

## **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**13 NOVEMBER 2024**

### **STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE HOUSING AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Housing and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the Council's role and remit as a social landlord, including policy review; service improvement; and governance arrangements to help ensure compliance with provision and regulation of social housing. In addition, those housing services for which the Council is responsible, including housing strategy; homelessness and housing needs; the delivery of affordable housing as well as private sector housing renewal. It also scrutinises cultural issues and the Council's role as a provider of leisure services.

Since the Chair's last statement to Council in July 2024, the Committee has met once on 9 September 2024, to consider the following items of business:

- Libraries Annual Review 2023-24
- Update on development of a Cultural Strategy for North Yorkshire
- Progress update on Strategic Leisure Review
- Housing Policy Framework
- Draft Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy (Landlord Services)
- Housing Improvement Board Update
- Housing - Regulatory Update

Regarding the Libraries Review, the Committee welcomed the Arts Council funding to purchase a replacement Mobile Library, noting the current vehicle was reaching the end of its life. They were pleased to note the new mobile library would visit more communities and offer more services following its launch in 2025. The Committee raised concern about the condition of some library buildings and were noted the intended move towards a more pro-active approach in the future, with the introduction of a planned maintenance programme. They welcomed the introduction of a new IT system and highlighted the need to ensure volunteers received the necessary training alongside library staff.

The Committee welcomed the continuing work to develop a Cultural Strategy for the county acknowledging the symbolic relationship between arts and health, and the benefits of cultural engagement on mental health and health outcomes. Members were pleased to note that accessibility would be an inherent theme throughout the new Strategy to ensure engagement in cultural activities would be delivered in a range of ways to all. As a follow up, the Committee held an additional informal online meeting on 16 October 2024 to consider the finalised draft Cultural Strategy so that its views could be taken into consideration by the Executive as part of the decision-making process.

The update on the Strategic Leisure Review provided a timetable for the transfer of venues to the new branding and detailed the ongoing work to engage with staff and move to one IT system. The Committee considered the associated risks and issues and noted the planned two-phase approach to the development of the Strategy. It was pleased to note the planned public engagement in support of that work would include engagement with non-users, and with those currently participating in activities outside of council owned facilities. Regarding the 16 swimming pools across the county, the Committee agreed it would be beneficial to address staffing issues/training in order to build in some resilience and enable staff to provide cover where needed. The issue of introducing a county wide membership scheme enabling users to use any facility was discussed and the Committee acknowledged it would require some modelling work to understand what if any benefits/disadvantages such a scheme would bring.

Regarding the Policy Framework, the Committee considered a proposed timetable for the development of the necessary policies, procedures and standards required in order to deliver a harmonised service to tenants and noted that in most cases, it was about consolidating the existing documents of the legacy stockholding authorities. The Committee agreed to set up five Task Groups, each focussed on a key standard/policy, with the intention where possible of being involved both at the policy formation stage and at post public consultation/pre-decision stage. Member recognised they would need an understanding of the optimum number of task group meetings each review would require and the possible meeting dates when members would need to be available. Work is now underway to identify which five key standards/policies a task group review could add the most value to, and to consider what the work of each Task Group might include. Outside of that Task Group work, the Committee agreed to consider other draft policies prior to their consideration by the Executive Member for Culture, Arts & Housing so that the views of scrutiny members could inform the decision-making process.

As a result of considering the draft ASB Policy, and its supporting documents i.e., the draft Good Neighbourhood Management Policy and the draft ASB procedure, the Committee suggested:

- More promotional work was required to raise the public's awareness of the ASB Policy and procedure, including where to complain to, and the need to create a diary of events to support a complaint of ASB.
- Improved written communications with the public were required, particularly written feedback on actions taken in response to a complaint.

The Committee received its first update on the work of the Housing Improvement Board. Members noted the Council had self-referred to the Regulator and was awaiting a judgement confirmation of its current position. They agreed that completing the stock condition survey work was paramount and were therefore keen to see that work being progressed. The Committee acknowledged the scale of the work required to comply with the new RSH standards and was pleased to note the work to revise and put in place a new Allocation Policy for the Council had already been completed. The Committee is scheduled to receive regular updates on both the Board's work and on ongoing regulatory work.

Finally, the Committee continues with its training schedule to develop its understanding of all housing related matters.

The Committee next formal meeting is on 25 November 2024.

COUNCILLOR MALCOLM TAYLOR