

North Yorkshire County Council

Harrogate and Knaresborough Area Constituency Committee

Minutes of the special meeting held on Thursday, 10th November, 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at Harrogate Civic Centre.

Present: County Councillor Monika Slater in the Chair, and County Councillors Chris Aldred, Philip Broadbank, Hannah Gostlow, Michael Harrison, Paul Haslam, Peter Lacey, John Mann, Matt Walker, Arnold Warneken and Robert Windass.

In attendance: County Councillor Carl Les.

Officer Present: Ruth Gladstone.

Other Attendees: Andrew Jones MP and two members of the public.

Apologies: County Councillor Margaret Atkinson, Sam Gibbs, Pat Marsh and Mike Schofield.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

23 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

24 Update from Andrew Jones MP

Considered: A verbal update from Andrew Jones MP regarding issues of key concern in the Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency.

The key points within the update provided by Andrew Jones MP were as follows:-

- Since his previous update to the Committee, it had been a most extraordinary period in terms of global challenges and a war in Europe. That had led to a huge amount of work within Parliament and the consequences of that locally had been very high. Since 1 September 2022, his local office had received 1,699 new casework cases, which was a very significant volume of activity. It had involved helping people navigate the challenges ahead, such as challenges arising from Covid follow-through, and issues arising from the war in Ukraine such as inflation, energy prices, and energy supply.
- Andrew Jones MP had been keeping pace with local public service providers and seeing some of the challenges which they were facing and helping by raising those with Ministers. He had also been keeping pace with businesses and some of the challenges they were facing, which tended to take the form of recruitment and concern about fuel costs ie latest data showed an unemployment rate of 2% within the constituency area and there were often more vacancies than jobseekers.
- The challenges on recruitment were quite profound. To overcome that, Andrew Jones MP had been talking to businesses and public service providers about what they were doing to ensure they recruited people early in their careers, working with the college, and building-up skills. He had also been encouraging more people, who had been out of the workplace, to return. That could be through the Job

Centre, within whom he kept in very close contact, or encouraging the employment of people who had a disability. Over a million people with disabilities had entered the workplace in the previous five years, which was a major achievement.

- The war in Ukraine had dominated in Parliament and had changed a variety of policy areas, ie international relations, energy, and defence. In effect, Parliament had faced an extraordinary challenge, for example, restrictions in both the energy and food, and the most appalling humanitarian cases. The British responses generally, through both Government and communities, had been extremely good and had taken different forms. He had met with the Ukrainian Ambassador who had been very impressed and touched by the support from the United Kingdom. He felt that the number of people, who had opened their homes to people from Ukraine, had been truly impressive.

Water Quality

During his verbal briefing, Andrew Jones MP advised of the work he had undertaken regarding water quality. He advised of the following:-

- The Environment Bill, now the Environment Act, had been through Parliament and he had been very happy to support it. The Act, in terms of water, mandated water companies to invest in reducing the use of overflows to the levels they were at when they were operating fewer than ten per year. To increase transparency, the Act mandated that water overflow use would be published in real time. Six years previously, only 5% of sewage overflows had been monitored. Next year, this would be 100%. This would enable everyone to hold water companies to account.
- In terms of local actions, Andrew Jones MP had been gathering support to submit an application for Bathing Water status for an area between the weirs at the Lido at Knaresborough. An application could not be made until summer 2023, and after at least 20 days of evidence collection during the period from May to September. He advised that he considered this to be a really positive initiative. He had:- met with Nidd catchment anglers and his team had been keeping up with those meetings when he had been in Parliament; secured the support of the owners of the Lido; made contact with wild-swimming groups to enlist their support; written to owners of properties on the banks of the Nidd to explain the campaign; raised this with Defra; asked several questions in Parliament; had secured an adjournment debate in Parliament specifically on this issue; and met with Yorkshire Water. He highlighted that this was going to be a team effort of community and agencies, local and national government, and the whole area would benefit from that work. He also highlighted that this was the first Government ever to take action to tackle the combined sewage overflows.

