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## North Yorkshire County Council

### Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 11th July, 2022 commencing at 10.00 am.

County Councillor David Staveley in the Chair plus County Councillors John Cattanch, Mark Crane, Melanie Davis, Caroline Goodrick, Hannah Gostlow, David Ireton, Mike Jordan, Steve Mason, Bob Packham, Phil Trumper, Arnold Warneken, Steve Watson and Robert Windass.

In attendance: County Councillor Carl Les (Items 1-6)

Officers present: Karl Battersby, Barrie Mason, Michael Leah, Vicki Dixon, Richard Binks, Mark Henderson, Will Baines, Martin Simpson and Ross Bullerwell (NY Highways).

Apologies: County Councillor Paul Haslam.

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**Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book**

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#### **1 Introductions and apologies for absence**

The Chair, County Councillor David Staveley, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Committee members then introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from County Councillor Paul Haslam, with County Councillor George Jabbour attending as substitute.

#### **2 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2022**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2022 were noted by members of the committee.

#### **3 Declarations of Interest**

County Councillor Melanie Davis declared a personal interest in item 10, as her partner works for Network Rail.

#### **4 Public Questions or Statements**

No public questions or statements were received.

#### **5 Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny at North Yorkshire County Council**

Considered – A report by Will Baines, Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer on the overview and scrutiny process in place at North Yorkshire County Council.

Key points in the report included:

- The role of overview and scrutiny as a key check and balance for the decisions made by the Executive
- The opportunity to keep councillors and the public aware of key issues and initiatives
- The opportunity for overview and scrutiny to act as a critical friend to gain feedback and suggestions
- The different approaches to overview and scrutiny available, from task and finish groups to select committee style meetings
- The role of the work programme to plan out the work of the committee for future meetings

In response to the report, it was confirmed that substitutes can be nominated to attend mid-cycle briefings.

### **Resolved –**

That Members note the report.

## **6 Annual report on the progress and performance of NY Highways**

Considered – A report by the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services to present the annual report on the performance of NY Highways, the County Council's company for the operational delivery of highway services.

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

- The NY Highways Teckal company is an externally contracted set-up, but with schemes delivered in-house, allowing greater collaboration, more efficiency and innovation.
- NY Highways in its first year of implementation has met and exceeded the expectations of a business starting-up to run the road maintenance of the biggest geographical highways network in the UK. The main success criterion was that the main customer, the public, noticed no discernible difference between the mature contract of the previous contractor and the new business start-up of NY Highways.
- The pothole maintenance, street lighting and surface dressing programme was disrupted by the events of Storm Arwen in November 2021, but service delivery has recovered, with the winter service plan to ensure the public highway is safe and accessible successfully delivered.
- Current challenges include the delivery of gully operations, following issues faced with receiving new state of the art gully tanker vehicles. It is a target for the next year to improve the service through investment in innovation.
- NY Highways is now into the fourth year of a five year plan now, with the hope during years 4 and 5 to establish further service transformation opportunities.
- New methods of service delivery have been introduced, such as spray injection patching and a trial using innovative pothole techniques (Pothole Pro) to deliver savings with the same level of service.
- The challenge of transferring the 200+ Ringway staff into the NY Highways Teckal was particularly difficult during Covid-19, as it was hard to get staff back together, but it has been well received.
- There is a concerted attempt across the county for staff to fix multiple issues at one site, rather than having to make subsequent visits.
- There has been a shift in the staff culture, with a willingness to take on board ideas and not just to see things from a purely commercial point of view. There is also felt to be a greater awareness of the public purse and of corporate responsibility amongst staff due to the Teckal arrangement.
- Improvements have been made to install two wind turbines/solar arrays to store

