

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive

Public Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on Tuesday, 29th November, 2022 commencing at 11.00 am.

County Councillor Carl Les in the Chair. plus County Councillors Gareth Dadd, Derek Bastiman, Michael Harrison, Simon Myers, Janet Sanderson, David Chance, Keane Duncan, Greg White and Annabel Wilkinson.

In attendance: County Councillors Paul Haslam, David Ireton, Karin Sedgwick, Caroline Dickinson, Alyson Baker, Barbara Brodigan, Tom Jones, Andrew Lee, and Malcolm Taylor.

Officers present: Stuart Carlton, Gary Fielding, Richard Flinton, Barry Khan, Richard Webb, Melanie Carr, Mark Kibblewhite and Dani Reeves.

Other Attendees: Mrs Anne Seex and Ms Helen Tomlinson.

Apologies: Karl Battersby.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

120 Introductions

Members of the Executive and Corporate Management Team introduced themselves, followed by other Councillors present at the meeting.

121 Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2022

Resolved –

That the public Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

122 Declarations of Interest

In regard to Agenda item 6, County Councillor Michael Harrison declared a disclosable interest, as an employee of one of the organisations listed in Treasury Management Appendix B. He confirmed he had a dispensation from the Standards Committee enabling him to remain in the meeting and vote on Agenda item 6.

123 Exclusion of the public from the meeting during consideration of each of the items of business listed in Column 1 of the following table on the grounds that they each involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph(s) specified in column 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to information)(Variation) Order 2006:-

Resolved –

That on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined

in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public was excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda item 10 – Capital funding request to purchase property in North Yorkshire.

124 Public Questions and Statements

There were to public questions received. The first from Ms Helen Tomlinson, as follows:

'With the new Council being remote and the number of elected representatives being drastically reduced, it is important for local democracy to have effective mechanisms for North Yorkshire residents to be informed about and consulted on important issues.

Regrettably, the current consultation on priorities for the new Council does not give any grounds for optimism. The survey is a jumbled confusion of issues and, crucially, provides the public with none of the information needed to give meaningful answers about Council priorities.

For example, one question asks 'What should be the new council priorities over the next three years' and lists 11 issues to be put into rank order. Strangely, Adult Social Care is mentioned in the preamble and as a front line service but is then not listed as one of the issues to be ranked.

There is no information about what the new Council might do in relation to any of these issues or what costs might be involved. The first issue listed is 'value for money' - a no-cost issue and, surely, important to everyone but we are required to 'rank' it against 'education and childcare' that already accounts for almost £600 million of County Council spending.

I wonder what would happen if all the responses rank 'health and well being' as the top priority or what North Yorkshire residents will get if 'Town Centres' is a top ranking issue. These questions are being put to the public with no monetary or practical information, models or consequences. This suggests that the consultation document is merely paying lip service to democracy and that the council are, rather patronisingly, assuming that the public cannot handle the relevant information. Why are we presented with a quiz rather than an important consultative document?'

In response, Vanessa Glover, Head of Communications confirmed that 'Let's Talk Local' was the start of a conversation with as many people as possible across North Yorkshire's many communities. It was an important first step for the new council to understand priorities across different areas and to make sure that local views inform the way North Yorkshire Council would work with local people, partners and businesses. She noted Let's Talk Local had so far received more than 3,000 responses.

She also confirmed Let's Talk Local has been supported by more than 200 pop up events across communities, and feedback had been extremely positive, with a number of communities joining in who the Authority had not been able to engage with previously. She encouraged as many people and places as possible to contribute and thanked everyone who had taken part in it and the other surveys on the Authority's commonplace platform.

She acknowledged that adult social care and children's services would represent two of the largest areas of spend for the new council and therefore their mention had been just for context. The priority list was based on themes, rather than services, to help start the deeper conversations locally based on local priorities. She also accepted that everywhere was different and suggested that by undertaking the biggest countywide conversation, the new council was setting out its stall clearly as one that wanted to listen and work at a very local level.

She drew attention to the opportunities in the statutory consultation 'Let's Talk Money', for people to rank specific services rather than themes if they wanted to.

Finally, Vanessa Glover confirmed:

- For Let's Talk Local, where health and wellbeing was a top priority in an area, deeper conversations would follow in that community to understand in more detail.
- Where high streets were a priority – things like public realm improvements, business enhancing and cultural initiatives could potentially be pursued through strong local partnership working. Dependent on what people said was of value locally.
- The aim of Let's Talk was to have conversations with residents about what was important to them.
- Over 5,000 online responses had been received across the three surveys and people from all over the county had come in person to share their views at face-to-face events.
- There were a range of topics included on the Let's Talk online platform with a mix of questions and free text boxes for people who would like to say more.
- The feedback from both the online platform and the face- to- face conversations at the events, would be used to inform a variety of strategies and plans which would be more formally consulted upon, alongside more detailed information in the future.

