journey times. The government believed that journey times between Leeds and Manchester could be substantially reduced without full electrification of the transpennine railway line. The Standedge Tunnels posed a practical obstacle to full electrification due to the fact that the tunnels were not high enough to accommodate an electrified line. Any works involving raising the height of the tunnels would be very expensive and would cause significant disruption over a protracted period. Electro-diesel locomotives could be the solution instead. Graham North went on to state that he believed that the electrification of lines elsewhere in the region such as between Leeds to York were going ahead as planned.
- A Member commented that the height of a number of railway bridges in her Division had been raised. She asked who paid for the works, noting that NYCC

Highways was involved in reinstating the road. Graham North confirmed that Network Rail paid for works relating to altering the height of railway bridges. The height had been increased in readiness for new intercity express trains and to comply with new regulations stipulating the height between the electrified line and the bridge parapet.

- With reference to paragraph 2.8 of the report concerning railway line reinstatement, a Member asked why no mention had been made in the report about the work to reinstate the Skipton-East Lancs railway line. Graham North mentioned that he had been asked by the Committee to provide a specific update on the meetings that had been held about the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line. In connection with the Skipton-East Lancs railway line, a County Council officer was meeting with MPs on 1 November 2017 to discuss line re-openings in the county and about working with Transport for the North on improving East-West rail connectivity.
- With reference to paragraph 2.7, a Member said that he was pleased to read in the report that more trains would be coming into service on the Esk Valley railway and that the aspiration would be to get up to eight trains but asked for clarification as to why at least seven trains a day could not be introduced now. Graham North said that it was due to limits on the infrastructure, availability of rolling stock and timetable restrictions including return journey times. The plan was by December 2019 for a fifth train to be introduced to arrive in Middlesbrough by 8.30am. A sixth train would be introduced from Middlesbrough to arrive in Whitby at 9 am and then return. A seventh train would then be put in place for the morning or in the evening. The eighth train would be more difficult to arrange for the reasons given above.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

16. Airport Consultative Committee

Considered -

The verbal update and report of North Yorkshire County Council representatives on the Airport Consultative Committee

County Councillor Chris Pearson and County Councillor Cliff Trotter were not in attendance.

Members made the following key comments:

- A Member said that he would have appreciated if County Councillor Cliff Trotter could have informed the Committee about Leeds Bradford Airport's Airspace Change Proposal, in view of its relevance to the county. He noted that the consultation closed on 5 November 2017.

The Committee thanked County Councillor David Jeffels for his report.

Resolved -

That County Councillor Chris Pearson and County Councillor Cliff Trotter be requested to produce a written update report on the Robin Hood and Leeds Bradford Airport Consultative Committees respectively, including making reference to the Leeds

Bradford Airport's Airspace Change Proposal.

17. Work Programme

Considered -

The report of the Corporate Development Officer asking the Committee to note the information in the report and to confirm, amend or add to the areas of work shown in the Work Programme schedule attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Resolved -

That an update report on the Adult Learning and Skills Service be presented to the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10 April 2018.

The meeting concluded at 12.31 pm

JS