

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Monday, 6th December, 2021 commencing at 10.30 am.

County Councillor Andy Paraskos in the Chair. plus County Councillors Bryn Griffiths, Margaret Atkinson, Richard Musgrave, Yvonne Peacock, Tony Randerson, Matt Scott, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

In attendance: County Councillors Carl Les and Gareth Dadd.

Officers present: Melanie Carr, Ray Busby, Gary Fielding, Vicki Dixon, Jon Holden, Deborah Hugill, Karen Iveson, Robert Ling, Odette Robson, Alaina Kitching and Simon Moss.

Other Attendees: Lindsey Butterfield, Temporary Assistant Chief Constable, North Yorkshire Police

Apologies: County Councillors Val Arnold, Caroline Goodrick and Mike Jordan

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2021

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2021 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2 Apologies & Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

3 Public Questions & Statements

There were no public questions or statements received.

4 Bi-annual Community Safety Update

Lindsey Butterfield, Temporary Assistant Chief Constable, North Yorkshire Police attended the meeting as the new Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) alongside Odette Robson, Head of Safer Communities.

Lindsey Butterfield provided an overview of the new charring arrangements, the work of the CSP during the last six months, and the delivery of its Plan. She went on to summarise the Partnership's role and the agreed priority areas for delivery, as detailed in the report. She also confirmed that the Partnership's five priorities were due to be reviewed and a new strategy created, which would be published after the new Police Fire & Crime Commissioner had published their new strategy in 2022. She also suggested that future reports be themed based on those new priorities.

The report considered, focussed on the impact of the pandemic on domestic abuse victims, and the opportunities and challenges arising from the Domestic Abuse Act. Lindsey Butterfield confirmed that during the first lockdown, a national helpline had been introduced and since then the CSP had introduced its own helpline, which had been advertised locally. It was noted that a 'live chat' facility had been widely used by both victims and perpetrators.

In regard to safe accommodation, it was confirmed that historically these had predominantly been situated along the east coast, but others facilities were now becoming available. It was confirmed that work had been undertaken with IDAS to assess the different types of accommodation for all types of victims, including refuge accommodation and dispersed accommodation. An assessment had also been made on how best to support those who wanted to remain in their own homes.

Lindsey Butterfield went on to confirm that:

- Work was on track to publish a full Safe Accommodation Strategy by 5 January 2022
- There was also a holistic Domestic Abuse Strategy that was due to be renewed in 2022, which included an holistic approach for supporting children

Scrutiny Members thanked Lindsey Butterfield for her attendance at the meeting, and it was

Resolved – To note the report and receive a 6-monthly update.

5 Update on Council Plan Refresh

Considered – An update on what was being considered as part of the 2021 – 2025 Council Plan refresh.

Simon Moss, Strategy & Performance Team Leader introduced the report confirming that this year; due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), only a light refresh had been required.

It was noted that Plan now included an overview of what had been achieved in the last year e.g. the Rural Commission, strengthening Climate Change and Equality objectives, and the support given during the pandemic and the recovery period.

Members noted a number of sections had been updated, as detailed within the table at paragraph 6 of the report, and that the draft Plan was scheduled to be ready for circulation by mid December 2021.

Members recognised the structure needed to be right for 2023 when the new Unitary Council took over, to support rural communities.

County Councillor Richard Musgrave drew attention to the intention to deliver a modern integrated transport network and queried when the current Transport Plan was due to be reviewed.

County Councillor Andy Paraskos requested a further updates on the Council Plan be added to the agenda for each future meeting and it was agreed that initially an update would be provided for the next Committee meeting in March 2022, at which time a decision would be taken as to whether further updates were required.

It was also agreed that an LGR update be provided for a future meeting.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6 Bi-annual Property Services Performance Update

Members received a presentation on Property Services Performance and John Holden, Head of Property Services provided an overview of the key issues, which included:

- The net savings made to date of £900K with additional savings expected to be achieved through further rationalisation, increased efficiencies and development of trading activities;
- Property disposals and development of the headquarters site;
- Post Covid working arrangements and changes to service delivery models;
- The pressures in the delivery of carbon reduction measures;
- An overview of the projects delivered through the capital programme;
- An overview of the maintenance backlog in schools, and improvements in the traded offer to schools;

In response to a query from County Councillor Bryn Griffiths, it was confirmed that generally air source heat pumps were considered a better solution than ground source head pumps, but that all options were considered based on individual sites.

Members noted work was underway to consider how best to accommodate an increased number of Members (90) within the Council Chamber. They also noted that as a result of LGR the new Unitary Council's property portfolio would increase with the inclusion of the current Districts building which was likely bring forward a range of issues. It was confirmed that a property workstream had been included in the LGR programme.

Resolved – that the Property Services update be noted

7 Annual Update on the Operation of the Customer Portal

Considered – A presentation on the use of the customer portal and the ongoing work to encourage a channel shift to online services.

