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North Yorkshire Council

Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 8th July, 2024 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor David Staveley in the Chair plus Councillors Philip Barrett, Melanie Davis, Hannah Gostlow, George Jabbour (substitute), David Jeffels, Tom Jones, Andy Paraskos (substitute), Clive Pearson (substitute), Subash Sharma, Phil Trumper, Arnold Warneken, Steve Watson and Robert Windass.

Officers present: Hugh Clear Hill, Will Baines, Allan McVeigh (virtual), Rachael Balmer (virtual)

Apologies: Councillors Derek Bastiman, John Cattanach, David Ireton, Steve Mason and Andrew Williams.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Derek Bastiman (substitute Councillor Clive Pearson), David Ireton (substitute Councillor George Jabbour), Andrew Williams (substitute Councillor Andy Paraskos), Steve Mason and John Cattanach.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 April 2024

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2024, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Public Participation

No public questions or statements were received.

5 Review of Motion on Water Quality for improvements in health, wildlife, biodiversity and economy

Considered – Report of the Corporate Director – Environment to update the committee on progress with actioning the water quality motion that was agreed by Full Council in November 2023.

Hugh Clear Hill, Principal Environmental Policy and Project Officer introduced the item, reporting back on the first meeting of the North Yorkshire River Catchments Forum

(NYRCF) that had taken place in late June.

Some of the key points highlighted in the update were as follows:

- The first meeting of the NYRCF had attracted an excellent turnout, including: board level representation from Yorkshire Water; area directors from the Environment Agency and Natural England; the Chair of the Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee; the Area Director of the Association of Drainage Authorities; senior representation from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust; both of the National Park Authorities and a range of river trusts and catchment partnerships from across the county.
- There was high level support at the forum for establishing a strategic initiative for river catchments and widespread support for the council taking a leading role and recognising our role as a major co-ordinator in this area.
- A number of senior council officers were also in attendance, from service areas such as water quality, public health, nature recovery, flood management planning and highways services.
- The focus for the months ahead will be to make sure that the River Catchments Forum adds value, with an agreement to focus on 3 to 4 key areas, of which improving water quality is the most important.
- More widely, it was recognised that the forum was an opportunity to share good practice and ideas, and it is hoped to convene a Rivers Summit with a wider audience in spring 2025 along with working with key partners to deliver a work programme.
- Elected member involvement in the NYRCF was addressed, with it felt in the pre-election period the forum event would not have happened if there had been political attendees. Looking ahead, there is a wider question to be dealt with around elected member attendance at future meetings.
- Extreme weather events are increasing, causing a rise in the amount of surface water run offs, so there is a close relationship between water quality and flood risk. The council can explore this further as the Lead Local Flood Authority and the Local Planning Authority, in order to ensure new developments do not exacerbate existing problems and through S106 agreements to improve the situation, such as through building attenuation tanks to store rainwater for gradual controlled release.
- On the new Local Plan for North Yorkshire, if national development management policies come to fruition, then water quality and environment protection are set to be key parts of these documents.
- The authority has been involved for a number of years with a project on the River Leven, working with the Tees Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency. The initial focus was on silt, as it affects the water quality and loss of soil. The most effective initiatives undertaken have been nature-based solutions, such as creating wetlands and working with farmers to change land management.
- The Local Investment in Natural Capital projects are developing flood alleviation projects to create long-term change.

Following the update, questions and comments raised by committee members were as follows:

- The progress detailed in the report since the approval of the motion at Full Council in November 2023 was welcomed and commended.
- It was felt that a further review of the water quality motion should be carried out by the committee again in six months to avoid the topic drifting.

- The link to using the new Local Plan for North Yorkshire to try and address water quality issues through the planning process was emphasised.
- The involvement of the National Farmers' Union in future Forum meetings and workshops was a learning point from the first meeting and would be addressed for future events.
- It was felt the discharges from highways run off into watercourses does not get the attention that it deserves, it is a big issue that affects water quality. In North Yorkshire, this is a huge area to get a grip on. For new roads, physical interventions are now usually put in to reduce this, but this is not in place for older carriageways.
- The attendance of elected members in future meetings was discussed in detail. There was dismay by some members that this had not been allowed at the first meeting, but it was hoped through the committee recommendation this could be resolved after range of suggestions were put forward and considered.
- There were concerns raised around the timings for the implementation of the strategic plans and policies concerning water quality. A broad outline of the timescales involved as part of a future report to the committee was requested.
- To be an effective convener and partner, good governance needs to be in place, to ensure reporting, monitoring and accountability arrangements are robust.
- The increasing use of astroturf in gardens was highlighted as a concern, as it exacerbated the problem of surface water run off. For new development, SuDs need to be installed, monitored and then maintained to ensure they are effective.
- 'Beaver bombing' is an issue. It has led to lots of trials but it will come to a point where culling is under consideration due to damage they cause to flood banks and to crops and forestry.
- The need for baseline data was seen as crucial, as it opens up a wider discussion on water quality issues to understand the underlying causes.

