

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

21 FEBRUARY 2024

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 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. The committee will run until 31 March 2026, with a review after two years.

Outlined below are further details of the topics that the committee considered at our last meeting on 4 December 2023:

LGR Transition and Transformation Update

Robert Ling, Director of Transformation, attended to provide an update, discussing the key period coming up of drawing up a budget for next year, alongside converging services through restructures to bring these teams together to be able to operate effectively into the future.

The way we work as a council, with teams located in different offices and in different ways, is another key focus for the months ahead. In some areas there are currently eight different ways of carrying out tasks, so it is important that we learn the best practice from each of the predecessor councils, agreeing the best way of working and then rolling that out across the service delivery teams to transform them.

Concerns raised by committee members included the timetable for the convergence process of bringing together staff under one umbrella and whether there was any benchmarking data available around corporate buy-in. In response, it was noted that some teams are having restructures quicker than others, but there is an understanding that colleagues want certainty.

The importance of getting the customer services approach and performance levels right was highlighted. The customer is a cross cutting theme across the Target Operating Model, as it is fundamental that the first point of contact at the front door with citizens to build the right experience and right level of customer satisfaction.

Strategic Leisure Review

Jo Ireland, Assistant Director for Culture and Leisure set out the key findings from the first phase of the Strategic Leisure Review (SLR) ahead of it going to the Executive back in early January 2024.

The basis for the strategic review was set out, with physical activity levels as a population now lower than they have been in previous decades, so enabling citizens to get active is key to improving the physical and mental health of individuals. It was also emphasised that in North Yorkshire, there are some great leisure assets, physical facilities, skilled staff and significant programmes and outcomes, but we could do a lot more to positively impact on the health of the population and tackling health inequalities.

It was noted that North Yorkshire Council has the largest local authority leisure portfolio in the country comprising of 23 leisure centres and 16 pools. This shows the size and scale of the service area but also the opportunities that it brings. The current complex mix of leisure management arrangements across the county is a challenge, but it is pleasing to note that the asset condition surveys of the facilities have indicated the condition and maintenance liabilities are lower than in other similar local authority areas.

The consultation feedback had shown strong stakeholder support for a health and wellbeing approach, with the significance of community sports and volunteers also highlighted as important parts of any future approach. Accessibility, in terms of transport and travel, is one of the main challenges, with rural residents felt forgotten.

The new approach proposed in the review aims to move from a traditional leisure service to a sport and active wellbeing one, with a renewed focus on inclusive, wellbeing services that improve physical and

mental health and reduce inequalities through a mix of universal and targeted services. There is a strong relationship in the new delivery model between facilities, local place-based delivery and sports development. It is felt that this closely aligns with the latest national policy and strategies.

The preferred management model resulting from the review is a single in-house approach, to provide clarity and consistency for customers, a clear link with democratic decision making and strategic control for the council. It will represent significant management change, but does bring real opportunities because of the size and scale as services are integrated. Contracts would be migrated in a phased way to an in-house model, as current contracts end between 2024 and 2027.

Questions raised by members included how the new model will integrate with existing or proposed voluntary and private sector sports and leisure provision? In response, it was noted that community sports provision and a sports development approach has been built into the new model and the resulting staff structures will reflect this. Work is also underway with Planning colleagues to review the overarching strategy documents.

The community facilities provision across a large county like North Yorkshire was felt to be patchy at the moment.

The benefits of the council having strategic control as part of an in house model, to be able to influence areas such as the carbon emissions savings at the various leisure centre sites was seen as a positive move forwards, along with the increased emphasis on health and wellbeing and the greater opportunities to work with health and social care partners.

Mayoral Combined Authority Governance

Barry Khan, Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services updated the committee on progress with creating the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) for York and North Yorkshire and the associated governance issues.

Questions were asked concerning the checks and balances that will be put in place as part of the draft MCA Constitution to ensure that it can operate efficiently and transparently.

The role of the proposed Business Committee in encouraging public involvement in it was also discussed. As an advisory, non-decision making body, there will be checks and balances put in place along with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee providing challenge. It was also asked whether a Housing or Climate Change Committee has been considered? The model across other MCAs around the country is for a number of other thematic boards to be set up as required.

I am keen for the committee to be kept updated on the further development of the MCA Constitution ahead of the new Mayor taking office in May, with a further update to be brought to our next meeting in March.

Delivering Restructures

Trudy Forster, Assistant Chief Executive for HR and Business Support delivered an update on the delivery of the service restructures. The approach has been starting from the top and then moving down through the organisation. It was reported that work is continuing at pace, although staff have the opportunity to contribute and shape the proposals put forward as part of consultations to get the new structures right.

Following this, questions and comments raised by the committee included whether the large number of Heads of Service posts would be revised in the future. It was noted in response that this was a rationalisation from the number of posts as part of the predecessor councils. Following service transformation and system changes this may be looked at again, but it is uncertain at this early stage.

It was also asked how corporate buy-in to the new authority is being achieved to create a new 'Team North Yorkshire'? In response, it was felt by bringing teams together as part of a new structure and getting to know new colleagues will help in this regard, with a lot of organisational development and staff values work also going on to change the culture. Information on the financial savings generated from staff restructures would form part of the quarterly HR performance reports during the next financial year.

The importance of keeping valued and experienced staff within the organisation for the future was also highlighted.

Next Meeting

The next formal meeting of the committee will be taking place on Monday 11 March 2024 from 10am at County Hall.

COUNCILLOR MALCOLM TAYLOR

8 February 2024