

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**17 February 2021**

## **STATEMENT OF THE CORPORATE & PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

Since my last statement to Council in November 2020, the Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met twice. We have met twice, the first time in ear December 2020 and again on 18 January 2021.

At our December meeting, the Committee received an update on progress with the delivery of the County Council's alternative investment framework, which highlighted the categories under which opportunities for investment fall, the limit set on the sums for investment, and the targets set on returns so that appropriate assessment of the risks and rewards can take place.

We focussed on the pandemic's effect on investment activity, as evidenced by the lack of acquisitions in the last year, and were pleased to note reasonable revenue returns had still been achieved. We welcomed the cautious approach being taken with the property market and investments and noted the new rules introduced by the Government around the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB), preventing Council's from borrowing in order to fund commercial investments.

At the same meeting, we received updates on use of the customer portal, and the work of Safer Communities.

In regard to the Customer Portal, I can confirm that work continues to encourage a channel shift to online services. We were pleased to note the improving data on uptake and usage, digital demand, social media contact, website visits and frontline and social care response and handling times, but expressed some concern about the lack of feedback and sometimes incorrect feedback provided in response to service complaints. Members of the committee have subsequently provided examples for further investigation.

In regard to Safer Communities, we received an overview of the work of the Community Safety Partnership during the last six months and an update on its Plan delivery. We noted the Domestic Abuse Bill expected next year that will bring a new statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities, and the ongoing work to prepare for it. In light of the pandemic, we focussed on Domestic abuse. In noting the disconnect between the higher national helpline figures and those of local services which were much lower, we raised our concerns about the potential increase in hidden harm, and were pleased to note the work underway to raise the profile of the services available to domestic abuse victims.

Finally, we were consulted on the proposed updates to the Council Plan as part of the 2021 – 2025 refresh, and we started our consideration of the Notice of Motion to ban sky lanterns on any property and land which North Yorkshire County Council own or lease, or have any interest in or control over.

At our January meeting the Committee received updates on the Youth Justice Service, and NYCC staff welfare and support during the pandemic. We also concluded our consideration of the proposed ban of Sky Lanterns.

The Youth Justice update highlighted the findings from a recent inspection of the Young Offender Institute at Wetherby. We were pleased to note the 'Good with Outstanding Elements' rating

given and the subsequent decision to submit an improvement plan, even though one was not required. In particular, we were pleased to learn of the improvements to the escort and delivery system which allayed the Committee's previous concerns about the operation of a 24 Hour reception at Wetherby.

The staff welfare update detailed changes to the council's workforce in response to Covid, and the support provided to the workforce to enable them to remain operationally effective and personally resilient throughout the pandemic. As a committee, we acknowledged the difficulties associated with long-term working from home i.e. the work / life imbalance and the loss of social interaction. Together with the impact of Covid on a personal level, we recognised the potential for an increase in mental health concerns as a result. We were therefore pleased to see the measures put in place for supporting staff and expressed our appreciation for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic.

Finally, the Committee received contributions from members of the other scrutiny committees as part of its consideration of the proposed ban on sky lanterns. The information provided by members and officers led the Committee to include the banning of helium balloons in its considerations.

The Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee's report, which is being presented separately at this meeting, details the committee's lines of enquiry, review findings and recommendations for your consideration.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DEREK BASTIMAN