

North Yorkshire County Council

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 23 January 2020 at 10.00 am.

Present:

County Councillor Stanley Lumley in the Chair.

County Councillors Karl Arthur, David Goode, Paul Haslam, Robert Heseltine, David Jeffels, Don Mackay, Andy Paraskos, Caroline Patmore, Roberta Swiers and Richard Welch.

NYCC Officers attending: David Bowe, Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services (BES), Andrew Leeming, Enterprise Partnership Manager - York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP and Jonathan Spencer, Principal Scrutiny Officer (CSD).

One representative of the press was present.

County Councillors John McCartney and Clive Pearson were not in attendance.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

93. Minutes

Resolved -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

94. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

95. Public Questions or Statements

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

96. Corporate Director's update

Considered -

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

David Bowe provided the following update.

- A decision from the Department for Transport (DfT) was still awaited regarding whether the government would fund the bulk of the costs of the A59 diversion

at Kex Gill. Julian Smith MP had sent in a request to Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport but had received a non-committal reply back explaining that the DfT was in the process of reviewing the submission. It was hoped that funding could be assured through the DfT's Resilience Budget, which following the election might be unconstrained by time.

- Funding had been committed by the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership and from North Yorkshire County Council to double the number of trains on the Harrogate to York railway line. It was a complex logistical initiative and required the support of Network Rail and the Northern Rail franchise. Access rights had theoretically been granted but at present the initiative was still in a period of consultation and so there was the risk that other operators could challenge the proposals. An announcement about whether the go-ahead had been granted or not, was expected to be received by late February 2020. However, if there was an objection or challenge made this would not necessarily result in a negative outcome. This was because the main parties Network Rail and Northern were supportive of the project.

Members made the following key comments:

- County Councillor David Goode asked if the increase in trains on the Harrogate to York line to two each hour would result in the longer term solution of laying a second line being abandoned. David Bowe confirmed this would not be the case and instead could be a reason for the local community to continue to press for a significant upgrade of the Harrogate line. However, at this stage, it was an aspiration to significantly upgrade the track to electrified double lines and ultimately there could even be the possibility of providing access to Leeds Bradford Airport. It was wishful thinking though to assume that such an investment would go ahead without the bulk, if not all, of the costs being funded by the private sector.
- County Councillor Caroline Patmore said that she very concerned about the delay in the funding announcement for the A59 at Kex Gill and asked what the timeframe was before the existing road collapsed. She said that whilst it was important to lobby government there needed to be a cut-off point due to the road's strategic importance to the county. David Bowe replied that the County Council had done all it could to stabilize the hill. If government funding did not transpire there could be no guarantees that further work to stabilize the hill would have any lasting effect. The cost of the route diversion was £50 million. North Yorkshire County Council had offered £5 million to cover its percentage of the costs of the work. The County Council was using every means to highlight the seriousness of the situation including through Transport for the North. Transport for the North recognised that the road had an impact upon the regional connectivity of the road network in particular in West Yorkshire because when Kex Gill was closed it caused major traffic congestion in Ilkley and Otley. The two local MPs Andrew Jones and Julian Smith continued to lobby hard and the Prime Minister had promised more money for the North of England in various statements that he had given.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam said that it was disappointing that the upgrading of the Leeds, Harrogate to York railway line was not on the government's wish list. If the economic benefits that the Harrogate Conference Centre brought to the area were taken into account with regards to the GVA score that the government used, it would swing the maths as well as the extra access that there would be for York rather than passengers travelling straight

into Leeds. An analysis should therefore be undertaken to examine how much York would benefit if Harrogate had improved access through the upgrading of the railway line. County Councillor Paul Haslam went on to state that the potential for a rail halt or station in the Claro area on the Harrogate to York railway line would help increase passenger numbers and take a lot of traffic off the roads. In responding to the first point raised by County Councillor Paul Haslam, David Bowe said that the issue with the GVA calculation is it depended upon whether it was calculated on the basis of a person in Harrogate spending more money in York or whether the same pound would have been spent in Harrogate. In relation to the second point, David Bowe said that the introduction of an additional station on the line would come down to whether the private sector saw the benefit in doing so. Also there were limits to what additional capacity the Skelton junction on the East Coast mainline to York could accommodate.

