

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 MAY 2024

STATEMENT OF CHAIR OF THE TRANSPORT, ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Since the last Full Council meeting, the committee met on Wednesday 10 April to receive reports on a range of topics that fall under our remit.

Corporate Director update

We were joined by Karl Battersby, Corporate Director of Environment for his bi-annual update to us. There was important information on: the service transformation approach for the directorate; progress at the A59 Kex Gill re-alignment and the plans to get the road open again as soon as possible; progress updates on the three Transforming Cities Fund projects in Harrogate, Selby and Skipton; the introduction of continued monitoring of directorate climate change plans and the development of savings proposals for the next 12/18 months.

In response to this, questions were raised by committee members including:

- The impact of the recent unprecedented wet weather and its impact on the progress with major road schemes.
- The disruption to local businesses and the congestion caused by the Kex Gill diversion route.
- The expected completion date for the Kex Gill scheme.
- Whether the work of the climate change team will look at how we can future proof against potential costs coming in the years ahead, as well as developing policies and procedures around rationalising our estate and decarbonisation?
- How potential transformation savings are monitored and checked within the directorate?
- The impact of climate change events on insurance for the authority.
- It was emphasised by a member that they felt new trees are required when others are chopped down.
- The continued use of spray injection patching for pothole repairs and where it works better in some areas than others.
- The plans for protecting coastal infrastructure at Scarborough and Whitby harbours.
- The progress of detailed designs for a solution at Jackson's Lane, the Oliver's Mount approach road, particularly given the economic impact for the local area with the nationally recognised motorbike races.

National Highways

The committee were pleased to be joined by National Highways colleagues to provide latest updates on major projects, in particular on the A64 Hopgrove to Barton le Willows dualling and the situation at Scotch Corner as part of the A66 Transpennine Route scheme.

On the A64 dualling, it was noted that following the completion of a recent value engineering exercise, the cost of the project has reduced by simplifying the proposed project, however the overall value for money ratio remains low due to increases in other areas such as inflation, carbon reduction and biodiversity measures. The project is now with the Department for Transport for a decision on whether to progress along with other projects under the third road investment strategy (RIS3).

On the A66, following the recent approval of the Development Consent Order by the Secretary of State for Transport in March, the judicial review challenge period was still ongoing at the time of the meeting. The regular gridlock at the Scotch Corner roundabout, even without the

expected increase in traffic from the proposed shopping centre development, was emphasised by the local members who attended, so it was disappointing to hear plans for the roundabout upgrades as part of the eastern side of the scheme were only at a very early stage of development.

It was very clear from the discussion that there is a need for much improved engagement from National Highways to work closely with NYC officers and to ensure they tap into the local knowledge of the community representatives directly affected by major roads when developing schemes. I hope this was taken on board by the National Highways officers in attendance.

Preventing Flooding on Highways – Gully clearance and maintenance

There was much interest in the report by Nigel Smith, Head of Highways Operations on the performance of highway gully cleansing over the last 12 months.

The risk-based approach and the use of empirical data was set out, and it was pleasing to note that this is continually evolving and improving, meaning that resource is deployed where it is needed, as opposed to travelling to a site and finding a gully is free of silt / detritus and free-flowing.

As part of the questions and comments from members, it was asked:

- Whether there are trigger points where the planned gully cleaning schedule is superseded by more reactive schedules to treat gullies affected by heavy rainfall or other unforeseen weather events?
- Whether a link exists with the water companies to exchange intelligence and plan potential joint activities on gully cleaning and continued maintenance?
- Whether the approach to dealing with flooding ensured the most vulnerable locations / hot spots were addressed in priority order?
- Concerns around the combined drainage systems and potential pollution issues, plus the highway flooding impact on adjacent properties and climate change.

Air Quality

Dr Kevin Carr, Divisional Officer - Scientific and Vikki Flowers, Head of Environmental Protection, joined the meeting to set out the plans for a more co-ordinated approach to the monitoring of air quality as part of the new unitary council.

An annual air quality status report will be published in June, followed by the submission of the final Air Quality Action Plan for North Yorkshire to DEFRA in September, which will confirm the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) across the county.

One of the benefits of coming together as a unitary council will be working closer across service areas, with an air quality steering group set up with representation across relevant services such as planning, highways, transport planning, public health and climate change, to ensure there is a much more joined up approach to the subject across the authority.

Questions and comments raised by the committee included:

- The proposed approach was welcomed, in particular the development of baseline monitoring data to track changes in air quality levels.
- The future process for revoking the AQMA currently in place and how quickly they could be reimposed if air quality levels deteriorate again. Furthermore, confirmation that monitoring arrangements will be retained despite the revoking of the AQMA.
- The recent UK Clean Air Night campaign to shine a light on stricter conditions imposed on wood burning stoves to reduce the amount of smoke that can be emitted.
- The legally binding target under the Environment Act 2021 to reduce concentrations of PM_{2.5}

Annual Report of the Member Champion for Climate Change

Councillor Paul Haslam joined us to detail the climate change initiatives and activities that he had carried out as the Member Champion since his appointment, in particular the drawing up of a job description that will form a template for the development of the role in the future. He also spoke about the influencing work he has achieved through attending Area Constituency Committees on how the local plan, the local transport plan, the economic strategy, and the environmental / Climate change strategy can work together to help reduce our carbon footprint across buildings, transport and farming. Further to this, he detailed his experience with the UK100 Climate Change Academy and his work to provide an information exchange for all environmental groups to share best practice, seek new knowledge and share resources.

Working Group update

The action points from the working group that considered improvements to the Highways Reinstatements and Road Closures process were endorsed.

These were:

1. Confirm and communicate the precise definition of works to communities and partners, ensuring first time completion and the use of temporary reinstatements only when necessary (especially in conservation areas). Look to limit any attempts to exploit the 48-hr grace period with repeat works.
2. Recommend that the business case for change in resources or working patterns to allow increased inspector efficiency, up to and including additional recruitment, to improve the inspection rate in the face of anticipated continual increases from fibre.
3. Contact bus service operators in North Yorkshire, confirming their preferred procedure for informing them of short notice road closures and asking for information on their onward communication and contingency processes, ensuring that this is being done to mitigate and communicate the effect of closures.
4. Confirm a timescale for the improvement of One Network information.
5. Contact Parish Councils to inform them of the One Network tool for monitoring and communicating road closure information.

Members also agreed to consider the format and processes of the Highways Area sessions that take place with councillors to ensure they are working effectively ahead of the next meeting.

This will take place on Monday 10 July 2024, starting at 10am.

COUNCILLOR DAVID STAVELEY

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