

North Yorkshire Council

Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held in the Brierley Room at County Hall, Northallerton on Monday, 9th September, 2024 commencing at 10.30 am.

Councillor Andrew Williams in the Chair. plus Councillors Bryn Griffiths, Chris Aldred, Karl Arthur, Nick Brown, Kevin Foster, Tim Grogan, Robert Heseltine, David Ireton, Tony Randerson, Subash Sharma, Malcolm Taylor, Phil Trumper and George Jabbour.

In attendance: Councillor Hannah Gostlow.

Officers present: Gary Fielding, Marie-Ann Jackson, Robert Ling, Barbara Merrygold, Odette Robson, Angela Crossland, Andy Dukes, Adele Wilson Hope and Diane Parsons.

Apologies: Councillors Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff and Richard Foster.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

12 Apologies for Absence & Notification of Substitutes

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted. It was noted that Councillor Jabbour was substituting for Councillor Foster.

13 Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 June 2024

Considered

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2024.

The Chair highlighted that a declaration of interest was noted in the draft minutes for Councillor Peacock, who is not a standing member of the committee, and as such required further clarification.

The Chair also highlighted that it had been intended that an update report on attendance and wellbeing within the Environment Directorate should come to the September committee meeting and not December, and asked that the minutes be amended to reflect this.

It was noted that Robert Ling had agreed to provide a detailed timeline of the Transformation programme and that this would be taken as part of his Item 6 update.

Resolved

(i) That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2024 be agreed by the committee, provisional on the points of clarification and amendment required being made subsequent to the meeting.

(ii) That the minutes will be signed as an updated record by the Chair at the next committee meeting.

14 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were notified.

15 Public Participation

No questions or statements were received by the committee.

16 Community Safety Bi-annual Update

Considered

The report of Odette Robson (Head of Community Safety and CCTV) regarding local Prevent arrangements. Assistant Chief Constable Catherine Clarke and Prevent Sergeant Ben Hallewell co-presented the report.

Members highlighted that while it was helpful to have further context around Prevent arrangements, the data normally provided as part of the community safety update on issues such as domestic abuse incidents was missing and needed to be included going forward. It was agreed that the data would be circulated to the committee after the meeting, to include anti-social behaviour figures. The Asst Chief Constable highlighted within the meeting that domestic abuse incidents are down by 5.7% in the force area from 2023 to 2024.

The committee noted the threat outlined from far right groups and asked about the threat presented by groups not identified within the report such as those with far left, economic or environmental extreme ideologies. It was explained that the threat posed by the far left was currently minimal. The committee also discussed with Sgt Hallewell around the strategies needed to engage an individual's consent to the de-radicalisation process. Members asked about the role that online spaces play in encouraging extremist behaviour. Sgt Hallewell acknowledged that a high degree of Prevent referrals include reference to online behaviour, hence work underway to educate young people and to tactically (nationally) ensure intelligence and focus around the dark web for example. In response to a Member query it was noted that Prevent referrals in North Yorkshire broadly reflect what is being seen nationally.

Members asked about the recent disorder across the country, how this had affected North Yorkshire and whether there had been co-ordination through right-wing groups in the area. The committee were advised that there had been very little such disorder in the county and while there had been a slight increase in hate crime incidents the police have also ensured additional support for communities who may have felt less safe at this time.

Resolved

That the committee:

- (a) notes the report provided; and
- (b) receives an update on crime figures including on domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour, to be circulated after the meeting.

17 Transformation - Verbal Update

Considered –

The verbal update from Robert Ling, Director of Transformation, regarding the Transformation programme.

Robert spoke to the new Transformation Strategy and the Target Operating Model (TOM) which has been developed for the council, which defines how the council should operate in delivering against its vision and plan. There are four components to the model, focussing on Customer, Locality, Service Delivery and Support Services. Robert highlighted three TOM documents which have been prepared recently for different purposes and audiences to provide guidance about and engagement with the TOM.

The committee were also provided with a Service Convergence update. There have been fifty discussions with Heads of Service around service convergence readiness, which has provided a good overview of what each team needs to converge. It was highlighted that the convergence dashboard illustrated that there are no blockages or issues on the 'people' side and any red-rated areas are around issues such as finance systems. Each service has a scorecard to help give confidence that they understand where the gaps are and where support is needed.

The Chair advised that due to the level of detail referenced and the granularity of detail on the slides shown, the committee is unable to readily scrutinise the information so a written update will be required in future.

Members highlighted positive experiences of customer services but also raised specific concerns in relation to transformation and convergence, including:

- A number of planning-related emails not being followed up on;
- Street cleaning in Whitby affected by staff reductions;
- Contact being made with officers who are no longer in post;
- Lack of confidence around enforcement in Selby following a significant reduction in officers;
- Weeding of local areas not undertaken.