The second question was submitted by Mrs Anne Seex as follows:

'Having attended a 'Let's Talk Local' consultation event in my community and completed the survey on-line, I am appalled by this poor quality, utterly amateurish process. I would like answers to the following points:

- *Did the Council get advice from any professional public opinion or market research organisations? If so, which one?*
- *Who set the questions in the survey?*
- *Which Councillors approved the survey and when?*
- *What 'consumer testing' was done before launching the survey?*
- *Who will analyse the results?*
- *How many responses are needed for the results to be statistically valid and for the data collected in the 'personal information' section to have any value in analysing the responses to the other sections?*
- *How will the Council use the answers to the question 'what do you think makes a good place to live?' to work with residents at a local level?*
- *Will the Council publish the briefing information issued to the staff who attend the consultation meetings?*
- *When will the results be published?'*

In response, Vanessa Glover, Head of Communications confirmed that North Yorkshire Council aimed to be the most local council in England and that the engagement exercise was the first step in listening to help inform that approach.

She suggested that before its launch next year the new Council wanted to talk to as many people and communities who may not have engaged with the Authority previously, as well as those who had. In an effort to do things differently, in planning Let's Talk Local wanted it to feel like the start of a conversation, something from which stronger community level relationships could be built, to start to establish ways of working that suit local people and their priorities. She confirmed:

- It was not a consultation, but an engagement exercise, as part of which, there had been more than 200 pop up events at the places local people went, alongside wider marketing campaigns.
- So far in excess of 3,000 people had given their views as part of Let's Talk Local and more than 2,200 people had signed up to stay in touch.

- Overall across Let's Talk Local, Money and Devolution more than 5,100 people in North Yorkshire have completed surveys.

In regards to Mrs Seex's specific questions, Vanessa Glover confirmed:

- Experienced consultation and engagement officers from across county, district and borough councils had worked on the consultation events and on the broader Let's Talk engagement programme. The Consultation Institute had given some of the officer training undertaken.
- Officers had also worked closely with the team from Commonplace - a Government G-Cloud Supplier and a Dept for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Engagement Supplier.
- Commonplace were used by 250 organisations including government departments, local authorities, health trusts, consulting firms and corporates to empower people to connect and work together on local projects. Commonplace.
- Let's Talk Local was not designed or intended to be used as a traditional survey but to provide a framework for broader and on-going engagement with communities, through community conversations. Questions were based on national best practice and adapted to support a conversation-style approach to the engagement. They had also been put through Commonplace's quality assurance process.
- The approach to Let's Talk engagement exercise had been considered by portfolio holders for the various subjects.
- Questions had been tested internally involving staff from all eight councils.
- Data analysis and consultation and engagement officers would analyse the responses, working with staff from Commonplace.
- The personal information was being used to target engagement activities to help reach as wide a range of people as possible and to ensure the sample was representative of the wider population. For example if there was a lower response in one area or demographic, additional actions could be taken to try and reach them.
- Results at North Yorkshire level would be very reliable (within +/- 2%) because of the 3,000+ responses.
- Statistical tests would be used to calculate the reliability of the data received in the personal information section, which in turn would inform the process of determining whether there were any statistically significant differences in views between different groups.
- The conversation was just the first step in informing how the new council would work most effectively with different communities. It recognised that everywhere was different.
- The data would help the Authority understand what was most valued in different communities and what felt local to them.
- The approach to working locally would be iterative and reflect local views.
- An internal operational document had been issued to staff who attended the consultation meetings, a copy of which could be made available.
- The results of Let's Talk Local would be published in 2023 alongside further information on the new council's way of working with communities.

The Leader thanked both public participants for their contribution to the meeting.

125 Q2 Performance Monitoring and Budget Report

A joint report of the Chief Executive and Corporate Director - Strategic Resources, bringing together key aspects of the County Council's performance on a quarterly basis.

County Councillor David Chance introduced the section on Quarter 2 performance, which

provided an in-depth focus on 'Every adult has a longer healthier and independent life'. He drew attention to the strong performance and leadership across a range of areas, as detailed in the report, and provided an overview of the strengths and challenges in performance across all of the Council's ambitions.