- County Councillor Robert Heseltine said that an advantage of the outcome of the General Election in 2019 was that the nation had woken up to stable government for five years. This should in itself be a building block for the security of investment nationally. The problem was that there was now a window of less than five years and the clock was ticking. North Yorkshire County Council's current policy was to support HS2 but it appeared that some in government were now rowing back from committing to the HS2 rollout. £100 billion was being seen as dreadful to invest in the North of England and yet in the South of England the amount of funding spent on transport infrastructure was many times over, with £18 billion being spent on the Cross Rail project. Meanwhile commuter lines in the North of England had been neglected for decades, for example the York to Scarborough railway line still remained a single track line. With regards to GVA scoring of transport projects, Ministers only needed a miniscule of an argument to stop improvements in transport infrastructure in the North of England. It was important that North Yorkshire County Council reconfirmed its policy to support HS2 and to even more strongly support, in the shorter term, upgrades to commuter lines to bring them up to modern standards.
- County Councillor Don McKay said that he did not support the HS2 project as he did not believe it represented value for money simply to save 20 minutes off a journey. Investment instead needed to focus on improving the commuter lines in the North of England.
- County Councillor David Jeffels said that the Scarborough to York line remained beset with problems due to trains being cancelled. The new station car park promised for Seamer was desperately needed. He went on to note that the road traffic problems on County Bridge, Malton to Norton, remained still unresolved. The situation would be aggravated further when the new half hourly train service started in May 2020. David Bowe replied that in respect of Seamer Station, the County Council had looked at enhanced car parking but it could not be delivered. There were other locations where a car park could be built in the local area but there was the problem of additional costs due to bridging the railway line. The problem that North Yorkshire faced for this and other similar projects was the GVA comparative assessment, which was much easier to demonstrate in the South of England than it was in the North of England. What was required was to allocate the elements of funding in a different way such as the inclusion of a rural and urban element, to drive the outcomes and objectives that were required locally. In respect of the traffic congestion issues in Malton and Norton, traffic modelling and the impact that additional trains would have was included in the Malton and Norton

Infrastructure and Connectivity Improvements Study. At the present time the best solution was to have traffic signal arrangements. The issue with that though was at times this would have an adverse effect, whereas at peak times there would be a benefit. A bypass to the north of Malton on to the A64 would help alleviate the traffic congestion.

- County Councillor Karl Arthur said that the funding earmarked for the HS2 project could be much better spent in the North of England instead. Electrifying the railway line between Manchester to Hull, introducing new rolling stock on trains and investing in the A64 trunk road were better uses of the funding.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam said that the thinking behind the HS2 project was not just about reduction in journey times but more importantly about introducing additional freight and passenger capacity on the railway. He noted that EU funding had historically included a social benefit element for projects whereas the GVA assessment was calculated on a purely commercial basis and so going forward the latter might be the case for infrastructure related projects.
- County Councillor Robert Heseltine noted that North Yorkshire's and Northern England's destiny in infrastructure as a whole was likely to be linked closely with the devolution agenda. The government needed to do the right thing and allow devolution for One Yorkshire or even for a wider Greater Yorkshire. Sheffield City Region had got its devolution and HS2 would be going to Manchester and probably to Sheffield. Leeds City Region now had its devolution deal waiting to be signed, sealed and delivered. Hull and East Riding were also getting their act together. There did appear to be a strategy on the government's part to divide and rule by dividing Yorkshire up as it was terrified of having a One Yorkshire governance model. As things stood, North Yorkshire would pick up the crumbs unless it fought harder and soon.

Resolved -

That the update be noted.

97. York, North Yorkshire & East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership

Considered -

The written report of the Corporate Director - Business and Environmental providing an update on the performance of the York, North Yorkshire & East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership.