Robert agreed to review the enforcement officer issue in Selby and whether this has resulted in a performance change but the Chair wished to note that such issues should be picked up and smoothed over during the course of the next twelve months following service reviews.

Members also highlighted that there are currently too many drop-off points on the council website when using the 'contact us' form and that it is quite a lengthy process. It was noted that this will be reviewed.

Gary Fielding acknowledged the need to reinforce messages to services around team movements and keeping Members informed and that operational issues such as on planning need to be addresses through the operational teams.

Resolved

That the committee:

- (a) notes the verbal update provided;
- (b) receives a copy of the slides used during the meeting; and
- (c) receives written update reports on the Transformation programme for future meetings.

18 Customer Services Update

Considered –

The report of Margaret Wallace, Assistant Director, Customer, Revenue and Benefits updating on customer services, the customer experience and customer strategy.

The committee noted the number of telephone calls from customers handled by the council in the last year (650,566) and felt that this needed to be more widely publicised as it represents more than one call per resident being made. It was noted that this information will be shared across the council.

Members asked about the operating hours of the customer service centre, which fall broadly around a 9-5 pattern and considered whether extending operational hours would assist with handling larger volumes over peak periods such as lunchtimes. Margaret advised that once a trend analysis has been undertaken, it will help identify whether this would be needed as there would clearly be a cost implication. An annual survey of customers will be undertaken to ensure feedback is received on the future model.

It was highlighted by the committee that the report could usefully include additional data such as the time taken to answer phone calls as it's currently difficult to assess whether the council is being efficient. Other points raised included the following:

- Commendation was given for providing a customer point from the C4DI site in central Northallerton;
- Members queried when the legacy council phone numbers will cease to be usable;
- Members queried the top five service demands listed on page 19 as these were not felt to reflect the types of issue and concerns most frequently raised with councillors;
- The committee asked whether targets are set around calls handled;
- Members expressed surprise at the high ratio of customer calls to email traffic; and
- It was noted that AI may assist with efficiency and savings.

Gary Fielding highlighted that it is key that the customer makes contact in the manner which is efficient for them. Margaret acknowledged the need for baselines on calls and that these had been difficult to set centrally due to legacy areas starting off from different points. Targets on calls handled will be included in the new customer strategy. It was highlighted that calls on issues not listed in the 'top five' would tend to go directly to those services. It was agreed that the committee needs a clearer sense of what 'good' looks like in future reports.

The Chair highlighted that now the council has had its first full year, it would be helpful for the committee to review quarterly performance on volumes in order to assess whether there are 'pinch points' across the year. It was highlighted that it would also be helpful to benchmark customer handling against other organisations (HMRC was referenced as an example). This will be considered further at the Mid Cycle Briefing.

Resolved

That the committee:

- (a) notes the report provided; and
- (b) explores with the service how best to bring future reports which identify 'pinch points' across the year and which benchmark performance.

19 Feedback on 'Right to Grow' Notice of Motion

Considered

The report from Angela Crossland (Public Health) which reviews the Right to Grow motion proposed at Full Council in May 2024, with the aim of supporting the committee to consider its recommendation to Full Council in November 2024.

Councillor Gostlow was invited to speak to the Motion which she had put forward to Full Council in May 2024. The committee were provided with two examples of projects in Councillor Gostlow's area where land had ultimately been granted to local groups, resulting in increased biodiversity in addition to connecting residents in a way which increased wellbeing and connectivity.

The Chair highlighted that another councillor had asked for a protocol to be developed around this at the council, prior to the Motion being put forward, but acknowledged that the Motion goes further. The Chair also highlighted for the committee that in view of the significant funding gap being faced by the council, there is a concern among the officer team around staffing resources being potentially diverted to develop an approach on Right to Grow at a time when key services need to be protected such as SEND provision.

Gary Fielding wished to note that in the near term, the particular concern is around property officers needing to produce a register of all such land available for community use. The council is keen to look at regeneration and reducing its footprint where possible so where community groups come forward and have identified land then in principle there would be no objection to assisting them but Gary expressed concerns around a broader mapping exercise being undertaken in view of resources. Gary suggested that any support would need to be relatively light-touch at this stage until the council has been given more time to develop a suitable approach. As such, the committee is being asked to recommend to Full Council that the Motion is not upheld as written due to the implications for council priorities and resources but that additional time is given to officers to develop a responsive approach within the context of current capacity and cross-cutting strategic priorities.

