

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 NOVEMBER 2023

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN OF SCRUTINY BOARD

Scrutiny Board brings together the Chairs of the six thematic overview and scrutiny committees at the Council and the Older Peoples', Young People's and Climate Change Champions. It provides an opportunity for a whole council view of scrutiny activity, which avoids gaps and overlaps and helps establish a lead committee for areas of joint interest. It also provides a forum in which the key performance issues for the Council can be reviewed and items for further scrutiny identified.

The scrutiny function was created to act as a check on and balance to the executive and it is a statutory requirement for all authorities operating executive arrangements. There has been one meeting of Scrutiny Board since my last statement to Council.

The meeting of Scrutiny Board on 25 August 2023 focussed upon the scrutiny of the Executive Q1 Performance and Finance Management Report, ahead of the members of the Board attending the meeting of the Executive at 11am on Tuesday 29 August 2023. Some of the issues raised at the Executive meeting by members of the Scrutiny Board are highlighted below:

- The progress being made with 'channel shift' and the move of more services to self-service through the Council website. It was noted that 71% of contacts with the Customer Service Centre are currently by phone
- The good progress being made with the Council Tax collection rates and what will be needed to maintain and improve these rates
- What more could be done to reduce the use of agency staff and associated spend in planning departments
- The importance of NHS Health Checks in promoting health and wellbeing and enabling early identification of health problems. As such, interest in understanding what more can be done to improve the take up rates
- The factors that have led to an increase demand for support from Children and Young People's Services and whether this has been driven by the legacy of the pandemic, exacerbated by the increased cost of living over the past 12 months
- The significant improvement in the performance, despite high demand, on the completion of Education, Health and Care Plans
- An increase in the number of children in care in the county, reaching a peak not seen since 2013/14
- Whether a standardised approach to recycling kerb-side collection and the reporting of missed collections will be implemented soon, following recent government announcements
- The recent reductions in reported fly-tipping and what is behind this
- The performance of planning services, specifically, the KPI for major applications completed within timescale being significant below the national average
- The factors behind an increase of number of empty homes.

Members of Scrutiny Board also held a discussion about how scrutiny of housing provision and management can be undertaken. Housing provision is an issue that cuts across all of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees as access to housing and affordable housing impacts on wellbeing, educational attainment, economic development and the environment.

The conclusion of the discussion was that there were two separate and distinct issues to be considered: 1) housing provision and how this supports quality of life in the county and the strategic ambitions of the Council; and 2) governance arrangements and the performance of the Council as a Registered Provider of social housing. Further work is underway to determine whether a new overview and scrutiny committee could be constituted with a focus upon the role of the Council as a Registered Provider of social housing. All other housing matters would then be reviewed by the existing overview and scrutiny committees, coordinated by Scrutiny Board.

The Climate Change Champion provided a written update on his work and some of the key issues arising, including:

- Details of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015
- The role that all councillors have to play in reviewing reports and policies through a lens of the impact on the climate and environment thus ensuring that climate mitigation and adaptation is business as usual
- The monitoring, measuring and holding to account Council performance against the measures in the newly adopted climate change policy
- The promotion of water quality awareness and initiatives and work around green energy generation and environmentally friendly agriculture and food production.

It was noted that biodiversity was included in the Climate Change Champion role and remit.

The Older People's and Young People's Champions provided an update on key aspects of their work over the past three months. The themes covered by the updates included:

- The success of the £2 bus fare scheme and whether the government would extend this as it allowed older people to get out and about and not feel isolated
- The refresh of the 'Bring Me Sunshine - Dementia Strategy'
- How the promotion of physical activity amongst older people can reduce the risk of and severity of falls and the role that leisure services has to play
- The Pension Credit campaign that is underway and the estimated 6,000 North Yorkshire residents who are not currently accessing Pension Credit
- The ongoing work of Healthy Schools and the key role that they have to play in promoting and embedding healthy lifestyles for both children and their parents and carers
- The work of the Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education and the adoption of the new syllabus for religious education in schools
- The role that all councillors have to play as a corporate parent and specifically the work undertaken by the Council's Corporate Parenting Group.

Members of Scrutiny Board are next due meet on 24 November 2023. At that meeting, the Executive Q2 Performance and Finance Management Report will be scrutinised.

COUNCILLOR KARIN SEDGWICK
25 October 2023