

North Yorkshire Council

Transition (LGR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 4th September, 2023 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor Bryn Griffiths in the Chair plus Councillors Philip Broadbank, Eric Broadbent (substitute), Nick Brown, Caroline Dickinson, Kevin Foster, Richard Foster, George Jabbour, Heather Moorhouse, Stuart Parsons, Clive Pearson and John Ritchie.

In attendance: Councillors Derek Bastiman and Carl Les.

Officers present: Dave Caulfield, Janet Deacon, Martin Grainger, Nic Harne and Robert Ling, Julian Rudd, Trevor Watson, Will Baines and Nicki Lishman.

Apologies: John Mann, Bob Packham, Kirsty Poskitt and Malcolm Taylor.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Malcolm Taylor, John Mann, Kirsty Poskitt and Bob Packham, with Councillor Eric Broadbent attending as his substitute.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 June 2023

Resolved -

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2023, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor George Jabbour declared a personal interest in item 9 on the agenda - North Yorkshire Destination Management Plan, as he used to run a project to promote Yorkshire, to support businesses in the tourism industry and to attract more visitors and investment to the region.

4 Public Participation

No public questions or statements were received.

5 Verbal Update from Robert Ling, Director of Transformation on LGR Transition

Robert Ling, Director of Transformation, attended the meeting to give an update on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) transition to one Council, as it was now 150 days since Vesting Day.

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

- Robert highlighted the huge geographical size of the new unitary authority at 8,000 square kilometres, in which you could fit the areas of Essex, Greater London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool and still have space left.
- The convergence of services from the former district and borough councils into a single unitary council and establishing a new operating model was continuing at pace, with the desire to transform together alongside putting in place aligned structures, budgets, systems and processes.
- Robert reminded the committee of the foundations of the new council operating model, focused on Customer, Locality, Service delivery, Strategic core and Enabling services.
- He also displayed the resources identified to deliver the service plans, with Technology, Finance and Procurement the top three resources required. There is a need to maximise internal resources to help deliver the next transformation phase.
- A prioritisation exercise is underway, to rank the service areas in terms of the resource required and how deliverable they are.

Following the presentation, questions raised by the committee included:

- To what extent is public feedback and views of the new Council taken into account as part of the service transformation process?
- Are the timescales on track with identifying savings and disposing of surplus assets?
- It was asked if committee members could be provided with a copy of the Managers Handbook
- Issues were raised around the prompt payment of invoices and improvements required to the current Finance system.
- The pros and cons of home working, in order to attract the right calibre of new employees to the new Council were discussed.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

6 Verbal Directorate Update from Nic Harne, Corporate Director of Community Development

Corporate Director for Community Development, Nic Harne, attended the meeting to give an overview of the work going on within the directorate.

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

- In the new Community Development directorate, 90% covers work previously undertaken by former district and borough councils.
- Emerging themes to focus on included Health and wellbeing, Place and regeneration, Net Zero and climate resilience and Culture (customer focus and driven by data and performance).
- Since transition, across the directorate there has been a focus on safe and legal service delivery, together with the development of stage 1 structures and engagement on a number of strategies and policies.
- Moving forward, the focus is to move quickly to complete stage 2 structures, embed these new structures and ways of working, together with driving place based approaches through the range of services delivered.

Following this, questions raised by the committee included:

- How homelessness help can be provided locally to take account of the variations in different areas across the county rather than a blanket approach?
- The patchwork approach to implementing selective licensing was leading to concerns from areas feeling left out and no idea of the plans for expansion into other areas of North Yorkshire. It was felt that the position was unclear at present.
- The need for an area specific focus in Planning services, which would be discussed further under the next agenda item.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

7 Planning Service Update

Considered – A presentation from Trevor Watson, Assistant Director, Planning and Martin Grainger, Head of Development Management.

