

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17 December 2024 commencing at 11.00 am.

Councillor Carl Les in the Chair. Councillors Mark Crane, Gareth Dadd, Keane Duncan, Michael Harrison, Simon Myers, Heather Phillips, Janet Sanderson, Greg White and Annabel Wilkinson.

In attendance: Councillors Barbara Brodigan, Kevin Foster, Tim Grogan Paul Haslam (remote), George Jabbour, Bob Packham (remote) and Malcolm Taylor.

Officers present: Richard Flinton, Karl Battersby, Stuart Carlton, Gary Fielding, Richard Webb, Barry Khan, Daniel Harry, Elizabeth Jackson, Kathryn Daly, Gareth Bentley, Simon Fisher, Paula Lorimer, Nick Edwards and Paul Foster.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

574 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

575 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 November 2024

Resolved

That the public Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed by the Chair as a correct record.

576 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Harrison declared an interest in Minute 581 on the basis that he was a partner member of the Integrated Care Board. This was a Council appointment and was being made in the interests of transparency.

Councillors Carl Les and Gareth Dadd declared interests in Minute 582 as they were Members of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority.

577 Exclusion of the Public

It was noted that the report relating to Minute 583 – Harrogate Convention Centre – Outcome of Soft Market Testing, contained an exempt appendix A. As the content of the appendix was not discussed there was no requirement to exclude the public from the meeting.

578 Public Participation

There were four public statements submitted in relation to Minute 579 – Adoption of an Inclusive Service Plan focussed on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing and

Minute 580 – Adoption of a Revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, as follows:

1. Statement from Richard Fieldman, Harrogate

Dear Councillors

I am here today to bring you the feelings of the taxi trade, or more precisely, the nearly one hundred drivers that I represent, on your agenda item, that is, suitable vehicles to be licenced as hackney carriages.

One bad policy decision that has already been made, has seen a depletion in your WAV fleet, a decision that I warned both councillors Les, and Bastiman what the result would be if it was adopted, and was told “no that won’t happen, and if it does, you can come back round this table and say, I told you so” well here I am.

Now before you vote in favour of the proposal before you today, please don’t make the same mistake again! The vehicles that you are being asked to approve will see the same result in your taxi fleet, a depletion of drivers who are not willing to invest in a Wav vehicle, Electric vehicle, or a hybrid, and many have already expressed that if this policy is adopted, they will simply leave the trade, and seek employment elsewhere, due to the constant restrictions you are putting in place.

We feel we are being made the scapegoat for your previous bad decision, and being beaten with a big stick into being forced into purchasing a WAV vehicle, as a lesser of evils, this will not happen, and the result will be, an under provision of your normal taxi fleet.

Today I ask that you take York Councils lead, that despite their documented controversial new taxi policy, they have listened to their drivers, and have included Euro 6 emission vehicles as suitable for licensing, after all, if the government deem them fit to enter clean air zones, then why should they not be suitable to be licensed as taxis?

The trade have faced, and are facing, great expense and difficulty maintaining a profitable and viable business in these present times. We are being swamped and overtaken by a massive influx of Uber cars in North Yorkshire, and they have a distinct advantage over us regarding licensing conditions, and we must be allowed to be able to have an equal choice of vehicle as them, and York, to be able to keep our quota of taxis in North Yorkshire. And so I request that today, a counter proposal is put forward, that in addition to the proposed suitable vehicles to be licensed as hackney carriages, Euro 6 emission vehicles are also included.

I thank you for your time, and listening to my statement.

2. Statement from Jackie Snape, Chief Executive of Disability Action Yorkshire

This morning, imagine that your car wouldn’t start before heading to this meeting. How would you have managed to get here? Most likely, you’d have called a taxi, confident that one would be available when you needed it, ensuring you’d arrive on time or perhaps only slightly late.

Now, imagine that when you called for a taxi, you were told none were available for you—despite plenty being available for others. Every taxi company gave you the same response. You’d likely feel frustrated, upset, and stranded.