During discussion about water quality:-

- County Councillor Hannah Gostlow asked Andrew Jones MP to pledge his support behind the work that this Committee, Knaresborough town councillors, and the Knaresborough community, were doing to tackle the issue of water pollution affecting the River Nidd, rather than duplicating effort. She highlighted that hundreds of hours of volunteer work would be required and that this was a community effort, with this Committee at the forefront, along with Knaresborough town councillors. Andrew Jones MP responded that this would be a team effort and the work would involve local government, national government, community groups, businesses etc. He highlighted that he had met anglers in August and had been working on the issue since that time. He hoped that everyone could work together on this matter because he thought it would not be achieved by working individually as many actions would need to come together.

- In response to a question from County Councillor Hannah Gostlow, Andrew Jones MP confirmed that he had voted in favour of the Environment Act, although he had voted against some amendments. The reason why he had voted for one amendment, which had received particular press coverage, was because it gave the water companies an obligation to deal with the issue but without the means to discharge that obligation. The costs involved were enormous because there were decades of under-investment to catch-up on, just on overflows. A significant amount of re-working of the sewage system was required because it had been in place for decades and went back to Victorian times. The estimates for this varied between £350billion and £600billion. Therefore, giving the water companies the obligation to do this, but without the means of discharging it, would have been wrong and would ultimately have led to a huge hike in bills which he did not think was justified. He felt that instead the country needed to work through this in a measured, planned way. He highlighted that this was the first Government to take action on sewage overflows and water quality more broadly.
- In response to a question from County Councillor Monika Slater regarding whether it was good enough that the Government accepted Yorkshire Water's lower than average targets within the Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan, Andrew Jones MP advised that an Independent Regulator held water companies to account. He added that the Plan required interventions from Government, for the water companies to increase their investment, communities to work together, and behavioural changes regarding what people put into water including run-off from farmland. He also added that all water companies needed to raise their game, including Yorkshire Water. He advised that, in Yorkshire:- 97% of the combined sewer overflows (CSOs) were monitored, which was ahead of the national picture; in 2021, each CSO in Yorkshire discharged an average 34 times, which was higher than the average across the country, but the duration of a discharge was an average of 5.8 hours, which was lower than the average. He suggested that data needed to be looked at in aggregate rather than at a single data point. Yorkshire Water had announced an additional investment of £100million, on top of their existing five year plan, focussed on reducing their average spills by a minimum of 20% by 2025. Individual water company performance varied by individual measure, but the aggregate should be a desire to make significant progress in every company, at every point, but to do so in a planned measured way because a significant amount of money was involved and it was important that investment was used in the correct way whilst protecting bill-payers.
- County Councillor Paul Haslam highlighted the issue of run-off from farms and asked how Defra and the farming unions were helping out. Andrew Jones MP advised that the situation varied across different parts of the country. He was not following that work closely because it was taking place outside the Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency area in terms of the Nidd catchment. He felt, however, that good practice should be expected everywhere. The new Agriculture Act provided for payments to be made to farmers to protect the environment and reduce pollution run-off into rivers.
- County Councillor Arnold Warneken advised that he had a farming background and was a member of the NFU. He suggested that good practice needed financial support and highlighted that farmers were struggling. He advised that some farmers were using manure to contain slurry and, when it rained, this added to the problem of pollution in rivers. He asked what financial support the Government was providing to farmers to prevent them from having to 'cut corners' and be part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, to environmental protection. Andrew Jones MP advised that he would provide a written response to County Councillor Arnold Warneken after the meeting.

- In response to a question from County Councillor Michael Harrison, Andrew Jones MP agreed that ultimately the country was dealing with a legacy issue because it was basically working on Victorian sewerage systems. However, population growth was a factor in the way that sewage systems worked, and that the biggest driver of the change was climate change, ie, the country was experiencing more intense periods of rainfall which were overwhelming the system. As such, the system had to be expanded to cope with increasing demand.
- Andrew Jones MP disagreed with a suggestion that water companies had not previously been investing in water infrastructure. Andrew Jones MP added that the issue now was that more infrastructure was needed, and at a faster pace.
- Andrew Jones MP agreed that build standards needed to be fit for the future. In addition, he considered that infrastructure should be delivered alongside, in parallel with, new developments.