electricity for overnight charging of batteries that power portable tools/plant.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- There have been occasions of road closures taking place without informing county councillors and then not removing information signs after works completed, causing further confusion. It was commented in response that the local highways teams try to make local members aware of impending works as much as possible.
- Praise for the surface dressing works that have been undertaken in various parts of the county.
- A request was made to share details of drainage 'hot spot' locations with elected members.
- Blockage of key road signs by vegetation.
- It was asked whether the introduction of the new unitary authority would impact on the Area offices model currently used and the opportunity for councillors to build up a rapport with local officers. This is not intended to change from the existing seven area offices, with all of the depots based in strategic locations in North Yorkshire.
- It was noted that the level of service complaints received is generally low, with the further feedback to be received through the roll out of public satisfaction questionnaires via QR code and an annual National Highways public satisfaction survey undertaken in summer. Despite this, it was felt the Highways service could be more proactive, with the ability to feedback easily using QR codes and citizen panels.
- Calculating the carbon footprint of suppliers has been considered, with the idea to develop a carbon calculator to analyse emissions that can be shared amongst local authorities as there are currently variations in standards and metrics.
- It was felt that roads could be swept more regularly to avoid debris building up on the carriageway. In response, it was noted that performance in this area has improved, with the sweeping of road verges undertaken by district councils, working closely with colleagues, particularly through the LGR transition, to deliver quick wins and better co-ordination.
- County Councillor George Jabbour asked the following on behalf of both himself and County Councillor Paul Haslam: KPI information on the NY Highways vacancy rate and agency staff levels and the return of investment on off-grid measures. In response, Barrie Mason commented that more information would be available at the next review point. It was noted that staffing across the public sector is currently very challenging.
- It was felt that a comms platform should be considered to improve co-ordination and lead to improved use of social media platforms to promote the Highways teams and the work that they're doing across the county.
- It was commented that when road closures are changed at short notice, it didn't help people trying to plan journeys, for example on works to Selby Bypass that didn't take place as planned. A possible reason for late changes to works is that surface dressing is weather dependent. Members were asked to feed in specific locations and occasions.
- The what3words training for new members as a way of reporting in issues was highlighted.

#### **Resolved –**

Note the information within the annual report and responses to questions raised.

Considered – Report of the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services, introducing an update on the delivery of major transport schemes across North Yorkshire.

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

- Details of the bids made to the Levelling Up Fund for £39.3m on behalf of the county council to improve access to Thirsk, Seamer and Scarborough railway stations, plus other separate bids in North Yorkshire, including a £19.9m plan to redevelop Malton railway station and a £20m bid to regenerate part of Catterick Garrison town centre.
- The rail improvement scheme in Harrogate to enable two trains per hour in each direction between Harrogate and York is ongoing. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 impacts and train crew resourcing issues, the timetable had been scaled back, with the County Council working with partners to find a solution.

Key road schemes in progress include:

- Junction 47 of the A1(M) remains a big and complex scheme.
- The A66 dualling is an important strategic network for the county. It is expected to go through an Examination in Public from October 2022 up to March 2023. Construction is currently expected in Spring 2024 with an accelerated programme of works to be completed within five years.
- On the A64 Hopgrove to Barton Hill dualling, NYCC officers are heavily involved with National Highways in the public consultation exercise running from the end of July to September 2022. A preferred route option is expected to be confirmed by April 2023.
- The A59 Kex Gill is the biggest major project scheme for the county council, due to the subsidence issues causing regular monitoring of movement of the road. The scheme is currently at outline business case proposal, with a full business case to be developed for the reconstruction of the road. It is hoped to give contractors as much certainty as possible on the price of the scheme, but this may not be possible with high inflation.
- In North Northallerton, the ring road scheme is in the final stages.
- The Transforming Cities Fund programme projects in Harrogate, Skipton and Selby are into the process of consultation.

There is an aim to develop a pipeline of projects that is ready to go as and when funding opportunities arise.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- The Junction 47 improvements on the A1(M) were seen to be a major improvement.
- The A64 dualling public consultation should be undertaken with the widest possible area, to cover communities living within a 2 to 3 mile radius of the A64 corridor.
- Reassurance that any traffic modelling for the A64 dualling would take into account the planned upgrades to the York Outer Ring Road.
- Progress with developing East-West links and need to upgrade the A66/A64 links. A66 works are hoped to begin on site in 2024, as part of the Project Speed to accelerate the delivery timescales. On the A64, progress has been made, with the potential to develop as part of the Route Improvement Strategy.
- The 'Restoring your Railways' campaign through the Department for Transport is ongoing to champion the reopening of lines closed under the Beeching cuts.
- It was noted that high inflation and cost pressures which are not built into current contracts could rise and see schemes go over budget.
- County Councillor George Jabbour asked on behalf of County Councillor Paul Haslam about the Harrogate Rail Station Gateway project, as part of the Transforming Cities Fund, and why the public / stakeholder consultation to date had not detailed how the project fits in with other schemes, and whether a wider consultation would take place in the future.
- County Councillor Steve Watson noted on the North Northallerton scheme that there were outstanding issues, but hoped the remaining work can be finished

smoothly, up to standard and completed as quickly as possible.