Resolved –

It is recommended that:

1. The motion on water quality will be further reviewed by the committee in six months' time to track progress and areas of improvement.
2. The Executive Member for Managing Our Environment attend the next meeting of the NYRCF and report back to a future TEEE O&S meeting.
3. That the overall attendee list of the NYRCF be reviewed ahead of the next meeting, in particular the ability of elected members to attend as observers.
4. The letter referenced under the point 9 of the agreed motion be resent to the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Minute Annex: Cllr Haslam comments received

6 Network Strategy Update

Considered – Report of the Head of Network Strategy to provide the committee with an update on actions arising from discussions at a previous meeting regarding 20mph schemes and active travel.

Questions raised by committee members included:

- The current position of North Yorkshire Police regarding the use of fixed speed cameras in the county was asked about. In response, it was noted that a camera enforcement study is ongoing, led by North Yorkshire Police, that was live but had been pending the recent mayoral elections.
- Clarity was sought on the response within the report to the query raised about the speed limit on Station Parade, Harrogate and what the next steps on this were. Outside of the meeting, a response was sought from the project team, and it was confirmed that the request for a 20mph speed limit on Station Parade is beyond the scope of the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) project. It would though be considered, separately, following the completion of TCF, as part of a planned programme of speed limit reviews.
- Timescales for the development of the outstanding Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) and specifically the current position of Selby as part of this was sought.

Resolved – That the updates be noted.

7 Work Programme

Considered -

The following comments for future topics were made by committee members:

- In regards to the accessibility of green space, the maintenance of the Public Rights of Way in North Yorkshire and how they are publicised to maximise the use of them
- The role of the Combined Authority and the overarching Economic Framework

Resolved -

That the future work programme and comments for upcoming topics be noted.

8 Any other items

There were no further items.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 am.

Councillor Paul Haslam (Member Champion for Climate Change) asked for his comments on Item 5 to be included as part of the minutes. They are reproduced below.

Thank you for this valuable and insightful update which makes a good start. There is far too much prose and insufficient data here. I have sent Hugh my detailed comments. I will comment on 3.1.3 separately. I appreciate as a Councillor, I may not know or be privy to all the protocols and rules. Notwithstanding that please find below my thoughts.

I would like to see a more robust reporting framework providing greater **transparency** of the results and progress. The work also needs to cut cross work silos so councilors see both the overall picture and our limited officer resources are maximized rather than work being duplicated. We need to know precisely who is responsible for the actions including recording and reporting of those actions.

Partnering will only be successful if there is clear governance with responsibilities. We need to adopt “black box” thinking (whenever there is a plane crash, the safety is the number one issue, not the blame – that comes later) that is not fixated on blame but on effective solutions.

I believe we have a public health duty here and that department should be represented within this team with monitoring in place to ensure they have the correct information to provide insight and recommend potentially lifesaving action.

It should be remembered that our rivers suffer from four major problems:

1. Combined sewage outflow
2. Run off: Farmers field runoff including from “treated” sewage on the land that still contains phosphates. Run off from roads.
3. Residual pollution from old industrial workings such as lead mines (near the source of the Nidd several lambs died as a result of lead poisoning).
4. The rivers are too straight leading to problems with aquatic life able to “anchor” to places and the resulting flooding after periods of heavy rain which is becoming more prevalent as a result of climate change. [Why we will get constant rain by 2034 - according to a climate scientist \(inews.co.uk\)](#)

It's quite clear to me that the water companies have some essential analytical work to do!

They need to map the sewage network including width of pipes etc so they can see the impact. Without this I don't understand how they can carry out their job effectively to either protect the resident from sewage backing up or sewage discharging on the streets or more likely into the watercourses.

Have they evaluated the impact of the changing rainfall patterns? Sewage workings are based on a base level of sewage they deal with on regular basis. This base level is multiplied by three for sizing to cover when it rains. At the moment it can be sixfold, and this results in raw sewage being discharged.

The water companies need to explain to councillors exactly how sewage treatment works are sized and why they are struggling to deal with the increasing rainfall that is often in more concentrated deluges than in the past and how this can overwhelm the system – they need to be invited to a members seminar- I asked for this over a year ago.

This is also an issue for Ofwat and they must be copied in our comments to add pressure and support to resolving this issue.

Finally, it appears incredible that residents had to get water bathing status to get work done on what is a national disgrace in our water courses.

3.1.3 comments.

3.1.3 Ask the Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee to invite senior representatives from Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Dales River Trust, Nidd Action Group, Natural England, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the National Farmers' Union and other interested groups to attend a meeting to allow for a better understanding of the current levels of pollution and remedial action being taken in this regard.

i. After further discussion initiated by Richard Flinton, the inaugural meeting of a new North Yorkshire River Catchments Forum (NYRCP) has been arranged for 24 June.

It was incredibly crass to consider that no councillors, no elected representatives were allowed to / invited to attend. With the best will in the world, the officers never receive or get the anger and rage on the doorstep that elected officials do. This in effect becomes a talking shop not a doing shop! "Let's kick the can down the road" attitude is prevalent here. It needs actions and deeds not just words – we know how eloquent people can be on explaining why they are "not doing nothing". It is impossible for officers to truly represent residents' anger or the need for urgency. This is a very poor decision that I urge to be reversed. We must provide the resource to play our part in this work. We need to show we are serious in our desire to resolve these increasingly frequent problems! That may include political pressure to get additional government funding.

People and partners will do what you inspect, not what you expect.