Specifically in regard to the ambition of 'Every adult has a longer healthier and independent life', County Councillor Michael Harrison drew attention to the ongoing resource pressures in social care being experienced right across the sector which included;

- A sustained increase in hospital discharges creating ongoing significant pressure in assessment activity and reduced assessor capacity in front line teams;
- High occupancy levels in residential settings and low availability in the domiciliary care sector;
- An increase in requests for financial support from care providers
- An increase in safeguarding referrals
- Workforce pressures, with a focus on recruitment and retention;

Richard Webb, Corporate Director for Health & Adult Services confirmed that whilst the situation was plateauing and there were some improvements, it was still a challenging time. He drew attention to the benefits arising from international recruitment and the excellent joint working with partners. He also noted the continuing work on prevention and the investment in extra care housing with proposals for new schemes expected.

In regard to the County Council's other ambitions:

Leading for North Yorkshire - County Councillor David Chance confirmed the cost of living crisis continued to cause hardship across all parts of the County, with the County Council taking a proactive lead in Communities, providing access to services and supporting economic growth.

Best Start in Life – County Councillor Janet Sanderson confirmed the ongoing parallels with Health e.g. the number of referrals. County councillor Annabel Wilkinson confirmed the Authority would continue to lobby the DFE for fairer funding settlements for North Yorkshire Schools.

Growth – County Councillor Keane Duncan highlighted the Authority's successes which e.g. its largest capital project ever - Kex Gill, the trialling of Yorbus, with positive feedback from users, the introduction of electric vehicle charging points, with an ambition to deliver 3000 across the county by 2030, and the recently successful bid for £2.2m from the Government's Levi Fund.

In response to questions from members of the Scrutiny Board, it was confirmed that:

The impact of care market costs was hitting different parts of the market in different ways, including the impact of the rise in labour and energy costs, and notable increase in hardship applications;

Work was underway to analyse the increase in safeguarding referrals, as there was no obvious reasons for it – it was noted there was a similar emerging pattern in Local Authorities across the region;

Addressing workforce pressures in social care had been focussed on a combination of overseas recruitment for a number of specific professional roles where the County had struggled with recruitment from the domestic workforce, and a number of specifically targeted apprenticeship schemes;

The concern around bank branch closures across the county was noted - it was

acknowledged the Authority could only encourage banks to maintain the remaining branches and look at alternative venues for provision such as local libraries;

The age assessment of asylum seekers was done using the 'Merton Judgement' and was an ongoing focus in recognition of the need for their appropriate placement;

In regard to Ofsted reporting on North Yorkshire primary schools, it was difficult to compare the data with national figures as North Yorkshire was 18 schools short. A risk based approach was being taken with a robust school improvement team in place charged with assessing school plans and providing guidance. It was noted that regular changes in the Ofsted framework were a barrier in maintaining consistency within schools.

In regard to referrals to Children's Social Care, there had been an increase in demand through Customer Service Centre which could be linked to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and other factors such as the war in Ukraine and the ongoing financial crisis. In regard to repeat referrals, attention was drawn to the table on page 67 which indicated they were within range and favourably comparable with the national picture.

Attendance is a core responsibility of a school and the Authority monitors how schools are monitoring it. Intervention happens where there are safeguarding concerns. Currently not all schools provide the Authority with data but there is a government initiative to introduce a national database, which the Authority would welcome. New guidance has also recently been introduced by the Government that comes into force in September 2023. There is concern that this new non-funded guidance would put an additional strain on schools and Local Authorities.

The whole country saw a significant increase in childhood obesity through the pandemic, which the Authority was responding to by trialling a family weight management programme to encourage parents to work with their children to reduce weight.

The drivers behind the high rate of general hospital admissions for children under the age of 15 as detailed on page 103 of the report was not clearly understood at this stage and was being assessed through the Authority's safeguarding partnership work. It was noted the reasons were in line with expected age related injuries etc and health advice and public health alerts were regularly issued in response. Young people mental health submissions were an ongoing concern. The situation was not unique to North Yorkshire and was known to be for a variety of reasons and was considered to be a legacy impact of the pandemic.

The general aspiration regarding Authority owned property post vesting day was to only retain what was necessary thereby reducing CO₂ emissions and both capital and revenue costs. Major pieces of work were ongoing with district/borough councils to fully understand what should be retained in the long term. Work continued to embed hybrid and remote working and it was noted that in regard to recruitment and retention, it had become an expectation, and the LGA was still pushing for government approval to enable virtual decision making meetings.