**Resolved** – That the report be noted.

## **8 North Yorkshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy**

Considered – Report of the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services regarding the revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

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

- North Yorkshire County Council is the lead local flood authority (LLFA) to develop, maintain and monitor a flood risk strategy for the county.
- The last Local Flood Risk Management Strategy took place in 2016, and is required to be updated every 6 years.
- The key proposed objectives of the revised strategy (set out in section 4.1) include communities having a greater role in managing flood risk, improved knowledge and understanding as well as making best use of all potential funding opportunities.
- As a statutory consultee to the planning process, the County Council provide guidance and advice to Local Planning Authorities, developers and local communities in respect of individual planning applications where these effect or are affected by local flood risk. In doing so, the aim is to secure the application of high quality, multi-functional Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), which follow the most up to date guidance, in new developments.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- The strategy should be strengthened to reflect the need for the LLFA to take into account the local knowledge of communities with drainage and flood risk issues when responding to consultations, strategies and local plan allocations in relation to the planning process.
- Help communities to develop an understanding of who has responsibility when a flooding issue occurs. When uncertainty occurs during a flooding incident, the LLFA will assist with identifying the sources of flooding and notifying those Risk Management Authorities which have responsibilities.
- The importance of engaging with local areas on an ongoing basis, for example holding pre-emptive flooding workshops in the Yorkshire Dales to prepare communities for potential future events.
- Provide a user friendly and accessible document that summaries the local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
- The role of the internal drainage boards following LGR and the end of the district and borough councils.

**Resolved** –

- i) To note the revised draft Local Flood Risk Management strategy.
- ii) The views of the Committee be reported to the Executive for approval and recommendation to Full Council for approval and adoption.

## **9 Single Use Plastics**

Considered – Report of the Assistant Director – Travel, Environmental and Countryside on the progress made with reducing single use plastics across the authority.

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

- Since December 2020, the Council has taken a more proactive stance on the matter of reducing single use plastics, but also working to influence partners, for example external organisations such as schools and suppliers, to take similar approaches.
- Progress has also been made in property and facilities, with regular internal staff communications used to encourage reuse of single use plastics and the impact they have on the environment. Winding down the provision of single use cups in the water dispensers at Council offices and replacing these with compostable cups or encouraging use of your own re-useable mug or bottle is another development.
- Engaging with schools to support and promote their own sustainability agenda and signposting them to relevant resources.
- Work undertaken with supermarkets to promote the use of plastic wrap recycling points and trying to make public aware of the type of packaging they are buying.
- The importance of Extended Producer Responsibility, a concept where the cost of processing and disposing of product packaging will be borne by the producer, to incentivise producing less packaging waste. This policy will come into force from 1 April 2024.
- Through the procurement strategy (under review) and contract management processes, the sustainability agenda is prioritised where possible.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- Making changes at a grassroots level to drive change in the production of single use plastics from the bottom up.
- Will the reduction in single use plastics be incorporated into waste management and if so, the effect of that on the energy systems.
- Rather than simply asking companies to go plastic free, working with them to show how it can be done for mutual benefit.
- County Councillor George Jabbour asked on behalf of County Councillor Paul Haslam about how progress with reducing single use plastics will be monitored in the future through the Beyond Carbon programme.

### **Resolved –**

That the update on single use plastics be noted and agreement that the theme will now sit within the wider Beyond Carbon programme.

## **10 Rail Update Report**

Considered – A report on rail developments and forthcoming changes for the railway and rail passengers in North Yorkshire.

