

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Monday, 5th December 2022 commencing at 10.30 am.

County Councillor David Ireton in the Chair. plus County Councillors Nick Brown, Chris Aldred, Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff, Kevin Foster, Richard Foster, Bryn Griffiths, Tim Grogan, Robert Heseltine, Tom Jones, Yvonne Peacock, Tony Randerson, Malcolm Taylor, Phil Trumper, Eric Broadbent and George Jabbour.

Officers present: Jon Holden, Deborah Hugill, Alaina Kitching, Robert Ling and Simon Moss and Melanie Carr.

Apologies: County Councillors Karl Arthur and Subash Sharma.

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

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### **20 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2022**

#### **Resolved –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2022 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **21 Apologies & Declaration of Interest**

There were no apologies or declarations of interest to note.

### **22 Public Questions & Statements**

There were no public questions or statements received.

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

Jon Holden, Head of Property Services, gave an overview of the key points from the presentation, as summarised below:

- Savings of £954,000 have been achieved since 2014, with £213,500 identified in 22/23
- Rationalisation opportunities associated with LGR. For example in Northallerton
- New Ways of Working (Post Covid-19) with most back office staff working from home for some of the week
- Continued reviews of running costs, including energy, in light of inflationary pressures
- Ongoing work on carbon reduction and the achievement of the 2030 target
- Carbon reduction achieved through property rationalisation, investment in building fabric, LED lighting upgrades, feasibility studies on low carbon technologies, decarbonisation of heat and behaviour change
- £1.9m on Public Sector Heat Decarbonisation Scheme window replacement work at 22 schools and 4 corporate sites
- 174 properties are managed that are used for the direct or indirect delivery of services

that are not provided by Schools and Pupil Referral Units

- There are 231 community schools and community Pupil Referral Units
- There are 192 properties that are not used for direct or indirect service delivery in the short, medium or long terms
- During 2021-2022, 34 capital projects completed with total value of £22.8m
- £4.364m traded turnover in 2021-22, with a total of 280 clients.

There followed a discussion, with key points as summarised below:

- There are between 3,000 and 4,000 assets across all 8 local authorities. A programme of review and rationalisation will be undertaken after vesting day but the focus at present is upon making the 'safe and legal' transition to the new unitary authority
- A number of councillors raised queries about the future of district and borough council properties and also the use of the existing County Hall site
- Interest in understanding the liabilities and risks associated with the properties that would be inherited by the new unitary council
- The air source heat pumps are located at an office, a library and a children's resource centre. For the pumps to work effectively high levels of insulation are needed in the buildings
- The lifetime of a commercial boiler is 15 years. Towards the end of that period, a review is undertaken to see what form of heating could be adopted that is effective, efficient and helps with decarbonisation
- The refurbishment of the Grand committee room at County Hall, Northallerton will not be complete until next year. The work to remove asbestos has been complex
- There was interest in understanding how the various office setups impacted upon productivity.

County Councillor George Jabbour sought clarification on assets listed as 'other' in the presentation.

In response, Jon Holden explained that these were often bus stops or laybys used by highways to store grit or surface dressing material. He said that he would provide a written response.

County Councillor Tony Randerson asked what was happening to the old Overdale primary school site.

Jon Holden said that the site had been made secure following the suspected arson attack and that the Council was looking to dispose of the site.

The Chair summed up and thanked Jon Holden for attending the meeting and presenting his annual update to the committee.

**Resolved** – That an update on the management of the property portfolio and any planned rationalisation following the creation of the new North Yorkshire Council be brought back to the December 2023 meeting of the committee.

## 24 Annual Equality and Diversity Update

Deb Hugill, Senior Strategy and Performance Officer, gave an overview of the report with key points as summarised below:

- The report provides Members with an overview of progress with achieving the Council's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) objectives and other EDI related work
- The public sector equality duty requires the Council to prepare and publish one or more equality objectives at least every four years

- A vaccine assurance group was set up to identify and address inequalities in the COVID-19 vaccine take up
- The vaccine assurance group identified that schools could be doing more to promote uptake of school-age immunisations
- Refugee resettlement by the Council working in partnership with the district councils, has permanently resettled 127 persons (27 families) under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and to date 134 persons (34 families) under the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)
- Work has continued on exploring the Council's employment of disabled people, particularly people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent people
- Four staff networks have been established and are chaired by senior members of staff: Pride; Value in Racial Diversity; Disabled Employee; Gender Equality
- Mandatory EDI training for all managers has been developed and is in the pilot stage
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month in June was promoted within the Council
- Pride month was promoted and celebrated within the Council in June
- Digital inclusion has been enabled with the roll out of free public WiFi in 20 towns across the county
- Work is progressing to develop a proposed framework to ensure the new council meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty.

