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North Yorkshire Council

Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 1st February, 2024 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor David Staveley in the Chair plus Councillors Phillip Barrett, John Cattanach, Mark Crane, Melanie Davis, Caroline Goodrick, Hannah Gostlow, David Ireton, David Jeffels, George Jabbour (substitute), Subash Sharma, Phil Trumper, Arnold Warneken, Steve Watson and Robert Windass.

Councillor Steve Mason attended virtually.

Officers present: Andrew Clarke, Jos Holmes, Robert Ling, Louise Neale, Alastair Taylor (NYnet), Paul Thompson and Will Baines.

Apologies: Councillor Paul Haslam

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Haslam (substitute Councillor George Jabbour).

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2024

Consideration of the minutes from the 18th January 2024 meeting was deferred to the April meeting date.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor David Jeffels declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 – ‘Bus Services in North Yorkshire’ as a Trustee of Scarborough Dial A Ride.

4 Public Participation

No public questions or statements were received.

5 Rural Connectivity

Considered – Report of Robert Ling, Transformation Director and Alastair Taylor, CEO of NYnet to update on the progress of digital connectivity across North Yorkshire.

The key points highlighted in the report are as summarised below:

- NYnet, the North Yorkshire owned telecoms company has delivered four phases of Superfast North Yorkshire contracts in conjunction with Building Digital UK (BDUK).

- In 2009, superfast broadband coverage across North Yorkshire was at approx. 41%. By 2020, coverage had climbed to 94%, with a wireless contract awarded to Quickline in 2020 to increase coverage further by 2024.
- North Yorkshire Council offers a free WiFi service in 21 market towns across the geography. The service started in 2021 with support from a Government grant to combat the impact of COVID-19. Currently the service across North Yorkshire attracts around 70k users per week and helps to track tourism in some market towns. Discussions are ongoing to look to extend the network.
- A new 'Project Gigabit' has now been launched by BDUK to roll out gigabit-capable broadband to hard to reach premises. Procurement for available lots in North Yorkshire (31 and 8) is ongoing with contract awards expected shortly. It is hoped this will take coverage in North Yorkshire up to approximately 97%.
- Voucher funding to act as help for people experiencing slow broadband speeds in rural areas has been paused in North Yorkshire. This is expected to reopen after the contract awards for any areas not covered, for other providers to offer demand-led projects.
- The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has launched trials and a consultation around Very Hard to Reach premises (VHTR). It is likely that North Yorkshire will have a disproportionate amount of VHTR premises (above the average of 0.4%) due to its geography. The solution for these premises will therefore be of the utmost importance. Alpha trials using Low Earth Orbit Satellite are taking place at Rievaulx Abbey, although superfast broadband has already been made available very close to this area through NYnet.
- On mobile signal coverage, the county is lagging behind, with North Yorkshire 5G signal patchy despite a national rollout cycle being well underway. 4G is running at around 70%, so we have a significant challenge to face. The Shared Rural Network is progressing forwards but slowly, and officers continue to speak to mobile providers to try and improve the situation. There is a challenge around the siting of masts to facilitate this and install important infrastructure for the future in the best way possible.
- Smart places are the next wave of innovation and transformation around how we use sensors and monitors as part of the local infrastructure.
- Public phone boxes are being removed across the country by BT if they meet certain conditions as set out by OFCOM. Public phone boxes can be removed from the community should the area have good mobile coverage from the four major telecoms providers and they have made less than 52 calls in a twelve-month period. This then triggers a planning process to seek their removal. Members were asked to feed back if phone boxes in their divisions are not working and therefore not getting the calls made data that would be expected.
- The BT/Openreach switchover from the analogue phone network to digital phone lines is ongoing, with a target date of the end of 2025. This will see upgrades from the old copper network to a new digital connection, but this new connection will now require power in order for it to operate, unlike with the copper network. Work is ongoing with NYC service areas to understand those vulnerable residents and those with lifelines who may be affected by this. There is a concern that publicity and communication on this at the moment is limited at the moment, which is of a concern.

