

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

19 July 2023

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE TRANSITION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION) OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Transition (LGR) Overview and Scrutiny committee was constituted back in July 2022 to work alongside the existing five overview and scrutiny committees undertaking their 'business as usual' work, with a particular focus on helping to shape the development of the new unitary authority. As part of the new constitution for North Yorkshire Council, the committee has now been retained for a further three years (until 31 March 2026) with a review after two years.

Following vesting day on 1 April 2023 and the move to the new unitary authority, the committee have been closely following developments and gathering feedback from residents.

Meeting of the TEEE O&S Committee on 25 May 2023

Committee members were invited to a meeting of the Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise O&S in May to consider progress with service harmonisation of the waste and recycling collections. I understand it was a very informative presentation on the various options under consideration, and the committee will be following this matter closely as the plans develop.

Committee Meeting on 19 June 2023

The committee met in person in the Brierley Room at County Hall. At the meeting, members received detailed presentations on: the progress of the transition and transformation following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), initiatives to support the development of a staff culture within North Yorkshire Council and the work of the Customer Services teams across the county.

Outlined below are further details in relation to some of the areas that the committee considered:

LGR Transition and Transformation

Robert Ling, Director of Transformation, attended to provide an update on the overall transition process in the lead up to vesting day and the work now starting to get underway to transform service areas. Following a relatively smooth transition across to North Yorkshire Council, attention has now turned to learning lessons for the future and the involvement of the committee in scrutinising this piece of work. All staff across the organisation have been asked to submit current 'niggles' that need fixing since LGR to try and iron out issues, both major and minor, that have arisen.

Topics discussed in the Q&A with Robert that followed included:

- The improvements required to a number of corporate systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and working in the way that we want them to for the future
- A request for elected members to be kept updated on ongoing issues related to the new council to enable prompt responses to residents' queries
- Ensuring best practice from the predecessor councils is utilised as part of the service transformation process
- Issues experienced by residents trying to pay North Yorkshire Council by phone
- Success with reporting issues via the new council website has proved indifferent

It was agreed that the update from Robert will become a standing item for future committee meetings.

Developing a staff culture

Trudy Forster, Assistant Chief Executive for HR and Business Support joined the meeting to present to the committee on the schemes and events undertaken to help with developing a staff culture within the new council. These included: focus groups, webinars, pulse surveys, quick video guides and health & wellbeing resources. Personal development information and support continues to be provided for all staff, with the aim to embed the values and behaviours for North Yorkshire Council across the organisation.

Topics discussed in the Q&A with Trudy that followed included:

- Issues experienced by officers, particularly those joining from the former district and borough councils, in not feeling part of one organisation following LGR
- How can success in developing a staff culture be measured?
- The new hybrid working policy and what it means for staff
- The future occupancy of council buildings

Customer Services

Margaret Wallace, Assistant Director for Customer, Revenues and Benefits and Sarah Foley, Head of Customer Services gave an overview of the agreed customer principles, emphasising the aim to act as one council with one front door from day one, so that the customer experience is as seamless as possible. The achievement of reaching 'safe and legal' for Day 1 was highlighted, given the complexities within the service area, in particular ensuring that a customer can easily reach the right information or for walk in customers that there is a person in the right office location to help. There was recognition that the situation is not perfect, with improvements to continue as the customer journeys process is transformed.

Performance metrics were shared with the committee, which showed an improvement in May stats for telephony when compared to April, such as 8% more calls handled, the abandoned calls rate has fallen by 34% and the average time to answer now 42 seconds quicker. These metrics will continue to be monitored over the summer months.

It was reported that the new 'Contact us' website form has generated 6269 cases from 1 April to 31 May, helping to provide vital customer data insight to assist with making evidence based tweaks to the system. Over 900 changes to the website have already been made to make the online customer journey easier. The new chatbot is available 24/7, with bin collection days and garden waste service proving popular requests using this channel following vesting day.

It was pleasing to note that LGR has led to an increased opportunity for customers to access services in a single contact, meaning better connected services and developing an intelligence-led approach using improved insight from data and customer feedback.

The current challenges for the service were also addressed, for example that each area office is currently using different technology and there is no centralised Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. It was noted that customers have had to go through a culture change with the new website looking and feeling different, and the initial challenges with telephony that are showing short-term improvement.

Topics discussed in the Q&A that followed included:

- The performance of the interactive voice response (IVR) software to triage phone calls to the right service

- Whether the safety net team has been required as much as expected to direct phone calls?
- Developing one CRM system would help to standardise processes and call scripts across the different locations to provide a more consistent approach

Work Programme

Following the appointment of a new Vice-Chair in Cllr Griffiths, the committee will hold our first mid-cycle briefing in early August along with political group spokespersons to consider the future work programme in more detail. At the June meeting committee members suggested topics including the delivery of the Planning service, Finance system and requested regular updates on LGR savings and the development of a single CRM system in the future.

The next formal meeting of the committee will be taking place on Monday 4 September 2023 from 10am at County Hall.

COUNCILLOR MALCOLM TAYLOR
CHAIR OF THE TRANSITION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION)
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 July 2023