Now take it further—imagine the taxi was essential for a medical appointment, a job interview, or visiting a critically ill relative in hospital. For wheelchair users who rely on

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs), this isn't an isolated incident—it's an ongoing reality. It happens not only when trying to book a taxi on short notice but also when booking well in advance.

The impact is profound. Difficulty accessing WAV taxis leads to missed medical and dental appointments, delayed diagnoses, unmanaged health conditions, and increased risks of acute health crises. This ripple effect places additional strain on already overstretched acute health and social care services.

A recent example highlights this stark reality. A disabled North Yorkshire resident, who had been asked by her GP to attend for an urgent appointment, was unable to secure a WAV taxi. In her distress, she dialled 999. The ambulance that responded was the only emergency unit available at the time and had to travel significant distances under blue lights to reach her, only to find that it wasn't an emergency.

The challenges extend beyond healthcare. Disabled people eager to work often face barriers getting to their workplaces, while visitors to North Yorkshire who require WAV taxis leave frustrated by unmet needs. This affects both the local and wider economy, undermining inclusion and accessibility.

I urge North Yorkshire to rethink its approach to WAV taxi accessibility. Upholding the fundamental rights of disabled people to move freely within their communities is crucial, and as the largest county in the country, we should be leading the way, not falling behind. A well-balanced strategy would benefit both disabled residents and the taxi trade, creating a community where accessible transportation is a shared responsibility and priority rather than an afterthought.

3. Statement from Ian Lawson, Chair of the North Yorkshire Disability Forum's Accessible Transport Group

Today, I am here to appeal to your sense of social justice—a value I believe we all share. For years, the chronic shortage of wheelchair-accessible taxis has been a pressing issue across North Yorkshire. Despite being a known problem for decades, the seven Borough and District Councils failed to address it effectively. In recent years some of those councils incorporated policies requiring all new taxis to be wheelchair accessible. However, these well-intentioned efforts appear to have been abandoned with the introduction of the current Licensing Policy last April.

Since then, significant changes, including deregulation, have resulted in 120 additional taxis being licensed. Shockingly, not one of them is wheelchair-accessible. Another ill-advised change was the creation of a single licensing zone under the unevidenced assumption that wheelchair taxis would spontaneously appear on the ranks from other areas. They did not.

The consequences of this failure are dire. From personal experience and countless conversations with other wheelchair users, I know the devastating impact of this accessibility barrier. Medical and dental appointments are missed as are work commitments, and lives are stifled by social isolation—all because, as Jackie has explained, we cannot access a basic mode of transport.

Recognising the council's legal obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), I personally invested £9,000 last year to obtain then submit legal arguments showing how the proposed Licensing Policy would fail wheelchair users. Regrettably, those warnings went unheeded. Today, we face an even bleaker reality as there are now nine fewer wheelchair-accessible taxis than at the start of the current policy. This autumn, I have spent an additional £8,000 on my legal submissions, which once again argue that the council's current proposals will fail to meet your PSED obligations because, I believe, they will not result in the required increase in wheelchair taxis.

The council's own Inclusive Service Plan (ISP) acknowledges the need for 200 more wheelchair-accessible taxis. Yet, the plan provides no evidence that the proposed changes will move North Yorkshire towards this goal, even by the end of the decade.

Last year, in compliance with Dept of Transport's Best Practice Licensing Guidance, the council offered financial incentives to encourage the purchase of wheelchair taxis. Instead, every one of the 120 new drivers opted for standard saloon cars, as did all existing drivers replacing their vehicles. The result is fewer wheelchair-accessible taxis now than before. The council's proposals now offer drivers a choice of a wheelchair taxi, an electric saloon taxi, a hybrid saloon taxi and a diesel or petrol Private Hire Vehicle. Where is the evidence that wheelchair taxis will be chosen?

Why are identical restrictions not imposed on equally polluting PHVs and why does the Inclusive Service Plan not explain the reasons why? By removing the 10-year age limit for taxis, many drivers—including the 120 new ones—are likely to keep their current vehicles well into the next decade. Where does this leave wheelchair users? Trapped at home, cut off from essential health related services, work commitments and a social life in their community.