Following this, comments and questions raised by the committee included:

- Do local communities still have the option to buy back the decommissioned public phone boxes to turn them into other uses such as mobile libraries, for the storage of defibrillators or tourism information? It was confirmed that they do.
- In response to a question on the Project Gigabit rollout, it was explained that properties

not currently covered by superfast broadband will be prioritised under the new Project Gigabit. Work is also ongoing to look at ways to make potential solutions such as Starlink more affordable in the most rural areas.

- A Member shared the concerns raised about poor mobile phone signal across North Yorkshire, even in relatively urban areas. It was asked if more can be done to press the mobile phone operators to do a better job? In response, having a good working relationship with the mobile phone operators is key, but there is a balance to strike. As a county we can make ourselves more open to mobile phone operators, by making it easier and simpler for them to build masts, but we understand that some local residents do not like having these structures sited in particular areas, such as in areas of outstanding natural beauty or in close proximity to residential properties. Becoming a unitary council allows us the chance to develop these working relationships and officers are actively holding discussions to better understand the planning issues involved.
- If companies are not supporting North Yorkshire residents who require extra support to manage the digital switchover, could the regulator step in to oblige Openreach to fund marketing and publicity campaigns to promote the change? It was highlighted with changes such as the digital switchover, you need people who you can trust to support you through this change. The Council has to use the levers we have, such as talking to voluntary and community organisations and Citizen's Advice to work with suppliers and providing a safety net for those who slip through the net.
- The issue of lifeline users who cannot afford broadband was raised. In response, it was accepted we need to do more work around the affordability of broadband provision and look more at it from a more rounded view.
- The importance of better digital skills to give people greater confidence to use technology was highlighted.
- It was asked what the publicity requirements are for applicants when planning to install phone masts close to residential properties? It is just a sign required.
- It was noted that installing fibre internet to premises is a now requirement of planning policy. Openreach will provide FTTP free to sites with 20 or more premises.
- It was felt that there is always more we can do on skills and good working relationship with providers for broadband and mobile phones to link the infrastructure with digital skills.

Resolved – To note the progress update and the comments received.

6 Update on the Development of the New Local Transport Plan

Considered – Report of Louise Neale, Transport Planning Team Leader, to update on progress with developing a new Local Transport Plan.

Some of the key points highlighted in the report and presentation are as summarised below:

- The Local Transport Plan (LTP) is a statutory document required of us by the Local Transport Act 2000. The existing LTP was adopted back in 2016, so since 2022 transport planning officers have been working towards a full redevelopment of the plan.
- Whilst official guidance from the Department for Transport has yet to be published and is unlikely before a General Election, officers have been working on developing the LTP to the best of their knowledge, based on the limited advice coming out of government, and insight from within the transport sector.

- Public engagement took place in summer 2023 under the 'Let's Talk Transport' banner, with an online survey and public events and meetings held to raise awareness and help people to complete surveys, either online, or on paper form. Almost 5,000 people participated in the public engagement, making it the highest level of response of all the 'Let's Talk' activities so far.
- There was a general dissatisfaction with transport in North Yorkshire, such as transport choice and the affordability of it, along with issues around road safety and climate change.
- An improvement to public transport provision came out strongly, along with active travel provision and looking at highway maintenance.
- A further 100 responses were received to a stakeholder questionnaire, with public transport again seen as a priority. Officers have met with stakeholders on an individual basis to have more detailed discussions.
- Alongside this, staff sessions to get their views and two sessions with each Area Constituency Committee have also taken place.
- A Headline Strategic Transport Prospectus is in production along with City of York Council colleagues. It is hoped that this will be ready in time for the election of the new Mayor for York and North Yorkshire in May.
- The data collected is starting to help formulate policies and strategies.