In the last 18 months, waste going to landfill had reduced from 15-20% to 8-10%, and work was ongoing to improve throughput by reducing annual shut downs at Allerton Park from 2 to 1, with a reciprocal contingency arrangement in place with Leeds and Sheffield.

The Kex Gill project was key to the maintenance of east west connectivity across the County. In regard to the funding shortfall, the Authority's contribution of £12.7m was being addressed through its reserves. It was noted that inflation had been considered at part of the tendering process and the Authority was not contractually liable for inflationary rises in costs. £11.39m capital had been built in to the contract to capture the risk of any future inflation issues. However the Authority had put aside a secondary reserve to address any extra risk on contract overrun arising from supply chain issues as a result of Covid and

Brexit. That extra reserve contingency remained in place and could also be used if necessary to address inflation rises.

There was the potential to roll out the Yorbus scheme to other areas of the County. In order to identify the most appropriate use of the available budget for public transport and to maximise the services provided by the Authority, work was underway to identify the best way forward e.g. through a combination of fixed timetabled routes and demand responsive transport, which included considering national good practice. It was acknowledged that the continued provision of public transport related directly to how much it was used.

Revenue Budget, Treasury Management & Capital Plan

County Councillor Gareth Dadd introduced each section of the report. In regard to Revenue, he drew attention to the £2m underspend but noted it masked an underlying issue i.e. that without use of the contingencies, there would have been an overspend of nearly £21m. Prior to the Autumn statement, the Authority was facing an additional £50m of inflationary pressure next year which added to the structural deficit inherited from the districts could rise to approx. £70m. The analysis and effect of the autumn statement was to come. £22.6m of contingencies had been used this year; together with £7.7m of reserves already budgeted. The overall spend on LGR was not expected to be high as envisaged resulting in savings on the £14m allocated. He also noted that the longer term savings from LGR would take a year or two to materialise and therefore having the Council's reserves available was crucial.

Gary Fielding, Corporate Director – Strategic Resources confirmed the situation could well become more challenging as the majority of the contingencies for the year had already been deployed.

In regard to Treasury Management, County Councillor Gareth Dadd drew attention to the external debt, which was expected to decrease to £208m from the £222m at the start of the financial year.

In regard to the Capital Plan, it was noted that the District's capital deployments were being analysed, and it remained unclear at this stage whether everything could still be delivered, given the financial climate.

Executive Members voted unanimously in favour of all of the recommendations within the report, and it was

Resolved – That the following be noted:

- a. The latest position for the County Council's 2022/23 Revenue Budget, (see paragraph 2.1.2 of the report).
- b. The position on the GWB (paragraph 2.4.1 to 2.4.3).
- c. The position on the 'Strategic Capacity – Unallocated' reserve (paragraphs 2.4.4)
- d. The latest position regarding the Local Government Review transition fund (paragraph 2.5.1)
- e. The position on the County Council's Treasury Management activities during the second quarter of 2022/23

The Executive also agreed to:

- f. Refer the report to the Audit Committee for their consideration as part of the overall monitoring arrangements for Treasury Management.
- g. Approve the refreshed Capital Plan summarised at paragraph 4.2.3; and
- h. Agree that no action be taken at this stage to allocate any additional capital resources (paragraph 4.5.7).

126 The Rural England Prosperity Fund

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services seeking approval for the Council's submission to Government for the Rural England Prosperity Fund in North Yorkshire with a total value of £5.4m.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman introduced the report, and attention was drawn to the table at paragraph 2.7 of the report.

Members welcomed the planned investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas, and it was

Resolved – That the submission to Government of the Rural England Prosperity Fund addendum to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan, as outlined in this report, be approved.

127 Annual complaints report including LGSCO complaints

Considered – A report of the Chief Executive providing an overview of performance in relation to complaints and information on compliments received by the Council during the year 2020/21.

County Councillor David Chance introduced the report and drew attention to the table at paragraph 4.1 of the report showing the number of complaints for 2020/21 and the root causes listed in paragraph 4.2.

Members accepted that with the sheer scale of transactions undertaken, a number of complaints were inevitable, and acknowledged the work undertaken to understand the lessons learnt.

County Councillor David Chance thanked officers for their work on the report, and it was

Resolved - That the report be noted.

128 Forward Plan

Considered –

The Forward Plan for the period 21 November 2022 to 30 November 2023 was presented.

Resolved - That the Forward Plan be noted.

129 Capital Funding request to purchase property in North Yorkshire

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.