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

- In May 2021, the government announced the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, seen as the biggest reform to the railway in three decades, setting out a 30 year Whole Industry Strategic Plan (WISP). The key themes of the plan include replacing train operator franchises with new Passenger Service Contracts, establishing a Great British Railways body by 2024 and developing a new deal for passengers.
- During Covid-19, train passenger numbers in North Yorkshire fell to below 10% for a considerable time. Currently the number of services in North Yorkshire stands at around 90%, with passenger numbers overall reaching 80% of pre-Covid levels until the recent strikes.
- On the Esk Valley Line (Esk Valley, Whitby, Middlesbrough), additional train services are to be provided and infrastructure improvements, with a plan to get to

- seven trains per day by December 2024.
- The Transforming Cities Fund investment will see the development of station gateway projects in Skipton, Selby and Harrogate.
- Levelling Up Fund bids to improve access at and to Seamer, Scarborough, Thirsk and Malton railway stations.
- Reviewing car parking provision at railway stations and active travel schemes following the work of the Rural Commission.
- The ongoing strike action between the Rail Maritime Transport (RMT) union and Network Rail and the train companies.
- Savings in barrier downtimes have been made at Starbeck and Kildwick level crossings by relocating rail signalling infrastructure closer to the level crossing.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- How the railway industry can recover and adjust to the 'new normal' given the different working habits of commuters.
- Updates on the possibility of reopening the Skipton – Colne line following the publication of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail.
- The desire for a commuter service on the Esk Valley Line into Whitby to provide a public transport solution for working people.
- The knock-on effects of the published Integrated Rail Plan (for the North and Midlands) for North Yorkshire, leading to questions if the investment will be channelled into the right areas to effect real change.

### **Resolved –**

That members note the contents of the report and the progress being made on rail matters across the county.

## **11 Bus Update**

Considered – A verbal update by the Assistant Director for Travel, Environmental and Countryside on bus transport in North Yorkshire.

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

- The diversity of the geography of North Yorkshire and the challenges this provides for bus services.
- The Bus Service Improvement Plan developed following the publication of the government's National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better, detailing £3 billion of investment in bus services across England, to make bus use more attractive to encourage more people to use the bus and tackle climate change and social isolation.
- The significant drop in patronage on commercial bus services since the Covid-19 pandemic, with services set based on the demand from customers for public transport.
- Financial subsidy support to commercial bus operators is currently due to conclude at the end of September 2022, which could lead to heavy service reductions.
- The Enhanced Partnership approach adopted with local bus operators across the county in 2021, to develop service improvements in the bus network to meet the needs of local communities, enabling people to remain active and independent, providing excellent customer service and offering simple payment and ticketing options.
- The YorBus service offer and the improvements developed since launch, including a new mobile app and pre-booking facility. The service continues to be reviewed to consider customer feedback (which is very positive) to assess performance and

value for money.

- The failure to secure funding from the 'Bus Back Better' initiative for NYCC, the feedback received and the impact this has on future plans.

There followed a discussion with the key points as summarised below:

- The process of the County Council for awarding bus contracts.
- Whether the £2 bus fare cap adopted in areas such as Greater Manchester could be rolled out nationally, to include North Yorkshire.
- How the reducing bus routes and services could lead to increased competition amongst other transport providers for business.
- A comms campaign to encourage more people to use bus services to maintain the current service provision, particularly passengers who have not returned after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The social value of using bus transport for elderly passengers in particular.
- The reduction in the bus service budget, and the knock on effect on users and providers if services are withdrawn. County Councillor George Jabbour gave the example of the 128 Scarborough to Helmsley (via Pickering) route.
- The importance of community transport providers, such as Ryedale Community Transport, DalesBus and Scarborough Dial a Ride, to help people to continue to get out and about.
- Impact of service closures e.g loss of Little Red Bus service on rural communities
- Using buses for daily commute is almost impossible in some areas due to inconsistent service and timings of services during rush hour.
- Members of the committee commented on the effectiveness of the weekly drop-in sessions with the Area Highways Offices.

**Resolved** – That the verbal update be noted.

## **12 Work Programme**

Considered –

The following items were suggested to be added to the committee work programme:

- Parking enforcement across the county
- Litter
- Rural bus services and subsidies
- 20mph speed limit policy

**Resolved** – That the requests be added to the work programme.

The meeting concluded at 2.15 pm.