Andrew Leeming introduced the report. Referring to section 2 of the report, he provided an overview of the projects delivered through the Local Growth Fund, as detailed in the report. £80.9 million had been spent on schemes between 2015 to Q2 2019/20. In order to ensure full investment of the £123.9 million available, further projects were in the pipeline, as listed in paragraph 2.7. He went on to refer to section 3 of the report relating to skills development. In general, the various programmes had successfully supported people in the workforce. The targets in relation to apprenticeships however had been more difficult to achieve, with changes brought in by the government. Careers Advice was mainly funded through the EU's Social Project of £14 million. This was coming to an end and the LEP was keen to ensure that the UK Government replaced this with a similar initiative. Andrew Leeming referred to section 4 of the report relating to the LEP's Local Energy Strategy and

Circular Economy Strategy, linking into the Local Industrial Strategy. The rationale was to move from a linear economy where items were thrown out to a circular economy where items could be re-used, ensuring better value of what was extracted from the planet. The Local Industrial Strategy had been in the making for the past two years. Its key focus was to improve productivity in the economy. Currently North Yorkshire was a low productivity area and had slipped behind some of the other LEP areas. The Local Industrial Strategy would feed into the government's wider national industrial strategy. Referring to section 5 of the report he noted that the LEP's Local Industrial Strategy was currently out to consultation. He went on to provide an overview of the three priorities in the strategy, as listed at paragraph 5.4 of the report.

Andrew Leeming then referred to Section 6 of the report relating to the national review of LEPs and the outcome locally for the LEP resulting in it now no longer having overlapping geographical boundaries with other LEP areas in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Members made the following key comments:

- County Councillor Stanley Lumley asked if the LEP would fund the cost of diverting the A59 at Kex Gill if North Yorkshire County Council did not receive the funding required from the government. Andrew Leeming replied that whilst this would not be ruled in or out it would be very unlikely that the full costs of the project would be able to be funded by the LEP due to funding commitments for other projects. David Bowe said that if the amount of funding that the government provided was well below what North Yorkshire County Council required, it would seek funding from the LEP but not for the whole amount.
- County Councillor David Goode noted the high level challenges faced in the local jobs market especially around low paid work and the lack of high technical jobs into the area. He went to ask if the LEP had done an impact assessment of Brexit regarding the potential loss of jobs in the area over a five to ten year period and what measures could be put in place to mitigate job losses. Andrew Leeming replied that the LEP had done some analysis in this regard in particular on the effect of Brexit around farm payments. A member of staff had been employed at the LEP to advise businesses on changes of requirements post-Brexit. Some work had been done on the effect on the local labour market but what impact there would be depended upon who you asked and in which sectors of employment. There were some potential skills shortages in the economy and related actions had been incorporated into the Local Industrial Strategy.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam asked if the LEP could produce an area-by-area list of projects with inclusion of performance and/or social benefit information. He went on to mention that he was concerned there might be a rush to spend the remaining balance detailed in section 2 of the report without further consideration of how the funding could best be spent. He said that whilst he very much welcomed the LEP's approach about supporting a circular economy to tackle climate change, this was not clearly reflected in the draft Local Industrial Strategy document. Andrew Leeming replied that the LEP was able to provide more background on the projects and was currently starting to do impact assessments on those projects. This was part of an overall review. He went on to reassure Cllr Haslam that the LEP did not rush to spend unallocated funding money; the quality of projects was always of uppermost importance. The LEP would, however, welcome the government extending the timeframe in which the funding had to be spent. He went on to explain that the call for projects initially went to local authorities and key stakeholders in the

area, namely the Environment Agency, Highways England, Network Rail and Transport for the North. The LEP had recently opened the call for longer term projects, which had gone to local authorities, universities and FE colleges. He went on to note that with regards to the Local Industrial Strategy if the aspiration to move to a low carbon economy was not fully reflected in the document, he would look into that and he also invited people to respond to the consultation. He said that one of the climate change aspects that the Local Industrial Strategy wanted to major on was carbon capture, using land for that purpose. The intention was that once the strategy had been agreed investment plans would be produced providing more detail.