The Chair advised of the issues on the Committee's Work Programme and Members questioned Andrew Jones MP, as recorded below, to identify where he felt able to lend support.

Adult Social Care Sector

- Andrew Jones MP confirmed that he recognised the financial and other problems that continued to face the adult social care sector because he kept in close touch with the County Council's Executive Members and the Corporate Director – Health and Adult Services. He advised that he also took issues to Ministers.
- Opinions were expressed about support provided for the adult social care sector. County Councillor Peter Lacey asked for it to be placed on record that, in his opinion, not investing in social care and carers at the moment was a false economy from both the health and economic perspectives. He highlighted that not being able to discharge from hospitals backed-up into the NHS and potentially stopped ambulances responding to emergency calls. Andrew Jones MP advised that he recognised that investment in social care was a very positive thing, although he could see there being a difficult period ahead for the Chancellor. He added that he hoped and expected that the most vulnerable in our community would be at the heart of all support provided, both locally and nationally. In response to a comment from another Member, County Councillor Peter Lacey suggested that further comment needed to await the outcome of the national enquiry into the response to Covid, but he felt that the way the adult social care sector had been treated nationally during the pandemic, particularly in the early days, was disastrous and had caused tens of thousands of deaths.

Housing Developments and Infrastructure

- There was a discussion about whether there were now too many houses in the constituency area, with the consequence of enormous pressure being put on infrastructure eg roads, GPs, hospital and dentists, to the detriment of long-term residents. Andrew Jones MP commented that more houses were needed across the country because it was incredibly difficult for people to get onto the property ladder in many parts of the country including in this constituency. The Government had a policy of 300k new homes per year within the country. That policy had been built into the Local Plan, which had been approved by all political parties at Harrogate Borough Council. Andrew Jones MP highlighted that 300k new homes per year within the country had also been a policy contained in the Liberal Democrat Party's last manifesto, although a national statement subsequently

issued by the Liberal Democrats had upgraded that to 360k new homes per year within the country. There was agreement that the type of new housing was important and that more starter homes, and fewer larger houses, should be built so that local people got chance to put their roots down in their home areas. There was also agreement that infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, needed to be developed in parallel with new housing. It was agreed that this situation represented a very difficult challenge for councils and that this was one of the hardest jobs which councillors had as it was not possible to say both 'we need new homes' and 'nothing will change'.

Green Issues

- In response to a question about renewal energy capacity, Andrew Jones MP advised that he was quite optimistic about the progress that was being made. The UK's renewable energy capacity now stood at 49.7% (up from 2.3% in 1996) and the UK had decarbonised faster than any other major economy. He was also optimistic about the future of renewal energy generation. In his view, Committee Members did not need to worry about the possibility of fracking due to the national moratorium, which he supported. He felt that the country would continue to need some fossil fuels as it moved to its net zero target of 2050, and he anticipated that we would see significantly more offshore wind. Onshore wind was more problematic as people tended to be less pleased to see it and, on the journey to net zero, it was important to take people with us. He preferred to see a focus on offshore rather than onshore. Regarding local energy generation, Andrew Jones MP saw a very strong role for local micro energy generation as it was a significant part of national energy policy. It came with some cost implications for installation, and the way people thought needed to change from it being an up-front capital cost to a more life-time project cost because it would deliver cheaper power over the lifetime it was installed. Some kind of carbon-free baseload production would still be needed for times when the sun was not shining and the wind was not blowing, and that would probably be nuclear. He anticipated that we would see some of the smaller nuclear reactors in place around the country, which seemed to him to be very sensible. However, the country's energy supply needed to be diversified and made more resilient putting it, as much as we could, in our national control. To re-cap, he saw micro generation, alongside sustainable generation, at the heart of the future and he thought this was a very good thing.
- With regard to the fracking moratorium, the Chair highlighted that the previous few weeks and months had been a source of real concern to the wider public who had seen a relay of power within the Government, from one PM to the next, and massive fundamental changes in policy direction. This had caused a very unsettling feeling of not knowing what tomorrow was going to bring, and the wider public had yet to catch-up on a feeling of being reassured. Andrew Jones MP highlighted that manifestos were the public legitimacy, that the public expected their politicians to enact their manifestos, and that the public knew that things, such as Covid and the war in Ukraine, happened but were not in any manifesto. Therefore, there would be tolerance for events, but the fracking moratorium was in the Conservative manifesto.