The council has already complied with current licensing Best Practice Licensing Guidance by avoiding mandates and by offering incentives. Incentives were offered last year in the new Policy but the taxi trade ignored them so now I urge you to fulfil your legal obligations to wheelchair users (as in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) by mandating in some way, the introduction of more wheelchair-accessible taxis. Anything less will perpetuate the isolation and inequality faced by wheelchair users across North Yorkshire.

4. Statement from Graham Watson on behalf of Area G drivers (read out by Richard Fieldman)

Due to a busy Christmas schedule, I need this to be read out on behalf of Area G drivers with regard to EV and Hybrid vehicles, as I cannot afford to be present myself.

As you can see from my email below, there is a picture of my 4 year old taxi van, licensed by yourselves in area G, a fully fledged WAV. In December 2020, I paid £33019 for this vehicle, I have just re-insured it with a current forecourt value of £13009. In the 4 years I have owned it, I have clocked up 260000 (two hundred and sixty thousand miles) . I am on my 2nd engine and would hope to get a further 200000 miles out of her.

When the original engine gave up the ghost, I spoke to Cab Direct, The Taxi Shop and the Taxi Centre with regard to replacing the full vehicle rather than going down the repair route.

The cheapest like for like vehicle I could get (Brand new, because it's pointless me buying a used unit) was £59995 OTR. Almost double what I paid 4 years ago with a standard diesel Euro 6 engine and Auto gearbox.

The PHEV hybrid is a 2.5 litre petrol engine and does just 35 miles on a full hybrid charge - useless for the miles that I do. The fully electric Tourneo is currently £79000 and has a ultimate range of 350 miles in perfect summer conditions without A/C.

I fully accept that there are 2nd hand versions available but why would anyone buy something like mine even at 4 years old with my mileage on it, even the 3 taxi companies said to me 'we wouldn't offer you a trade in sir' every single dealer.

So what happens from here, from my point of view at 56 years old currently, I have to either keep mine on the road - which is the best all round option OR I REMORTGAGE my house to buy a new one (never going to happen - I've only just paid my mortgage off)

I sell up, go back to full time employment and leave yet another gap in the area G taxi market.

A 4th option would be to swap from HCV to PHV and spend 50k on non WAV, this again leaves another gap on the taxi market.

In the 4 years I have had my WAV, I have only carried 6 wheelchairs, I advertise that I am wheelchair friendly, I advertise on local radio, I advertise in local magazines and amateur dramatic programmes. Yet in 1412 days (give or take) I have done 6 wheelchair jobs. My corporate companies, Drax Power, Croda International, Sedamyl, Olivero, Bowker and Guardian WILL NOT ALLOW THEIR STAFF AND VISITORS TO TRAVEL IN A WAV, this is in the contracts that I have with them. Even Network Rail are now asking for non WAV's for their executive teams.

So that's it from me, I truly believe that by forcing HCV drivers to purchase WAV's that you will kill the trade and open up all our towns to UBER, which is the biggest APP based PH company in the world, and I am pretty sure that NYC won't be able to enforce UBER Technologies Incorporated to purchase WAV's to supply what little demand there is.

Response of the Executive Member for Managing our Environment, Councillor Greg White

The Council understands the impact that policy changes potentially have on the hackney carriage and private hire trade. It also understands the impact that a lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles has on the lives of wheelchair users and remains committed to addressing this.

There were 67 wheelchair accessible hackney carriages and 29 wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles (96 in total) on 31 March 2023. At present, there are now 66 wheelchair accessible hackney carriages and 43 wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles (109 in total). There has not been a depletion in the WAV fleet but, as has been the case throughout North Yorkshire historically, there remains a shortage of WAVs. The primary objective of the proposed review is to address that shortage by limiting the scope of suitable vehicles.

The Council has taken a progressive approach to addressing the shortage in WAVs. At the last policy review, a number of changes were made to encourage the provision WAVs, including:

- Removal of the age limit for WAVs;
- Removal of licence fees for WAVs.

It is clear that encouragement has not increased the number of WAVs sufficiently to meet the demand from wheelchair users, hence the need to review policy again in this respect through a detailed consultation process. The Executive will discuss the detail of the consultation on 17 December. No final decisions will be made at Executive and the Council will keep an open mind until the results of the consultation have been considered.

