

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Monday, 7th June 2021 commencing at 10.30 am.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair. plus County Councillors Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Goodrick, Mike Jordan, Richard Musgrave, Andy Paraskos, Yvonne Peacock, Tony Randerson, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

Officers present: Neil Irving, Jon Holden, Chrys Mellor & Melanie Carr.

Apologies: County Councillors Bryn Griffiths, Val Arnold and Angus Thompson. .

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**Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book**

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### **150 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 April 2021**

#### **Resolved –**

That the Minutes of the formal meeting held on 19 April having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **151 Apologies & Declaration of Interest**

Apologies were received from County Councillors Bryn Griffiths; Val Arnold and Angus Thompson Mike Jordan.

There were or declarations of interest to note.

### **152 Public Questions & Statements**

There were no public questions or statements received.

### **153 Bi-annual Update on Community Safety Plan Delivery & Partnership Working**

Members were disappointed to note the absence of Dr Justin Ives - Chief Executive of the Community Safety Partnership. In his absence they agreed to submit the following questions to the Head of Safer Communities with a request for a written response:

- In regard to the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner monitoring the effectiveness of local authorities and other statutory agencies – did those other statutory agencies include Wetherby Young Offenders Institute?
- How much liaison/work took place with District Council Housing departments?
- What counselling was offered to victims of domestic abuse?
- In regard to Serious and Organised Crime, which organisations made up the multi-agencies referred to in the report?

Finally, as there was no mention in the report of LGBT Groups, the Chair questioned whether they were included in the information on hate crime and community cohesion. He also asked that in future a more detailed report be provided, that included an update on any LGBT related issues.

Members were pleased to note the new Domestic Abuse Act. In particular they were pleased to see that GPs would no longer be able to charge a domestic abuse victim for a letter in support of an application for legal aid.

The Committee requested the attendance of the new Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership and the Head of Safer Communities, the next time the Committee was scheduled to receive a bi-annual update.

**Resolved** – That:

- i. The report be noted
- ii. The questions agreed at the meeting be submitted for a written response

#### **154 Property Services Bi-annual Performance Update**

Jon Holden, Head of Property Services provided a progress update on the Council's approach to property services and the rationalisation of NYCC's property portfolio, which included:

- An overview of the ongoing objectives for the Service;
- An update on the savings achieved to date against the target set as part of the 2020 Programme;
- A breakdown of the different types of properties within the County Council's portfolio;
- An overview of the re-modelling works for NYCC headquarters which were completed on budget but not on time, due to Covid;

He also provided an update on the other challenges, risks and issues associated with Covid, which included:

- The need for regular inspections of workplaces – it was noted that the HSE had given the County Council a clean bill of health following its spot checks;
- The significant impact on works planned or already underway
- The risks associated with maintenance contractors going in to the buildings;

In regard to the ongoing works to reduce carbon and improve energy efficiency, Members noted the Smart Campus review underway – looking at what technologies could be implemented to further improve efficiency and the opportunities arising for staff to work in a more efficient way. It was confirmed that energy efficiency advice and guidance had been made available to staff working from home. They also noted the continuing work to promote behavioural change.

Members queried whether going forward, the County Council had the technology available for holding hybrid meetings, they also questioned what work may be required if the Local Government Review was successful.

In response, Jon Holden confirmed that should LGR prove successful, property services would work closely with the District Councils to assess all buildings, and that the benefits that had arisen from remote meetings e.g. reduction in travel time, the improved experience / attendance of outside bodies and members of the public would feed in to the decision making around future meetings.

Members thanked Jon Holden for his update report and it was

**Resolved** – That:

- i. The update be noted
- ii. That a further update be provided in 6 months.

## **155 Annual Update on Library Services**

Members received a presentation from Chrys Mellor, General Manager of NYCC Libraries, providing an overview of their work since April 2020, throughout the Covid pandemic.

Chrys Mellor confirmed:

- The new Library Strategy was approved by Council in July 2020 with its new core priorities of Digital; Literacy & Learning; Health & Wellbeing; and Communities;
- There were a number of challenges e.g. capacity, skills, and IT kit for frontline staff. There was also much concern initially about loss of income but most community libraries had since received COVID grants. There had also been some reluctance to do things online, followed by a fear of re-opening and coming back into the physical spaces;
- Many volunteers were shielding;
- Originally, returned books were being quarantined but now they were comfortable with just wiping them clean;
- At the start of lockdown over 3,500 new members registered;
- A new library app was introduced in June 2020, making it easier to access the digital library;
- In November 2020 a new Select & Collect service was introduced, with over 3000 members now registered for the service. It's success had led to a decision to retain the service post COVID;
- A Young Adults Group was formed providing online sessions for other young adults across the county;
- Virtual classes were successfully piloted in the Scarborough area and would be rolled out across the county;
- Funding was received to pilot some telephone/online reading groups to reduce isolation and support well-being;
- Libraries had worked with Stronger Communities to deliver a telephone Befriending Service;
- A number of libraries had received a make-over;
- Libraries became a drop off point for North Yorkshire's Reboot Project;
- 142,000 new books were processed;
- Libraries were open only 41% of the year but by the end of June 2021, opening hours were nearly back to normal;
- Library priorities had been re-jigged to bring them inline nationally with how can support recovery

Chrys Mellor went on give an overview of the lessons learnt -'Give it a go'; 'Keep calm'; and 'Communicate'.

Members noted the challenges ahead, which included improving customer confidence, increasing volunteer capacity and volunteer retention, and funding. In order to encourage more donations, they asked that a press release be issued confirming that NYCC was prepared to wipe clean data on IT equipment donated via the Reboot Project.

In regard to volunteers, concern was expressed about the over reliance on their use. Suggestions were made about alternative routes in to volunteering. Members also queried

how residents who were not online, were made aware of all the services provided by libraries, and it was confirmed it was a challenge but often through press releases, radios and word of mouth. It was noted that the volunteers also acted as advocates for the library service.

Members questioned the possibility of residents using a private space within a public library to access and participate in online NYCC meetings e.g. a home to school transport appeal. It was confirmed that not all libraries had such a space but it was something they could work on. Finally, it was confirmed that post pandemic, there would be no loss of the services previously provided (as a result of the introduction of new services), although for some a mixed hybrid approach may be required initially.

Members recorded their appreciation for the work of volunteers and library staff, and it was

**Resolved** - That the annual Library Services update be noted.

#### **156 Annual Review of Locality Budgets 2020/21**

Members received a report reviewing the operation of County Councillor Locality Budgets in the financial year 2020/21.

Neil Irving, Assistant Director - Policy, Partnerships and Communities, Policy Partnerships and Communities (CSD) introduced the report, which confirmed the Locality Budgets were in their sixth year.

Members were disappointed to note that two County Councillors had not spent any of the budget allocation, and it was confirmed that it was a mixed picture in terms of seed funding, with many not requiring match funding.

**Resolved –**

That the report on the operation of County Councillor Locality Budgets during the 2020/21 financial year be noted.

#### **157 Work Programme 2020/21**

Members received a report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year, taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

County Councillor Mike Jordon drew attention to a recent fire in Scarborough caused by the use of a solar battery charger used to charge equipment in a caravan. He agreed he would keep a watching brief on the issue and would report it to Trading Standards if necessary.

The Chair agreed to follow up on the Safer Communities item and the lines of enquiry identified earlier in the meeting, and asked that it be added to the work programme for the Committee's next meeting.

**Resolved –** That the work programme for the next meeting be amended to include the additional item identified.

The meeting concluded at 12.18 pm.