Mental Health Services

- A Member highlighted that Covid had had a significant impact on mental health and was now having an impact on economic inactivity. The Brierley Unit had closed in 2019, there was a local Cygnet hospital although it was struggling to perform at levels required by the CQC based on its current footprint. Andrew Jones MP was asked whether he would support the re-opening of discussions to invest in local provision for adult mental health, such as had been on the table for

Cardale Park, to provide for those who had serious or common mental health problems within the community. Andrew Jones MP advised that he agreed strongly with the underlying premise of the point which was that there had been a huge mental health consequence from the pandemic. He supported investing in mental health. However, regarding whether that was a mental health in-bed facility, he felt that we should be seeking interventions earlier rather than later in the process because, if people required in-bed facilities, it was very serious and they were most acute. He thought we should be putting our energies in earlier in the process. In terms of how we prioritised, he suggested that this was a difficult area. The Government kept passing increased health budgets but they had a tendency to get consumed by the acute sector and all the good work they did there, but he felt we must make sure that more went into mental health services. He had raised this in a series of meetings he had had with local health commissioners and had liaised with Trusts who delivered services in the constituency area. Andrew Jones MP made a broader comment, namely, that the way we were now more open to discussing mental health services was a very good thing in our community. Members agreed that prevention was better than cure because mental health conditions developed over a long period and that Covid, and the overhang from Covid, was going to be with us for a long time.

- A Member highlighted that a situation which he found to be unacceptable, both locally and nationally, was the distances which people with serious mental illness had to travel. He advised that a lot of work had been done in Knaresborough during Covid to reduce isolation, together with focussed work on mental health and housing and the inter-relationship between those two. He suggested that more was needed with regard to prevention, understanding, engagement, and the inclusion of people with mental health needs. He got the sense that the decisions made in the 2010s warranted a look at the mental health services in place currently.
- Members asked Andrew Jones MP about the possibility of obtaining additional investment for North Yorkshire's mental health services, in particular for younger people, and whether it should be ring-fenced. In response, Andrew Jones MP highlighted that, to generate enough cash to invest in good public services meant that we had to have a focus upon the economy, to raise the cash that goes into public services. He advised that the allocation that went into the public services was calculated via a complex formula and a number of factors came into play eg assessment of need, assessment of the difficulty in providing services such as between a high density area and a low density area. Different communities had different health needs, which was why there were more localised CCGs. He suggested that, rather than go down a route that said 'you, as a politician, determine how much money should be spent in a particular area', he thought the Health Service should be making those calls. The Health Service was much more able to respond when dealing with things locally. With regard to what politicians could do about it, he advised that he had worked with colleagues to look at the funding formula for the lower population density areas. At the time he became an MP, the funding formula ensured that some areas of the country, including this one, were at the lower end of the funding. Subsequently some changes had been made, in a positive way for this area. He advised that it was up to everybody to highlight the need for increased mental health provision and that he had made sure that the CCG know about this by meeting them regularly. A member highlighted that, with the establishment of the Integrated Care Boards, CCGs had been abolished in July.
- County Councillor Peter Lacey advised of NYCC's Scrutiny of Health Committee's discussions about the arrangements and relationships with the new Integrated Care Boards and the role that area constituency committees could have in the

planning, advice, and scrutiny around health care going forwards.