- County Councillor Richard Welch said that one of the most frustrating aspects of how funding was being allocated by the LEP was that smaller but still significant projects were being neglected especially in rural areas with a lower population. He explained that in his division there was the only bridge on the busy A65 road that was not wide enough to take two goods vehicles. Accidents continued to occur and yet the widening of the bridge did not meet the LEP's criteria for funding. Andrew Leeming replied that the support for projects relied on local authorities coming forward with the proposals. If a business case could be made for a project, the LEP would support it if the funding was available.
- County Councillor David Goode said that he welcomed the LEP's approach to creating a low carbon economy. He went on to note that North Yorkshire County Council was doing a similar exercise and asked what level of engagement there was between both. With regards to business growth, local plans had identified areas for manufacturing industrial development but it was not clear where the businesses would come on. He asked where the LEP's strategic zone would be. Andrew Leeming replied that there was a lot of collaboration between the LEP and local authorities regarding the climate change agenda. In strategic terms it was high on the LEP's agenda but also relied upon what other organisations could do. If large organisations made changes in the direction of creating a circular economy and low carbon economy that would make a big difference overall. With regards to business growth, York and North Yorkshire and East Riding had identified areas where there was the potential for significant growth and over the course of the first half of this year would be looking at the type of business to attract. To this end there was currently a lot of discussions going on with local planning departments and local economic development departments.
- County Councillor David Jeffels referred to the 28% decline in apprenticeship starts cited on page 25 of the Local Industrial Strategy document. He asked how this reduction could be addressed and asked if the continuing trend of the younger generation moving away from North Yorkshire was related to this because there were not sufficient opportunities locally. He noted that if younger people were skilled up by local employers this would not only bring benefits economically but would also help to try to reverse the trend of North Yorkshire having an increasingly ageing population in the county. Andrew Leeming mentioned that background evidence, which was on the YNYER LEP website, had been produced by the Skills Advisory Panel. The Panel's report set out the key issues, including problems with the way in which the national apprenticeship scheme operated, making it difficult for young people to get into apprenticeships. There was a mismatch in the LEP area between having a low wage economy alongside a well-qualified and highly skilled population. There was no FE provision in the north of county. The lack of affordable housing was

also a big driver in young people moving away. The Skills Report and needs assessment were useful starting points to start to identify some of the solutions.

- County Councillor Robert Heseltine said it would be remiss if there was not mention in the Local Industrial Strategy of making best use of the land. Farmers had been told that post-Brexit the agricultural subsidy from government would be based on the 'public good' such as carbon sequestration, soil improvement etc. Food production would not be helped much. However, production of food remained the ultimate public good from managing land. If we were not careful there would be a sharp decline in upland farming leading to the depopulation of upland areas. This would unfortunately lead to those areas reverting to wilderness and yet the rural landscape created by farmers was what people came to see. Upland farmers were deeply worried whether they would have a future. Whilst climate change was happening and needed to be addressed worldwide, nature had a balance to get things right. National policies needed to recognise land management. Farmers that farm had been custodians of the landscape for generations and should in the future, by being able to produce food.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam said that he supported the priorities in the Local Industrial Strategy with some caveats but he would like the LEP to provide more frequent updates to the Committee so that the Committee could have a greater impact. He had not been aware for example of the recent workshops that had been held. He went on to note that the aim of creating a circular economy was laudable but we might want progress to be faster.

Resolved –

That the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the progress on the Local Growth Fund, Skills & Low Carbon and supports the outcome of the 'Strengthening Local Enterprise Partnerships' national review with the LEP reverting to York and North Yorkshire.

98. Winter Highways Maintenance Programme

Considered –

The verbal report of the NYCC Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services to provide an overview of the Winter Maintenance Policy. The Winter Maintenance Policy was included in the agenda pack.

