

North Yorkshire County Council

17 February 2021

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman's Statement

Committee – 21 January 2021

- York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Update (LEP):

When we received the previous LEP update at our committee meeting a year ago, we could not have imagined the onslaught that the covid-19 pandemic would bring to people's lives and the economy. Such a scenario was largely confined to sci-fi movies at that point. We can at least hope that later this year there will be some level of economic recovery, aided by the speed at which the covid-19 vaccine is now being rolled out.

Understandably this financial year the priority for the LEP's Growth Hub Business support was less on business growth and more on helping businesses to survive. Another covid-related challenge for the LEP was to try to ensure that it spent the remaining funds allocated to the Local Growth Fund by 31 March 2021. Despite the impact of covid-19 and associated delays in the construction industry, the government confirmed that there would be no opportunity to extend the funding beyond 31 March 2021.

In response to the pandemic, the LEP has produced an overarching Economic Plan. We queried how this latest plan related to the Local Industrial Strategy and why there was a need for both. We were told that the principle of the Economic Plan is to align all the LEP's various strategies under one document. We queried if the five-year life of the plan was too long in light of the economic uncertainties facing us but were advised that it is possible to map out, at least in outline form, what the milestones and issues will be over that period. These include the long-term impacts of covid particularly for high streets, and the likelihood of devolution with associated draw down of funding and powers.

- Highways England:

Related to the above, we know that dualling the A64 remains more important than ever for the economic health of the county and especially for the North Yorkshire coast.

We commended the range of safety improvements undertaken recently by Highways England and its plans to carry out more in the coming year on the A64 and other trunk roads in the county (A19, A1M and A66). These include installing safety barriers, traffic islands, improved right hand turning alignments and better signage. However, we made the point that Highways England and ultimately the Department for Transport should not lose sight of the importance of dualling the A64.

The Highways England representative at our meeting informed us that from February this year further scoping work ('project control framework stage 2 work') will be underway to consider road improvements around the Hopgrove Roundabout, including dualling that section of the road. Those working on the study will firstly carry out an assessment of the surveys and models of the previous work undertaken, with the aim being to move to the consultation stage later in 2021. The intention is to put forward the scheme to the Department for Transport for consideration for inclusion in the next road investment strategy. Highways England's governance process and the Department for Transport's governance process is multi-staged so there is no promise of construction at this point. When the time comes though all County Councillors need to ensure they take every opportunity to be involved in the consultation, due to the road's strategic importance to the county as a whole.

- Road casualties:

We received the road casualty statistics and activity for 2019 in North Yorkshire – the latest available official figures.

More people died on North Yorkshire's roads in 2019 than in 2018. However, there was a reduction in the number of people seriously injured in crashes and child casualties fell, with no children killed in road collisions in 2019. The figures for 2019 demonstrated that as in previous years there were four categories of driver who presented the highest risk to road safety in North Yorkshire – young drivers, older drivers, those drinking and driving or on drugs, and motorcyclists.

We were concerned to hear that the provisional figures for road casualties in the county in 2020 show a marked increase on the numbers of seriously injured, when compared to 2019 (411 people in 2020 against 298 in 2019). There was also an increase in the number of slightly injured (1793 in 2020 against 1110 in 2019).

The Police believe that the key reason for the increase in 2020 was that motorists travelled at faster speeds because there was less traffic on the roads. Consequently, some of the severity of the casualties was higher. This is a theory at this stage though and more analysis is required to verify this. It should also be borne in mind that we experience a large number of visitors to our county each year to enjoy the spectacular roads and scenery, and we did so increasingly from the summer onwards in 2020 with less people travelling abroad for holidays. The lockdowns could also have led to a reduction in driving skills, with motorists not having used their vehicles for some time. All of the above might cause an increase in road casualties in the first half of 2021 as well, from the overall downward trend since 2016.

For future reporting purposes, we have asked to have an update on the rollout of Temporary Vehicle Activated Speed signs in the county and the progress of implementing this Committee's recommendations on the County Council's approach to 20 mph speed limit policy.

- Single Use Plastics Task Group:

The Committee approved the task group's report including its recommendations. The report will go to the Executive on 9 March 2021.

Committee – 14 April 2021

We plan to have the following items presented to our next committee meeting on 14 April 2021. The meeting will have an access to services theme.

Rural Commission (North Yorkshire)	To discuss the findings and recommendations of the Rural Commission.
Rural transport	Community transport and bus services: the sustainability of some commercial services particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of the council in market shaping/development; and matters arising from the call for evidence on rural transport by the Rural Commission.
North Yorkshire County Council's Air Quality Strategy	To be consulted on North Yorkshire County Council's Air Quality Strategy.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley Chairman

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
County Hall
Northallerton

4 February 2021