

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Friday 7 January 2022 commencing at 10.00 am.

County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE in the Chair and County Councillors Margaret Atkinson, Phillip Barrett, Michael Harrison, Robert Heseltine, David Ireton (Vice Chair), Stanley Lumley, Stuart Martin MBE, Patrick Mulligan, Gillian Quinn, Andy Solloway and David Staveley.

In attendance: County Councillors David Chance, Gareth Dadd and Carl Les.

Officers present: Daniel Harry (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager) and Gary Fielding (Corporate Director, Strategic Resources, North Yorkshire County Council).

Other Attendees: The Rt Hon Julian Smith MP.

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

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### **142 Welcome and introductions and apologies for absence**

The committee Chairman, County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE reminded the committee that the meeting was being held informally and that any formal decisions would need to be taken in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer using his emergency powers.

There were no apologies for absence.

### **143 Minutes of the committee meeting held on 16 December 2021**

Considered the minutes of the meeting of the Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee held on 16 December 2021.

#### **Resolved -**

- a. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee held on 16 December 2021, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **144 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

### **145 Public Questions or Statements**

There were none.

### **146 Update from RT Hon Julian Smith MP**

Considered –

An update from the Rt Hon Julian Smith MP

The committee Chairman, County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE, invited the Rt Hon Julian Smith MP to give an overview to the committee of some of his areas of work, concerns and priorities. The key points are as summarised below:

- The hard work of the County Council over the Christmas period, when responding to the Omicron variant, was praised
- At present, the Government is continuing to follow 'Plan B' but there was a debate as to how long Covid-19 restrictions would remain in place
- There is a need to continue to have measures in place nationally and locally to support the hospitality industry
- There is no appetite for school closures and the Government is working with local authorities to help ensure that they stay open
- There is still a need for people to be encouraged to be vaccinated.

There followed a discussion, during the course of which County Councillors made the following points:

- The supply of Lateral Flow Test kits had been disrupted over the Christmas period, with none being available in pharmacies
- People need to have the confidence to go about their business as normal and testing kits can enable this.

County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE thanked the Rt Hon Julian Smith MP for attending the meeting and answering questions from the committee members.

The Rt Hon Julian Smith MP left the meeting at 10:20am.

#### **147 Executive member update to the committee**

Considered –

Updates from Executive Members present at the meeting.

The update provided by County Councillor Carl Les is as summarised below:

- The Area Constituency Committees have helped to promote local councillor engagement with the MPs. This is something that will be important as the new unitary authority is established
- The severity of illness associated with the Omicron variant is less severe than previous variants but more people are catching it and more people are having to self-isolate. This then has an impact on the staffing of adult social care services
- The 'Make Care Matter' campaign has been put in place to address some of the staff shortages in adult social care
- We all have a role in encouraging people to get vaccinated
- The work of volunteers in supporting the delivery of the vaccination programme was praised
- Good progress is being made by officers in working up some models for how key aspects of the new unitary could be delivered. The decisions around what models will be adopted will be made by the new administration after the May 2022 elections
- Some frustrations over the slow start to devolutions talks with Government.

County Councillor Carl Les left the meeting at 10.30am.

The update provided by County Councillor Michael Harrison is as summarised below:

- The increase in staff sickness and absence associated with the Omicron variant has led

- to 15% of adult social care staff being unavailable
- A number of care homes have had outbreaks of Covid-19
- Daily calls to care homes have been re-started, as part of a wider package of support
- Staff within Health and Adult Services have been re-deployed to front line roles
- The County Council has a good supply of Lateral Flow Tests.

The update provided by County Councillor David Chance is as summarised below:

- The Community Support Organisations will be retained for at least the next 12 months. Their role is increasingly focussed upon support people in financial difficulty
- A hotel in Scarborough is being used as a dispersal centre for people who have crossed the Channel and are seeking asylum. The Home Office plays the lead role in the management of the hotel and the resettlement programme. There are some concerns about an associated increase in community tensions.

The update provided by County Councillor Patrick Mulligan is as summarised below:

- The Council is working closely with schools to help ensure that they continue to stay open and that any disruption to children's education is minimised
- Testing, social distancing and masks remain in use at schools
- Clean air machines are being applied for through the Government scheme
- It is too early to know what the impact of the pandemic will be upon staff absences in schools.

County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE thanked the Executive members for their updates and for taking the time to attend the meeting.

#### **148 County Council Budget 2022/23 - Briefing presentation by the Corporate Director, Strategic Resources, North Yorkshire County Council**

Considered -

Gary Fielding (Corporate Director - Strategic Resources) gave a presentation regarding the Council's budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast. The presentation also picked up Council Tax issues, risks, and some financial issues relating to the Skipton and Ripon Constituency area.

Some of the key points highlighted in the presentation by Gary Fielding are as summarised below:

- A general working balance of £27million was available for emergencies, such as dealing with the pandemic and finding capacity to deal with local government reorganisation
- Use of reserves can be a sensible approach as it helps to protect services in the longer term
- There is a difficult decision to be made regarding the level of Council Tax increase that is set. Large increases can have a negative impact upon household income but help protect services, particularly adult social care
- Inflationary pressures are significant and have been taken into account as part of the budget. These pressures are not a uniform 5% across the board but vary widely. For example, the price of gas has increased by 55.8%
- The inflationary increases has had a positive impact on the Council's investments. The Council had no capital debt on variable interest rates so an increase in inflation would have no impact on such debt
- The financial pressures caused by the pandemic are long term. In addition to the need to respond to the pandemic, there is significant pent up demand for services that will have to be met over the next years
- The 2023-24 annual budget will be determined by the new administration. It will include

- a savings plan and Council Tax harmonisation will be a key element
- The Government Settlement is welcomed but there remain some significant cost pressures, including: inflation; pay claims; National Insurance contributions; home to school transport; and hospital discharge into social care services.
- The reform of adult social care funding is needed but will be complex
- Schools funding in the constituency area remains an issue, as the national funding formula does not take into account the issues facing rural schools. The Department for Education are being lobbied and have been receptive to the arguments put forward.

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

- The catchment areas of the secondary schools in the constituency area needed to be reviewed
- The fall in the school roll for many primary schools is having a significant impact upon their financial position
- School closures can have a negative long term impact upon an area, as it discourages young families from moving into the area
- The roll out of free WiFi in the area was welcomed but a query raised as to whether that funding could have been better spent on tackling 'not-spots' and areas of poor reception in the county.

County Councillor Mike Chambers MBE thanked Gary Fielding for attending and answering the questions of the committee.

**Resolved –**

That the presentation on the annual budget be noted.

**149 Committee work programme**

Considered -

A report by Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, outlining the committee work programme.

Daniel Harry introduced the report and asked that Members review the committee's work programme, taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the area.

**Resolved –**

- a. That the committee work programme be reviewed by members.

**150 Other business which the Chairman agrees should be considered as a matter of urgency because of special circumstances**

There was none.

Meeting ended at 11:40am.