David Bowe said that the Winter Maintenance Policy allowed flexibility in the way in which the Winter Maintenance programme was delivered. At present the route prioritisation was done on the basis of geographical areas. An alternative was to take into account the weather forecast relative to the topography of an area. However, the dilemma with that was it ran the risk of 'dead-running' where gritters were not being used for long periods. Where marginal weather conditions arose it was difficult to predict where the severe weather would be. Other options included looking at the spread density of the salt. Currently the gritters sprayed 10 million grams of salt per square meter. New higher quality equipment could reduce this amount to nine million grams per square metre, resulting in a financial saving. Other ways to reduce costs included reducing the number of gritter wagons on the fleet. Currently there were 86 vehicles used on the road network but there was never any more than 76 vehicles being used at the same time. This was due firstly to the operational ability of the

vehicle and manpower levels. In the policy there was nothing to say that the County Council had to retain its current fleet other than for priority routes, which involved using 66 vehicles. David Bowe concluded that the County Council did not need to change the policy to change processes but priority one and priority two routes could not be changed without re-visiting the policy.

Members made the following key comments:

- County Councillor David Jeffels asked if the potential reduction in salt coverage use per square metre and the overall trend for milder winters resulting in less gritting being required, could allow the savings made to be allocated to pothole improvement and general work. David Bowe replied that the budget was seven million pounds. Any surplus achieved each year went into reserves until a ceiling was reached. Eleven million pounds was the most spent. The challenge was if it was concluded that the existing budget was too large because of the reserves that had accumulated, then there might not be sufficient funding to tackle severe winters. With climate change it was more rather than less likely that there would be extremes of weather. More wet winters and autumns were likely to bring more problems to the network. The nightmare scenario was a wet autumn and a severe winter. Another way to achieve savings could be about the level of salt reserves kept in the county. An assessment was being undertaken to consider whether it would be worth investing in salt storage for emergencies for those once in a ten year events. When extreme winters occur the price of salt increased and so there could be a business case to have greater salt reserves.
- County Councillor Andy Paraskos said that a number of villages within his division had roads running through them which were not gritted. He asked if the County Council would be able to grit those roads if the local parish was willing to finance the cost. David Bowe said that the cost of additional treatment was very high as it would require extending the fleet. Any proposal would have to be examined in detail to see if it complied with the Winter Maintenance Policy. Invariably parishes wanted their roads gritted when there was an extreme situation. This perversely increased the risk of the fleet not being able to meet this demand as it would occur at a time when the vehicles were committed more than ever to keeping the priority routes open.
- County Councillor Richard Welch noted that different parts of the county had different requirements with regards to gritting. The topography, especially the height of settlements needed to be taken into account. An example included Settle which was on average two degrees colder than Scarborough due to its relative height; in turn the air temperature on roads running over to Malham were on average four degrees colder than in Settle. People struggled the most in bad winters with regards to travel and the policy needed to be more flexible in this regard. David Bowe replied that resources did go into treating roads in and around Settle and Malham but the route prioritisation meant that the A65, the highest priority road within that geography, was treated first.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam said that with regards to climate change the beast from the East type events were expected to become more prevalent and asked how this would impact upon the County Council's response. He went on to ask how the gritting vehicles were being utilised in the non-winter months and asked if they could be adapted to combatting any climate change issue. David Bowe explained that the County Council had in the past used vehicles with demountable winter gritting equipment but what had been found was that there were associated costs with demounting the equipment from the vehicle,

which had proved to be very expensive. With regards to more extreme weather events in the future, the issue was ensuring that communities were better prepared in order to be more resilient, especially in respect of flooding.

Resolved –

That the report be noted.

99. Work Programme

Considered -

The report of the Principal Scrutiny Officer asking the Committee to confirm, amend or add to the areas of the work listed in the Work Programme schedule (Appendix 1 to the report).

Jonathan Spencer introduced the report.

The Chairman noted that the Climate Change Task Group had decided the way forward was to direct areas to investigate to the overview and scrutiny committees. This was due to the broad-ranging nature of climate change and the actions required. In due course the Transport, Economy and Environment's Overview and Scrutiny Committee would need to incorporate relevant areas of work relating to its terms of reference into its work programme. Further direction was awaited from the Task Group.

Resolved -

- a) That the work programme be noted.
- b) That an update on the performance of the Allerton Waste Recovery Park be added to the work programme.
- c) That regular updates from the YNYER LEP be sent to Members on the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12.05pm

JS