Following this, comments and questions raised by the committee included:

- Ensuring reference to equality issues for public transport is included as part of the final LTP document
- Transport provision in rural areas is addressed within the new LTP and in particular how to support initiatives such as community transport to improve the local offer and provide choice for residents
- When an operator makes a commercial decision with regard to the operation of bus services, will the development of the Local Transport Plan help to give residents choice for how to try and take some control and influence back.
- Pavement size and maintenance to be taken into consideration to encourage walking for shorter journeys.
- Ensuring routes are safe for those riding bikes and trikes, but also making it easier for them to be kept securely when making journeys into town centres or visitor attractions.
- The Local Transport Plan is required to be an ambitious and aspirational document, so it becomes a business case document and that the different places across North Yorkshire get the efficient transport system required.
- An appropriate level of funding is required to support this LTP and to match the aspirational nature of the document.
- It will be key to ensure cross border dialogue is regular and maintained with neighbouring authorities when developing the LTP. In response it was noted that initial meetings have taken place with neighbouring local authorities and combined authorities.
- It was felt important that there is a strong link with the new Local Plan for North Yorkshire under development and that the new LTP becomes an enabling tool for the future.

A previous proposal to wait until receiving this report before considering whether to set up a working group following the election of the new Mayor for York and North Yorkshire to look at how to establish consistent active travel plans across the county and also link to the

Planning work with developing a new Local Plan for North Yorkshire was not taken forward at this meeting. It was to be picked up under the work programme update at the 10 April meeting.

Resolved - That the Committee note the progress report on developing a new Local Transport Plan.

7 Climate Change Delivery Pathway

Considered – Report of Jos Holmes, Climate Change Strategy Manager, to feed back on the development of the draft Climate Change Delivery Pathway.

Some of the key points highlighted in the report are as summarised below:

- Following the approval of the North Yorkshire Council Climate Change Strategy back in July 2023, officers are now in the process of creating the Climate Change Delivery Pathway (CCDP), outlining the key short-term (to March 2025) tasks and indicate the medium-term (to 2030) actions which will need to be undertaken to deliver the Strategy.
- Proposed metrics in the form of outcomes and outputs are included under each section of the Strategy, as well as the potential return on investment. Most of the activities are following a business plan approach and run on an invest to save basis.
- The development of Directorate Action Plans will support the identification of project sponsors for each task to ensure they are embedded within services, and ownership is taken.
- The CCDP is a dynamic document. It will be constantly updated and reviewed to ensure that new opportunities presented by future political, economic, technical, and social changes are embraced.
- Work on the adaptation section is ongoing and progress will be reported at a future stage.
- Following the review by this committee, a community-based workshop will be undertaken to further engage our residents in developing the actions to be undertaken. It will then be reviewed by Management Board and the Executive.

Following this, comments and questions raised by the committee included:

- It is good to see we are working with partners, such as the Yorkshire Marine Partnership to support projects such as the 'Great Yorkshire Kelp Forest'.
- In response to a question regarding plans for home insulation and how these would be funded, it was noted that we have legislative responsibilities as the landlord for a large number of domestic and non-domestic properties and are required to bring them up to particular energy performance standards. For most of operations, an invest to save approach is to be taken with regard to our property and fleet, such as property decarbonisation plans. Projects to combat poor insulation are taking place, such as a LEP study to look at hard to heat properties, e.g. Victorian terrace and also stone built properties in rural areas. The council has successfully applied for Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) funds to incentivise private households to apply to put in various energy efficiency measures. The council is also involved in a consultation exercise around the next round of HUG and the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme, and will be advocating more flexibility with the grants and to feed back the difficulties faced in administering the scheme in a rural area such as North Yorkshire.
- Further to this, work around listed buildings is taking place in conjunction with National Parks, to help support our Building Conservation Officers to give good advice on these matters.