- There was disagreement between County Councillor Peter Lacey and Andrew Jones MP about a fundamental philosophical position. County Councillor Peter Lacey said that there was a growing body of evidence that suggested that the country had passed a tipping point in terms of its wealth generation capability. He felt that relying on continued growth, before we invested in health services, was, he believed, to place 'horse before cart'. He felt that, unless we enabled people to re-engage in economic activity through public services, right across health, social care, housing and other areas, the country would not have a fit and able workforce to actually generate the wealth. Andrew Jones MP advised that he did not agree with County Councillor Peter Lacey's view that we had reached the limit for the creation of wealth in this country, or that there was a growing body of evidence. Andrew Jones MP thought the country needed to create wealth to pay for the quality of life, the services that we needed, and the environmental transitions that were going to require capital investment. He added that other countries had a higher GDP per capita and they were therefore creating more wealth on an individual basis. Andrew Jones MP thought that economic growth, done in the correct way, was a very good thing, and he viewed having a healthy economy as an absolutely fundamental bedrock to providing services, and the security, that the country needed. County Councillor Peter Lacey responded that he did not disagree that growth was critical, important and was possible, but he thought that the country had a huge prism-ball dragging behind it in terms of inequalities and inability to access economic activity due to a lack of investment in public services.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

- A Member highlighted that this Committee had responded to a recent consultation regarding North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Member asked Andrew Jones MP whether he considered that having one staffed fire engine overnight in Harrogate was adequate. Andrew Jones MP advised that he had raised his concerns on the RRM Review with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner previously, both publicly and privately. He added that, it seemed to him that the right thing was about having good back-up so there was capacity to respond. He clarified that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner knew of his views and reservations about back-up.

Funding for Schools

- A Member highlighted that schools' deficits had been increasing over recent years, that the 2023/24 forecast deficit for North Yorkshire schools was £12.8million. The Member asked Andrew Jones MP about the sort of pressure which North Yorkshire could continue to put on to change the funding formula for schools and improve the North Yorkshire amount per pupil. Andrew Jones MP advised that he was aware of the situation regarding the funding formula. He highlighted that a group, called the F40 Group, had been lobbying for change and that some change had been seen which had been positive for North Yorkshire. This had been a long-running piece of work and that work needed to continue as the level of education funding needed to reflect need. Andrew Jones MP highlighted that North Yorkshire schools at primary and secondary levels were performing extremely well. He thought that other parts of the country had a potentially different need because they were not performing as well. Andrew Jones MP highlighted that the country needed to ensure it was generating cash so it could spend it on the things it wanted to spend it on.
- A Member highlighted that North Yorkshire received the 144th lowest (out of 151 local authorities) amount of funding for schools and the County Council was

lobbying local MPs. The Member asked Andrew Jones MP whether he was able to give any further update, or advise whether there had been any real progress, on finding the additional money to support NYCC and educational providers. Andrew Jones MP advised that he worked with the leadership team at NYCC and thought they did a very good job. He advised that he endlessly lobbied on behalf of this area because there were some individual challenges, for example, in areas of low population density where there were operational challenges. Andrew Jones MP described funding for schools as 'work in progress' and advised that this was one of the areas where he was working with the leadership team at the Council and would continue to do so.

Woodfield Primary School

- A Member asked Andrew Jones MP whether he would support the change of use of Woodfield Primary School to cater for children with special educational needs. Andrew Jones MP responded that he did not wish to see the site of Woodfield Primary School lost for education provision. He had contacted NYCC with his suggestions, been contacted by educational providers interested in the site, and had put the two together. He hoped education would continue on the site at the earliest opportunity.

20mph Speed Limit

- Members discussed, with Andrew Jones MP, the recommendation that the Committee had made, which had been considered by NYCC's Executive on 8 November 2022, to have a 20mph speed limit piloted throughout towns and villages in this constituency area where a need had been identified. A Member asked whether there was a way of NYCC securing investment from the Government to have 20mph speed limits outside schools, old people's homes, small shopping centres etc. Andrew Jones MP thought that having a 20mph speed limit in certain locations was absolutely right, but that 20mph was not correct everywhere. He agreed that 20mph had an impact on road safety but highlighted that road safety in the UK was generally at a very high level and the UK tended to alternate with Sweden as having the safest roads in the world. There were some areas that were particular problem 'hot spots' in terms of safety eg on rural roads, younger drivers, middle-aged motor bikers, and he thought that targeted measures were needed to solve specific problems. With regard to the question about finances, Andrew Jones MP advised that increased national budgets for sustainable travel, and more national measures for decarbonising measures, were likely. He suggested that, if good schemes were put together, and with a mixture of local and national working to put our case, we could be successful in securing funding from the national 'pot'. This had happened previously, and had been well received locally.

