

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 MAY 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, but with a particular focus on helping to shape the development of the new unitary authority.

Outlined below are details of the topics that the committee considered at our last meeting on 11 March 2024:

LGR Transition and Transformation Update

Robert Ling, Director of Transformation, attended to provide his regular update, explaining that the key focus in the short to medium term is to deliver fundamental change for the new authority despite the scarce financial resources available. The service convergence process is well underway, with work going on across many areas to develop new policies that are clear and consistent, as in some cases seven different systems are being brought together into one.

Alongside this, there is a big push to ensure the performance data and information we gather as a council is robust to enable us to make real time, evidence based decisions and to help inform our future approach to customers and the single front door. A new transformation strategy for the council is under development, to set out our ambitions of how we will work as a unitary authority and take our next steps as an organisation to create strong teams, empower staff and becoming One Council fit for the future.

Questions from committee members included:

- The need to communicate effectively with staff, for example through use of the Yammer site.
- Ways of developing the right culture as part of the new authority.
- An indication of timescales for the next steps of the future transformation process.
- The role of elected members in bringing the transformation agenda together.

Mayoral Combined Authority Governance

Barry Khan, Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services and Rachel Antonelli, Deputy Monitoring Officer for the Combined Authority updated the committee on progress with establishing governance processes for the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) for York and North Yorkshire.

It was noted that there were two stages to this, with the need to get to a safe and legal position ready for the appointment of the newly elected Mayor, with more complex governance issues to be considered by a working group of the Combined Authority Audit & Governance Committee in due course.

A question was raised concerning the safeguards built into the new Combined Authority constitution to protect the new organisation. The process for the election of the Chair of the new Business Committee (Advisory) was also asked about.

Harbours Update

I was pleased to welcome Paul Thompson, Assistant Director for Integrated Passenger Transport, Public Rights of Way and Harbours alongside Gary Pearson, Harbour Operations Manager to update the committee on this important service area. This was preceded by fact finding visits by the committee to Scarborough and Whitby harbours last year.

It is clear from the report and presentation that there are significant challenges for our harbours, in particular with the maintenance of the infrastructure to a satisfactory operational standard.

However, the recent financial commitment by the council to spend nearly £800k to develop fully costed, shovel-ready schemes to be ready for any further funding opportunities was welcomed. The potential commercial opportunities to benefit from the growing offshore wind industry along the Yorkshire coast was also encouraging to hear about and should be fully explored.

It was pleasing to note the positive outlook from officers for the future of our harbours, and endorse the development of a harbours strategy to set out the vision for the years ahead.

As part of the debate and questions to the officers, it was recommended to Councillor Bastiman, as the Executive Member for Open to Business, that the committee supports the initial proposals to install a boat lift and associated storage at Scarborough Harbour and if external funding opportunities cannot be secured to progress this project, then subject to a viable business case, the Council should give consideration to funding the required works. I am pleased that this recommendation has been welcomed.

Bereavement Service

The primary purpose of the bereavement service is to provide dignified funerals and cremation or burial of the deceased for the people of North Yorkshire. This service was previously carried out by district and borough councils prior to 1 April 2023 and has moved across to the new council.

The current level of demand in North Yorkshire is approximately 75% of all deaths within the unitary authority.

The work of the Law Commission to review the laws on burial, cremation and funerary methods was highlighted and will be key to shaping the future direction of the service.

Questions raised by the committee concerned the metals recovery and recycling process detailed in the report, in particular the change to now using a British based firm, which will also help contribute to the Council's reduction of emissions through contracted transport activities. The capacity of the service across the county was also queried, as well as potential business models that may be available depending on the outcomes of the Law Commission review.

Members will be aware of the recommendation before us today as part of the amendments to the Constitution report to formally cease the Transition (LGR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If this recommendation is approved, I would like to put on record my thanks to all members of the committee for the collegiate approach they have adopted in our meetings over the last two years, to work together on a cross party basis to probe the effectiveness of the transition process through the Local Government Reorganisation process and into the new authority.

I would also like to place on record my thanks to Robert Ling for his frequent valuable contributions to the committee on the progress with the LGR transition period and into the new authority, and to Will Baines from Democratic Services for his work and support to the committee which has been greatly appreciated.

The move to one unitary authority as part of the Local Government Reorganisation process has gone relatively smoothly on the whole, for which all of us should be rightly pleased and proud of. But it will be important as we move into this next service transformation phase that as elected members, we continue to hold our officers to account to make the most of the once in a lifetime opportunity presented by Local Government Reorganisation, to think and do things differently as a council to provide outstanding services to all residents and businesses in North Yorkshire.

COUNCILLOR MALCOLM TAYLOR

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