Some of the key points raised in the presentation are as summarised below:

- Since the formation of the new authority in April, 1200 to 1400 decisions have been made on planning applications across North Yorkshire.
- The system put in place from 1st April was to be safe and legal, with officers keen to monitor and understand that before making changes to that system.
- The remits of the current Strategic Planning Committee and the Area Planning Committees were set out.
- Officers are looking at this and keeping the performance of the service under review, and are keen to understand specific examples.
- It was noted that there is a different approach to site visits currently and a consistent approach is needed.
- The timing allocated to public speakers was adopted from the previous County Council. This will form part of the service review.
- There needs to be consistency of notification of applications received and decisions made for affected members.
- The report and presentation formats are slightly different across the former district and borough council areas.
- A Planning Enforcement Management Plan is being developed to set out how North Yorkshire Council will ensure decisions are carried out as agreed.
- A number of legacy areas have had no dedicated enforcement resource in place, so it has been a priority to make the best use of the enforcement staff in post across the county.
- The planning service continue to collate, monitor and evaluate information on the committee and delegated decisions made, whilst continuing to work with Planning Chairs and Vice-Chairs to be able to make recommendations to develop the service at the appropriate point.
- It was noted that the number of officer delegated decisions has increased for most areas in the county. The right balance is needed to make sure the Area Planning Committees consider the right applications.
- It was reiterated that the planning team are approaching things with an open mind before putting forward recommendations after a suitable period of review.

Following this, questions and comments raised by the committee included:

- There are differences in the pre-application provision across the county, where some legacy authorities do offer one and others do not. Officers felt pre-apps help improve the quality of the applications coming in and are meaningful, so are a useful tool.
- Without enforcement, the planning system does not work and a quality enforcement service is required as part of the new council. Prioritising the current casework from the legacy councils and the legal oversight needed is underway now, with a plan to follow for the future service by the end of the financial year. The need for the public to see enforcement action carried out is key to act as a deterrent.
- Several committee members were keen to see the reinstatement of the ability to ask questions to developers during committee meetings. This would be considered as part of any service review.
- The involvement of elected members in the decision making process for planning applications was emphasised as an important consideration.
- The need for consistent decisions across the county using the same approach was felt to be required.
- The need for councillors to call in planning applications submitted where individual members have concerns was emphasised.
- The impact of parliamentary constituency boundary changes on the current Planning Committee areas was discussed.
- A query was raised about the investigation of complaints on planning officers and whether these are carried out independently. In response, the corporate complaints process was outlined.

In summing up the discussions on the item, the Chair gave his personal thoughts, including that:

- The weekly application updates received by elected members are useful.
- The three week limit for councillors to call-in application needs extending, to take account of monthly parish council meetings.
- The 500 homes threshold for the Strategic/Area Planning Committee needs to be re-examined.
- Planning committees should routinely hear feedback from appeal decisions by the Planning Inspectorate, to better understand and learn from them.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

8 North Yorkshire Economic Growth Strategy

Considered – Report of Dave Caulfield, Assistant Director – Economic Development, Regeneration, Tourism and Skills to present the second draft of the North Yorkshire Economic Growth Strategy.

Some of the key points highlighted in the report are as summarised as below:

- It has been important to listen to key stakeholders and engage with the public in developing the new Economic Growth strategy. This has included gathering feedback through consultation events such as sector workshops, local discussions, virtual sessions and member engagement through workshops. This has produced a strategy document that is ambitious and informed by the comments that have been

received.

- Officers are conscious that the ambitions set out in the strategy cannot be delivered by the Council on its own, it will require lots of partnership working to achieve its objectives. The final strategy also has to interact with other key NYC documents, such as the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and the Destination Management Plan.
- The relationship with the LEP and MCA when formed is key, with joint work already taking place on an emerging Economic Framework for the new Combined Authority.
- The main changes from the first draft of the strategy has been including a higher level of ambition and greater emphasis on the Council's role and stronger reference to specific and distinct place opportunities.
- The three pillars of the strategic framework are Enterprise (Support for businesses), Infrastructure (Places) and People (Skills).
- Significant work will take place following approval of the strategy on local-level action plans, which will take account of the views of the Area Constituency Committees and Community Networks to develop local detail and priorities. These local-level action plans will be SMART and progress updates can be brought to members on a regular basis.
- It will be important to develop a robust project pipeline to submit when external funding streams become available and improve the performance of the county in successfully leveraging in this funding.
- The strategy will run for five years, with reviews to take place annually.