- It was understood that we cannot work in isolation on this, and it will be important to collaborate with other agencies to deliver on projects in the most effective and efficient way to have the most impact in local communities.
- Plans for tree planting in urban areas was raised as a priority and ensuring that any trees removed are replanted. In response, the creation of the new verge management groups was explained and by working with the Parks and Grounds department as a unitary council, this would help to look at how to best we can utilise public open space for tree planting and adaptation work across North Yorkshire. It was noted that the council has recently appointed an officer to specifically look at all public spaces and develop accelerated tree planting in those areas.
- The inclusion of an acronym list in future versions was suggested.
- Future training requirements for home retrofitting projects and link to stock condition surveys.
- The inclusion of hedges within the tree planting section was to be added.
- It was commented that new housing developments sometimes gain planning permission despite not having adequate active travel infrastructure. Is there walking and cycling data to show how children travel to school across the county and how they feel about travelling to school? This suggestion will be fed into the schools wraparound group to consider further, particularly the idea of a survey that takes place on a specified day.
- Is there a way of parish and town councils contacting officers for help to identify potential areas for tree planting, as knowing who owns a piece of land is sometimes difficult. It was advised that this can now be done through the climate change officer team.
- It was asked what investment is the council putting into net zero and climate change measures to lead the way as North Yorkshire, and how much reliance is on grant funding from external partners? It was felt that there are private sector funding opportunities that can be tapped into accelerate progress. In response, the officer noted that grant funding has been the traditional route for local authorities to access funding, but officers are looking at more innovative funding mechanisms for investing in the various activities we want to undertake. For example, two of the Devolution Deal Net Zero projects involve large infrastructure projects, such as feasibility studies regarding decarbonisation at Allerton Waste Recovery Park and developing a green energy park at Seamer Carr. These involve new technologies and require more commercial, private sector investment. There is recognition that there isn't enough grant funding to do everything in the new delivery pathway, so a business plan approach is required to create a more commercial approach.

Resolved - That the draft Climate Change Delivery Pathway be noted and the feedback on the structure and content be incorporated into future versions.

8 Bus Services in North Yorkshire

Considered – Report of the Corporate Director – Environment to provide the committee with an update on bus services in North Yorkshire.

Some of the key points highlighted in the report are as summarised below:

- Bus services continue to be under significant pressure both locally and nationally following the Covid-19 pandemic. Passenger numbers have recovered to around circa 90% of pre covid levels, with this figure much lower for concessionary pass users at around 70%. This has particularly affected rural routes where older passengers

represented a greater proportion of users.

- There has also been a significant increase in operating costs along with national difficulties with recruiting bus drivers, engineering staff and sourcing spare parts. As a result of these added pressures, providers are reviewing their services more than ever before, resulting in commercial service level reductions and higher prices for routes operating under contract to the council.
- North Yorkshire Council has maintained its support for local bus routes over recent years, spending over £1.6m each year on bus services. We are also accessing grant funding from central government which is helping to keep the current bus network running.
- In rural areas there is no significant commercial network with services generally operating no more than two-hourly and with very limited, or no, evening and weekend services. Here bus services are largely financially supported by the Council, along with local community transport services and only very limited cross-boundary commercial routes.
- In areas with limited commercial and subsidised provision the Council also works in partnership with communities to establish community-operated, timetabled bus services or local voluntary car schemes. These are mainly in the more rural districts of Craven, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Ryedale. Community transport is typically small-scale, requires some subsidy and is heavily reliant on continued volunteer involvement to operate.
- Regular reviews are undertaken of the local bus services in receipt of financial support. As part of the formal review process, key stakeholders such as local members and parish councils are invited to contribute regarding service provision in their area.
- North Yorkshire Council expenditure on tendered bus services, community and demand responsive transport and concessionary travel is forecast to be over £9m for 2023/24. The Council is required to reimburse operators for concessionary journeys made by bus pass holders as part of the statutory national scheme and this alone accounts for over £6m of spend. The remainder supports local bus routes, community transport and park and ride services.
- Around a third of bus services have seen timetable reductions since the pandemic or have required additional financial support to maintain services. The Council is also receiving grants from the Department for Transport (DfT) to support previously commercial bus routes that would otherwise already have been withdrawn due to fewer passengers travelling and rising costs.
- While higher operating costs and a reduction in the number of trips being made by older passengers continues to put pressure on our rural bus services, we believe through a combination of council funding and these DfT grants we can keep the current network in place until at least 2025/26.
- Feedback from bus companies to the £2 fare cap is mainly positive, in that the scheme is generating more passenger journeys, although the level of funding provided is not always enough to provide extra capacity. The fare cap has been a significant factor in Yorkshire Coastliner's decision not to withdraw the Route 840 Leeds to Whitby service. However, it has led to some overloading issues, particularly on tourist routes and at busy times of the year.
- Government recently announced that additional funding for buses called "BSIP3" would be allocated to local authorities in the Midlands and the North following the decision not to proceed with the High Speed 2 rail project. NYC has been given an indicative allocation of £3.5m. This funding is to support delivery of our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for interventions that it is felt will deliver the best overall outcomes in growing long term patronage and revenues (thus maintaining service levels), whilst maintaining essential social and economic connectivity for local communities. However, this is currently for one year only (2024-25) and so will need to be focused on schemes