Active Travel

- Members discussed active travel with Andrew Jones MP. Andrew Jones MP advised that he was keen to see more people using buses and he was in favour of more measures to encourage people to walk and cycle, separated, wherever possible, between human-powered transport and engine-powered transport, and segregated cycle lanes. Andrew Jones MP suggested that, to maximise the North Yorkshire take of any funding which became available, NYCC should do groundwork-thinking about possible bids, rather than detailed preparation. He explained that any detailed preparation would possibly be out-of-date by the time of bid submission. With regard to the previous deadlines, Andrew Jones MP advised that the purpose of very short deadlines was to encourage local action and delivery.

Boundary Commission Recommendations for Parliamentary Constituencies

- Members discussed, with Andrew Jones MP, the Boundary Commission's recommendations regarding Parliamentary constituencies, which were likely to impact on the Committee's make-up after the next General Election. Andrew Jones MP advised that, in his view, communities should be kept together. Consequently he had argued for the Claro Ward being retained within the Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency because the villages in that Ward had great links to Knaresborough. However, he had not argued for the inclusion of the Boroughbridge Ward within the constituency because that would be impossible to deliver whilst keeping within the electorate figures used within the Commission's review.

Strike Action by Nurses

- County Councillor Matt Walker asked Andrew Jones MP whether he would join him in asking the Secretary of State for Health for a fairly funded pay deal for nurses. Andrew Jones MP advised that he was aware that the RCN was asking for a 17% pay increase, which he considered to be very high. He highlighted that there was an independent pay review body which covered many public services and that it was very difficult to say that we want to have an independent body and then to ignore it. Andrew James MP said he obviously wanted to see people well paid in public services, as this was part of attracting people into public services. There were record numbers of doctors, midwives, nurses etc in England at the moment and they needed to be rewarded properly. Whether that was a 17% increase, which was the amount quoted in the RCN press release, it would have consequences for public finances. Consideration needed to be given to where the money was coming from. Andrew Jones MP, in summary, advised that he supported the principle of more money for nurses; he hoped they would resolve their dispute quickly, which meant sitting down with all the employer bodies and coming to a conclusion; and that the last thing we wanted to see was the public service comprised because of strikes. Andrew Jones MP added that we were seeing record amounts of budgets in the NHS, and record amounts of workers in the NHS and this was a positive thing, but industrial action needed to be brought to the speediest possible negotiated conclusion.
- County Councillor Matt Walker highlighted several problems relating to access to NHS services and expressed the view that there needed to be an intervention in the industrial action by the Government. County Councillor Matt Walker added that he thought a 17% pay increase was unrealistic. Andrew Jones MP highlighted that the amount of money going into the NHS had increased enormously in recent years, which he regarded as a very good thing, with new treatments becoming available and more care provided. It was a huge budget and had gone up in the region of £50billion in the last few years alone. Whilst a 17% pay increase was generally regarded as being unrealistic, this is the amount which has been asked for. Therefore, he thought that his suggestion, that all sides sit down and try to come to an agreed conclusion, was more realistic and correct. Andrew Jones MP advised that, with regard to the actions he would take, he would continue his dialogue with the Hospital, which did a first class job. He also had a programme for keeping in regular touch with service providers, at all public services, and to make sure that their needs were identified quickly, any problems were identified quickly, and were relayed to Ministers as fast as possible.

The Chair thanked everyone, in particular Andrew Jones MP, for attending this meeting. She also thanked the officers for supporting, and live streaming, the meeting.

Resolved –

That the briefing be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.00 pm.