Following this, questions and comments raised by the committee included:

- It was pleasing to see the commitment to Area Constituency Committees and Community Networks as part of the ongoing dialogue on the local level action planning to follow on from the development of this strategy.
- To what extent can the skills gaps identified be filled by working with local partners in the county and neighbouring areas to find solutions. For example, a recent Local Skills Improvement Plan developed by West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce has already produced an evidence based strategy to set out an understanding of local circumstances, needs and aspirations for skills development across the business community.
- A business directory was suggested to make securing a local supplier easier.
- Given the external influences that the strategy will depend on, it will be important to set any performance indicators in that context.
- Where the Council can lead on parts of the strategy, it should do sharply and quickly to bring forward solutions. In response, an example was given of developing small business space within North Yorkshire and the Council leading quickly on making this happen.
- Transport infrastructure and delivery will be crucial to the delivery of the strategy, as it is a big concern, particularly in rural areas.
- The importance of the Harrogate Convention Centre as a key economic asset for the local economy was stressed.
- The resources required to deliver the strategy was questioned. In response, it was felt that if external funding can be unlocked, then this will help to increase staff capacity to achieve more for North Yorkshire.
- It was noted that the smaller market towns play an equally important part in people's lives and the local economy and should be recognised.

Resolved –

- i) That the report be noted
- ii) That the Members feedback received be taken into account in the final draft of the strategy

9 North Yorkshire Destination Management Plan

Considered – Presentation by Janet Deacon, Head of Tourism and Culture (Scarborough) and Dave Caufield, Assistant Director – Economic Development, Regeneration, Tourism and Skills on the draft Destination Management Plan (DMP).

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

- It is a challenge to develop one DMP to cover the diversity of places across a county the size of North Yorkshire.
- We need to continue to emphasise the local distinctiveness of places and local brands and identifying where we could do more.
- The value of the visitor economy is estimated to be worth between £1.5bn – £2bn to the local economy, attracting between 33 to 37 million visitors – 10% of the total North Yorkshire economy.
- The ambition is to grow the value even further by around 4% to 5% year on year and grow the number of overnight visitors to more than 20% of all visits.
- Having one co-ordinated plan which is private sector led with a clear steer from the Council will ensure that the industry is shaping the priorities and actions to support future growth.
- In order to submit a bid to become a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, a Destination Management Plan that is under development is required.
- Officers are confident that the priorities set out in the DMP reflect those of the sector.
- There is a need to build a definitive evidence base for tourism across North Yorkshire in a consistent way to have a clear idea of the overall offer to set measurable targets.
- As part of the DMP, it will be crucial to convert day visitors into staying visitors, to attract and disperse visitors so that they come to the current honeypot areas but experience and explore the rest of North Yorkshire.
- Some feedback from the stakeholder consultations was that transport accessibility is key, clarity over who manages which area is needed, and how businesses can engage with these was important.
- The recruitment and retention of staff in the tourist and hospitality industry is a major issue, but there is pride in the destination and this should be preserved and nurtured.
- There is an opportunity for collaboration between stakeholders for quality product development. A repository is required to collectively work together to maximise the opportunity to showcase local producers to visitors.

Following this, questions raised by the committee included:

- What the process for gaining Local Economy Visitor Partnership (LVEP) status is going forwards and what the next steps are to put in place a Destination Development Partnership for Yorkshire as a whole.
- The night time economy in North Yorkshire should be highlighted in the DMP and the availability of parking to encourage visitors.

- The 'Yorkshire' brand is a strong one from a tourist point of view and should not be denigrated.
- The importance of transport connectivity to support the visitor economy in North Yorkshire

Resolved – To note the presentation and for the comments received to be taken into account in the final version of the North Yorkshire Destination Management Plan.

10 Standing items

Resolved - The updates on the standing items were noted.

11 Work Programme

Resolved – To note the current Work Programme.

12 Any other items

There were no other items.

The meeting concluded at 1.20 pm.