Members discussed the positive benefits of supporting such projects and identified that are a range of ways in which communities could work with land owners to identify what land might be available as well as council land, for example working with parish or town councils. The committee considered whether the community anchors could therefore support this. It was considered that the financial benefit to the council in pursuing this type of work was very small and that it should be seen as having social value but that the support provided needed to be proportionate at the current time. It was also highlighted that it was also important to understand whether a piece of land is safe to grow food on.

A Member raised that a piece of council-owned land had been identified by a local community three years ago but that there had been little engagement from officers in that time, which had been a source of frustration.

Angela Crossland outlined that approaches to working with communities in this way are under development and are part of a wider food systems agenda for the council but highlighted that significant processes need to be done to ensure this is effected properly and to ensure that approaches are consistent. Angela highlighted that there may be more capacity to look at this further next year.

The committee discussed that where new housing estates are being developed, garden spaces are often not large enough for households to grow their own food and there is also no space provided for allotments. It was considered that as part of the developing Local Plan, the council could consider provision of allotment land as part of new housing developments. A further recommendation was therefore agreed to be added to the existing officers recommendations going to Full Council on this basis, with the full recommendations as follows:

- The Committee recommends to Full Council that the Motion as written is not upheld due to the implications of the approach on council priorities and resources.
- The Committee recommends that Full Council agree to give additional time to

officers to develop a responsive approach to community grow within the context of current capacity and cross-cutting strategic priorities.

- The Committee recommends that consideration for the provision of allotment land as part of new housing developments should be a policy provision within the new Local Plan.

A majority vote was passed via a show of hands.

Resolved

That the committee:

- (a) notes the feedback report provided on the 'Right to Grow' Notice of Motion;
- (b) agrees to recommend to Full Council the following:

- (i) The Committee recommends to Full Council that the Motion as written is not upheld due to the implications of the approach on council priorities and resources.

- (ii) The Committee recommends that Full Council agree to give additional time to officers to develop a responsive approach to community grow within the context of current capacity and cross-cutting strategic priorities.

- (iii) The Committee recommends that consideration for the provision of allotment land as part of new housing developments should be a policy provision within the new Local Plan.

20 Youth Justice - Annual Performance Update

Considered

The annual performance update from the Youth Justice Service, presented by Barbara Merrygold (Head of Early Help) and Andy Dukes (Youth Justice Team Manager).

The committee reflected on the fact that there appears to be an unusually high representation of girls in both the First Time Entrants and offending cohorts and queried what the causal factors may be. The committee were advised that the main concentration has occurred in Scarborough and Harrogate, with a variety of reasons at play including use of social media. Members felt it important that the service gets a full understanding of what's driving this issue in order to be able to tackle it effectively and were advised that work is underway with York University to look at this further.

The committee considered whether offending by girls is also linked to school attendance and whether the service has identified schools where they may be a pattern of non-attendance. Barbara agreed that this may be a helpful factor to review. Members heard that the new Deputy Mayor is keen to be part of looking at solutions to reoffending and also heard about the range of programmes across the service which support families whose children have come into the youth justice system. The St Giles project is the only project linked to serious violence which works specifically with girls.

Resolved

That the committee notes the performance update provided on youth justice.

Councillor Bryn Griffiths left the meeting at 12:30pm.

21 Localities Bi-annual Update

Considered

The Localities Bi-Annual Update presented by Marie-Ann Jackson (Head of Localities) and Adele Wilson-Hope (Communities Area Manager, East).

Members asked if the policy for the locality budget could be reviewed, particularly as the £300 minimum isn't always helpful where community groups would benefit from a lower value award. Marie-Ann explained that there is no current review of the policy or awards level but that she will look into this. It was also agreed that Members can be provided with information on grants awarded in their area (by other councillors) up to £1000.

The committee enquired about progress with the Community Anchors. In response, Marie-Ann outlined examples of how having faith in the anchors as investment partners has enabled them to go on and do new projects, such as in the case of the Chain Lane (Knaresborough) fluvial flooding emergency response. The anchors are all at different stages but there are now 25 in total. It was noted that the timeline for development of the Harrogate and Scarborough urban anchor models will be finalised in the next couple of weeks.

Resolved

That the committee notes the bi-annual Localities update.

22 Work Programme

Considered

The report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of 2024/35 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

The Chair wished to note that there will need to be discussions at the next Mid Cycle Briefing regarding scope and expectations for both the Transformation update and reporting further on Customer Services.

Resolved

That the work programme be agreed with the inclusion of the additional items identified for the Mid Cycle Briefing.

23 Any Other Items

No urgent business was identified.

24 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 2nd December – 10:30am – County Hall, Northallerton.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

DP.