

North Yorkshire Council

Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 4th December, 2023 commencing at 10.30 am.

Councillor Andrew Williams in the Chair, plus Councillors Chris Aldred, Nick Brown, Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff, Kevin Foster, Richard Foster, Bryn Griffiths, Tim Grogan, Robert Heseltine, David Ireton, Mike Schofield, Subash Sharma, Steve Shaw-Wright, Malcolm Taylor, Phil Trumper and George Jabbour (as substitute for Councillor Karl Arthur).

Officers present: Will Boardman, Jon Holden, Madi Hoskins, Edward Maxwell, and Matt Robinson.

Apologies: Councillor Karl Arthur.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

57 Apologies for Absence & Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillor Karl Arthur, with Councillor George Jabbour substituting.

58 Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 September 2023

Resolved: That the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023, be approved in principle, subject to the following amendments:

- That the word “remote” be deleted from Line 1.
- That Councillor Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff be deleted from the list of members attending in person, and instead listed as having attended virtually.
- That the spelling of Cathryn Clarke’s name be corrected in Minute 52.

Subject to these amendments, the minutes were approved in principle and would be signed at the next meeting of the Committee.

59 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

60 Public Participation

There were no registered public participants.

61 Bi-annual Property Services Performance Update

Considered – a presentation by Jon Holden (Head of Property Services), providing an update on the council’s property portfolio and a summary of the management strategy.

The Chair welcomed Jon Holden to the meeting. Members expressed their view that the document which had been provided was not adequate, since it was not a formal and detailed report which could be properly scrutinised. It was suggested that future reports should:

- Include a summary of recent asset rationalisations which had taken place.
- Include a summary of those planned for the immediate future.
- Show which assets had been considered and rejected for rationalisation.
- Include a project plan showing the timeline for future actions.
- Include a detailed explanation of the strategy for asset rationalisation.
- Be presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

These points were accepted, and the Head of Property Services apologised for the lack of information in the briefing. It was explained that the intention was to provide a summary of the asset rationalisation work done since LGR, and how the work of rationalisation would contribute to wider Council savings. As well as disposing of capital assets, savings are to be achieved using a single asset management system, proposed efficiencies in service development and a staff restructure which would deliver savings going forward.

Members expressed the urgency of this work and requested that the planned programme be delivered with greater urgency given the wider context of financial pressure on the council's budget. The need to retain commercial and private sector expertise among staff was also highlighted.

It was explained that the urgency and need for change was recognised, and that quick wins had been identified to allow for savings to be delivered quickly. These were specifically designed not to impinge on other service delivery areas, so as not to adversely affect front-line services. A future Strategic Asset Management Plan would also ensure that future asset disposal would not affect other service areas.

Resolved:

- That the report be noted.
- That an additional meeting of the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee be held in January 2024, to allow the additional concerns raised by members to be addressed, to which the Executive Member would be invited.

62 Council Plan 2024-28 Development

Considered – a report from Will Boardman (Head of Strategy & Performance), providing an update on the development of the 2024-28 Council Plan.

Will Boardman was welcomed to the meeting and summarised the report. The council was not undertaking to completely overhaul the Council Plan, since there were many themes and issues shared with the previous Plan, but that instead it was being updated and refreshed to reflect changing priorities.

Members asked how property rationalisation had affected the Plan, and whether the changes would impact it going forward. It was explained that, as a strategic document, individual decisions would not affect the Plan, and instead the plan would guide decisions taken in the course of Council business.

Councillor Kevin Foster highlighted the importance of public transport as an issue impacting his division where services were falling short, and Councillor Richard Foster also called for clarity and simplicity in the wording of the plan, to make it more accessible to all. Members also discussed how the Plan would affect Planning policy to allow for greater shared access to green spaces. The Head of Strategy & Performance explained how the Plan would provide overall strategic guidance to decision makers rather than setting out specific policy proposals, but that the specific issues raised by Members were all considered in the Plan. It was highlighted that the draft Plan would formally be circulated to all Members for detailed comments before the end of the year, being scheduled for consideration by the Executive

and Full Council in January and February 2024 respectively.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

63 Progress Update on IT Network and Systems Consolidation

Considered – a presentation by Madi Hoskins (AD Technology and Change), updating Members on progress with infrastructure consolidation and service transformation. This included some early work towards a draft consolidation plan, with a view to presenting a final version for consideration by the Committee at a later date.

Members discussed the work ongoing to consolidate and rationalise systems in the new council, with a view to delivering savings, simplifying processes, and reducing unnecessary duplication. This included early work where simple changes, like moving to a single supplier for the new council, could quickly and easily deliver changes, where infrastructure constraints allowed. Business analysis was ongoing to identify where these savings could be made without impacting on service delivery. In future, there would be a move towards fewer bespoke systems which would allow for services and programmes to be rolled out more quickly and cheaply. A risk-based consolidation of contracts inherited from predecessor councils was ongoing, to identify where savings could be made as these contracts lapse and come up for renewal. Members asked whether this would be delivered internally, and it was explained that where appropriate, external expertise was being used even where this incurred a short-term cost, as it would allow for greater savings and rationalisation in the medium and long term.

Councillor Nick Brown highlighted the importance of parish and town councillors having access to up-to-date, easy-to-use systems to help them communicate to residents and deliver their services in a clear and efficient manner.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Note: The chair adjourned the meeting for a short break at 11:55. The meeting reconvened at 12:04.

64 Annual Update on National Resilience Standards & Current Performance

Considered – a presentation by Matt Robinson (Head of Resilience and Emergencies).

Councillor Tim Grogan raised the issue of Tadcaster Bridge, which had been closed during a recent flooding event, but which residents felt was an unnecessary closure. It was explained that the decision had been taken by North Yorkshire Highways, and that while pre-emptive decisions had to be taken in fast-moving circumstances, but a process of continuous review was employed to identify instances where the disruption caused by a closure or diversion was greater than that which might have been caused by the weather. Out-of-hours, these decisions were taken by North Yorkshire Police where a threat to life was identified, with the council being notified afterwards.

Councillor Nick Brown asked whether civil defence issues were considered as part of the resilience strategy, and it was confirmed that malicious risk (from hostile actors, rather than non-malicious risk from weather or other uncontrolled phenomenon) were considered. Councillor Richard Foster highlighted how responsive community social media groups could be, and it was confirmed that during a crisis staff could be dedicated to monitoring these means to provide local information.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

65 Work Programme 2023/24

Considered – the Committee’s Work Programme.

The Committee noted the current Work Programme, with the following additions which arose during discussion of the other agenda items.

- That a Quarterly Property Services Update be added to the Work Programme, with an additional extraordinary meeting taking place in January 2024.
- That IT Network and Systems Update be added to the Work Programme as a regular item twice a year, with the first update taking place in June 2024.
- That any future Resilience and Emergencies Policy that would affect the provision of crisis and emergency services be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.
- That the Food Bank Working Group meet again in Spring 2024, to review winter performance, and to report back to the Committee in 2024.

66 Date of Next Meeting - 5 March 2024

Members noted the next confirmed meeting of the Committee on 5 March 2024, but that once a date for a January meeting had been agreed it would be communicated to Members.

The meeting concluded at 12.34 pm.