that can be delivered in a relatively short timescale.

- Between April and June 2024, 20 new single deck and 19 new double deck battery electric buses will be introduced in the Harrogate district area, including the four declared air quality management areas in Ripon, Harrogate and Knaresborough, and will result in immediate air quality improvements in these locations and an improved customer experience.

Following this, comments and questions raised by the committee included:

- On the plans to spend the £3.5m additional BSIP3 funding, officers explained that they have been engaging with bus service operators already on potential plans, with a focus on improvements that can be delivered quickly given as the funding is only for one year. It is hoped further funding will follow in years to come, where a more longer term view can be taken.
- As it stands, the current £2 fare cap is only running until the end of the calendar year. However, the fare cap has been extended several times before and it has had the desired effect of increasing passenger numbers. Further funding announcements are expected from the Department for Transport during the calendar year.
- On cross boundary working, with the formation of the MCA and the transport powers it will inherit, this should improve joined up thinking regarding bus services that overlap areas, particularly between York and North Yorkshire areas. Active discussions are taking place on this. Cross boundary discussions with other local authorities continue and NYC officers will seek to influence where they can.
- There has been a fundamental shift in how people choose to live their lives and how they wish to travel following the pandemic. As part of the Local Transport Plan being refreshed, this will start to reflect the current thinking and look at future trends to try and help us have a new plan that is fit for the future.
A question was raised about future franchising of bus services in the future, with the potential that more profitable services could end up subsidising the less profitable services. In response, it was explained that the new Local Transport Plan, as the key strategic policy will come first to determine the services across the region that we want to deliver, and then to look at the best delivery mechanism to do that. It will be a matter for the new Combined Authority to consider regarding future franchising and the various pros and cons.
- A Member stated they were not a fan of the £2 fare cap and felt the government should actually gave the true cost to the council to put back into key routes to offer more frequent services.
- It was asked if the £3.5m BSIP3 funding can include community transport provision, but it was confirmed it cannot and it is ringfenced to be spent on the delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).
- It was noted that the electric bus provision across the county relies on the appetite of the bus service operators, as they have to commit significant expenditure to secure match funding.
- The approach of the council to use the additional BSIP3 funding is to pump prime some of these services, and together with providing fare caps for young people put in services that can become commercially sustainable in the future and we will work hard to promote these.
- It was explained that there is a proposed allocation as part of the new funding to improve the promotion of the information we offer to the public though display boards and the web offer to display timetable information better.
- In response to a query whether there the potential for a publicity campaign to encourage residents to travel by bus in the summer, particularly with the cost of travelling by car and insurance premiums, this was to be considered.

- The prioritisation of buses on roads will form a key part of the new Local Transport Plan and there is ongoing work around park and ride site provision.

Resolved – That the Committee note the information in this report and that comments be passed to the relevant Executive members.

9 Work Programme

Considered -

The following comments were made:

- That a follow up be requested on work previously referenced by the Executive Member for Managing Our Environment on Net Zero Innovation funding to study the tree planting supply chain.
- That a representative from Yorkshire Water be invited to a future meeting.

Resolved - That the comments made on the work programme be noted and updated accordingly.

10 Any other items

There were no further items of business.

The meeting concluded at 2.20 pm.

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