Robert Ling, Assistant Director Technology & Change provided a detailed presentation on the Customer Portal, providing up to date statistics on the numbers of customers now using the County Council's online services. He also provided information on the methods used to support and encourage that channel shift and the ongoing work to identify reasons why some residents were still choosing to contact Customer Services by telephone. In particular, he highlighted:

- A 10% increase on last year in the number of website visits across the range of County Council services, driven by the pandemic. It was expected the figure would drop over the coming year;
- An increase in social media contact again driven by Covid, and the benefits derived;
- Increased Customer Portal uptake and usage, with a focus on those areas requiring further work e.g. bus passes, death appointments and financial assessments;
- The overall increase in digital demand;
- The increase in requests for services and changes to service deliver, as a result of Covid, e.g. social care demand;
- Customer Service Centre frontline and social care response and handling times, and the introduction of a professional line;
- Work to improve the customer experience, with each service having two or more access channels and improved accessibility support;
- The results from the annual survey of the County Council's accessibility – it was noted that significant strides had been made in the more difficult areas, but there was still a problem around the first level of access due to the use of pdfs;

- Work to address the issues around hidden disabilities preventing some users from using the County Council's online services;
- Update on CSC Live Services e.g. dropped kerbs;
- An increase in the use of the County Council's automated services, with better credit control driving more online payments;
- The ongoing work to consider other services that could be taken online with a focus in the coming year on Children's and Adult Services;

County Councillor Andy Paraskos suggested a further push on Parish Councils to reinforce the use of their portal to register salt bin street lights etc

County Councillor Yvonne Peacock highlighted the importance of maintaining a good standard of telephone services, and it was confirmed that it was regularly being tested to ensure it was working appropriately and efficiently.

Resolved – That the update be noted and a further update be provided in 12 months

8 Progress Update on Equality Objectives 2021- 2025

Considered – A report updating Members on equality work in the County Council, including progress on Equality objectives agreed for the period 2021 – 2025, introduced by Deb Hugill (Senior Strategy and Performance Officer, Policy Partnerships and Communities (CSD)).

Deb Hugill confirmed the Equality objectives had been refreshed and approved in June 2021, and embedded into the refreshed Council Plan. It was noted that the County Council's equality and diversity inclusion policy statement had also recently been refreshed after a public and staff consultation, and that work was ongoing to embed that statement across the Council.

Deb Hugill went on to highlight the progress to date made against each of the new objectives, as detailed in section 3 of the report.

County Councillor Andy Paraskos queried how the Council was myth busting about the Covid vaccine and it was confirmed that consistent information was being provided in conjunction with other appropriate agencies, with every effort being made to target those groups less inclined to take up the vaccine, through a range of routes.

In regard to the Romany and gypsy communities, it was noted that during the pandemic work had been undertaken to improve engagement and the intention was to maintain and build on those engagement levels. Members expressed an interest in receiving a more detailed report on that work.

In regard to the new anti-racist practice group set up in HAS, it was confirmed the group would take a pro-active focussed approach to anti-racism rather than focussing on issues that have found, with the intention of empowering people to take a stand against inappropriate attitudes wherever possible.

Resolved – That the update report be noted.

9 Alternative Investments - Year 4 Review

Considered - An update on progress with the delivery of the County Council's alternative investment framework introduced by Karen Iveson, Assistant Director for Strategic

Resources

The report provided background to the introduction of the framework in 2017 and an update on activity during its fourth year of implementation against the backdrop of the pandemic.

The report highlighted the categories under which opportunities for investment fell, the limit set on the sums for investment and the targets set on returns so that appropriate assessment of the risks and rewards could take place.

Members noted there had been:

- Some changes to the rules governing how Local Authorities undertook commercial investments, with the aim of controlling what Councils could do.
- No new investments in the last year beyond the usual drawdown of company loans;
- Reasonable returns despite Covid;
- Some capital losses which was to be expected given the volatility of the market, which provision had been made for i.e. those losses were on long term assets which would not be disposed of until the market was appropriate;
- Some recovery of property funds;

Karen Iveson went to provide an overview of the lessons learned and confirmed the County Council had adopted a cautious and modest approach to commercial investment.

Finally, in response to climate change, Karen Iveson confirmed the County Council had looked at pursuing some kind of commercial investment in solar energy generation, and that following some feasibility work, a decision had been taken not to progress that option at this time.

In response to a query from County Councillor Richard Musgrave on how the County Council's returns on its property funds compared to other property funds, it was confirmed they were reasonable and that most of the losses in the last financial year had been recovered, with further improvement expected going forward. County Councillor Gareth Dadd confirmed that presentations from a number of property funds had been considered by the Commercial Investment Board, and the two chosen were amongst the top performers in the marketplace at that time.

Specifically in regard to Harrogate Royal Baths, County Councillor Richard Musgrave noted its poor performance and Karen Iveson confirmed that its purchase was subject to a robust business case and due diligence was given to the tenants, and the current position was in part due to the pandemic. In response, County Councillor Gareth Dadd confirmed that whilst the Authority was not currently achieving the level of profit originally expected on Harrogate Baths, it was still delivering a higher level of profit than the funding would have made had it stayed in the bank.

Resolved – That the progress to date be noted.

10 Work Programme 2020/21

The report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of 2021-22 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

County Councillor Richard Musgrave requested an update on Welcome to Yorkshire, and it was suggested that the Economic Environment & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider looking at the Local Transport Plan.

Finally it was agreed that a future item of business be added to the Work programme to provide a more detailed overview of the Equality Objective 4: Improving health and educational outcomes amongst Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) communities in the county.

Resolved – That the work programme be amended to include the additional items identified.

The public meeting concluded at 12:18pm

11 Brierley Group Update

This item was considered in private session and is therefore not included in the public Minutes.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.