There followed a discussion, with the key points as summarised below:

- Access to transport is a key issue in North Yorkshire, particularly bus services and rail
- Equality of access to services in a county as sparsely populated as North Yorkshire will always be a challenge
- It is important that we, as a commissioner and provider of services, understand what people's needs are and work to prevent discrimination
- Keen to ensure that key pieces of work on equality and diversity that have been undertaken in the districts and boroughs are not lost as the new unitary council is formed.

County Councillor George Jabbour asked whether comparator data could be shared regarding the diversity of staff working for the County Council and other similar councils.

The Chair summed up and thanked Deb Hugill for attending the meeting and updating members on the Council's work on equality and diversity.

**Resolved** – That a further update be provided to the committee in December 2023.

## **25 Update on the Development of a new Council Plan 2023-27**

Simon Moss, Strategy and Performance Team Leader, introduced the report and made key points as summarised below:

- The Council Plan 2023-27 will go to County Council in February 2023 for approval
- It is the new council plan for the new council and a bringing together of elements of the existing plans from 8 local authorities. It has not been, however, an exercise in simply stapling together those plans
- Representatives from all 8 local authorities have worked together on the development of the plan
- There has been a move to adopting more thematic objectives
- There is a need to have 'deliverable ambition' on the objectives and targets
- There are five themes: Place and Environment; Economy; Health and wellbeing; People; and Organisation
- The full draft plan will be circulated by email to all members of the Council after 19

December 2022 for comment.

There followed a discussion, the key points of which are as summarised below:

- There are no references to councillors in the plan and the key role that they have to play in their Electoral Divisions
- It would be helpful to have a more detailed explanation of how the new unitary council will be locally responsive and accountable
- The community networks and the role that they will play needs to be explained in the Council Plan
- Concerns raised that the community networks were not needed as Parish and Town Councils already fulfilled that role
- There is a risk that the community networks undermine the Parish and Town Councils
- Concerns that the 'Let's Talk' campaign was not as open and transparent as it could have been and that key aspects of how the new council will work were not covered
- Members need to take a key role in the establishment and development of the community networks
- The section on the economy does not mention the inter-dependencies with neighbouring authorities
- Queries about the accountability of the community networks
- Little or no mention of sustainable housing in the plan.

The Chair summed up and thanked Simon Moss and Alaina Kitching for attending and updating the committee.

#### **Resolved –**

1. That a report on the next iteration of the Council Plan be brought to the meeting of the committee in December 2023
2. That the points raised by members in the discussions on this item be taken into account in the development of the Council Plan.

## **26 Update on the Operation of the Customer Portal**

Robert Ling, AD Technology and Change Management, and Sarah Foley, Head of Customer Services, introduced the presentation and made key points as summarised below:

- The number of website views had been slightly down on the previous year. This was to be expected as 2021 was the height of the pandemic when large amount of covid-19 related information was posted on the website for the public to access
- Social media activity continued to grow, and work was being done to expand the range of activity. The number of hits on Facebook were 48,977; Instagram 8,534; Twitter 5,505; and LinkedIn 4,067
- The feedback on the map of roadworks had been poor. The mapping system was sourced from a third party to large numbers of local authorities and work was underway to improve this system
- Services continue to be moved on-line and this is helping to reduce the number of face to face meetings
- About 57% of all services were now requested on-line
- There are challenges around telephony as it tended to be the more complex requests that go via that route
- There were delays in responding to telephone calls and work was being done to reduce those delays, but compared to many private sector organisations performance was relatively good

- More resource had been put into the night shift team in the call centre
- The focus was upon digital by choice and not digital by default.

Robert Ling apologised to members for the wrong version of the presentation being included in the papers for the meeting.

There followed a discussion, the key points of which are as summarised below:

- Need to ensure that personalised contact details were removed from the website and that generic, team emails and phone numbers were used. This helps ensure that queries were answered effectively and not missed when someone was in a meeting or on leave
- Concerns about the length of time that people had to wait until phone calls were answered and also the number of abandoned calls
- Need to ensure that telephone access was still available to people as not everyone could use or had access to IT
- Plea to ensure that all reports to councillors and information to the public was in plain English
- Queries about the capacity to ensure that all services continued to be supported once the new unitary council was established.

The Chair summed up and thanked Robert Ling and Sarah Foley for attending and updating the committee.

**Resolved** – That a further update on operation of the customer portal be brought to the December 2023 meeting of the committee.

## **27 Work Programme 2022/23**

The report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of 2022/23 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

**Resolved** – That the work programme be amended to include the additional items identified at the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.