The Council has identified through research that the number of WAV vehicles available is not meeting current demand from wheelchair users.

Mr Lawson asks why there are no similar mandates for the private hire fleet in the current proposals. Many of the additional measures proposed in the Inclusive Service Plan apply to hackney carriage vehicles and private hire vehicles equally, and the draft policy includes new obligations on private hire operators to enquire about accessibility needs at

the time of booking. Private hire vehicles often operate in very specific ways, different to hackney carriage vehicles. They often serve very specific requirements e.g. home to school contracts or executive hire to business, so require a specific type of vehicle. Private hire vehicles must also be pre-booked, allowing the customer to discuss the style of vehicle required in advance. This is not possible when taking a hackney carriage vehicle from the rank. The current proposals move private hire vehicles to Euro 6 standard thereby also improving emission standards.

The Council is under a duty to ensure that wheelchair users have a sufficient supply of WAVs to meet their needs. In order to achieve balance and fairness for the trade and customers, the Council is seeking to find a solution that avoids requiring that all vehicles be WAVs at this stage.

It is important that people let us have their views and alternative proposals through the consultation period in order that the Council can take full account of them.

579 Adoption of an Inclusive Service Plan focussed on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director Environment seeking approval to consult on the proposed adoption of a new Inclusive Service Plan (ISP) in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licensing, which was attached at Appendix A. The ISP had been produced in line with a commitment made by the Executive on 21 February 2023 and in accordance with the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance recommending local authorities create and maintain an ISP describing the demand for accessible services and the strategy to make taxi and private hire services more inclusive.

The Executive Member for Managing our Environment, Councillor Greg White, introduced the report, advising that the new Inclusive Service Plan would subsequently lead to a requirement to change the policy on hackney carriage and private hire licensing, which would be considered at the following agenda item.

Gareth Bentley, the Head of Licensing, gave an overview of the two reports and gave an overview of key points as follows:

- The first report presented a new policy document in relation to how the Council would fulfil its duties to improve services for people with disabilities, with a particular focus on wheelchair accessible vehicles. The plan covered a range of things the Council proposed to do to improve access to licensed vehicles for people with disabilities
- The second report provided the first review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Licensing Policy which had been adopted on 1 April 2023. The review reflected revised guidance from the Department for Transport and sought to address needs in relation to wheelchair users.
- The General Licensing and Registration Committee had been consulted on the proposed new ISP, and had submitted an alternative ISP for consideration, which was included at Appendix D. The alternative also included a hybrid electric vehicle option.
- A 12 week consultation would commence early in 2025, with a report back to Executive expected in May 2025.

Members of the Executive considered the difficulties of supporting the needs of both taxi drivers and those needing to use wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Councillor Tim Grogan, Chair of the General Licensing and Registration Committee,

addressed the Executive and reported that the Committee wanted to see an increase in WAVs, but also wanted to support the taxi trade.

Members emphasised the importance of the consultation as an opportunity to get the views of all those with an interest in the matter. All options would be consulted on.

Resolved (unanimously) – that

- 1) the draft Inclusive Service Plan attached at Appendix A and the alternative version recommended by the General Licensing and Registration Committee at Appendix D, be noted
- 2) the content of the draft Inclusive Service Plan attached at Appendix D be approved as a draft for consultation
- 3) the commencement of a public consultation to seek views on the draft Inclusive Service Plan and any viable alternatives be approved

Reasons for recommendations

The Council has committed to developing and maintaining an Inclusive Service Plan and must have regard to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance.

Alternative options considered

The Council must have regard to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance and therefore there is an expectation that an ISP is adopted. The recommendations in the ISP, however, are at the Council's discretion and therefore alternative options may be considered.

Alternative options have already been explored to encourage more wheelchair accessible vehicles to be licensed in North Yorkshire by waiving the licence fee and relaxing the age limits on WAVs. However, the number of hackney carriage WAVs in North Yorkshire remains very low and there is no reasonable expectation that this will change without further intervention.

Alternative options have subsequently been considered to address the shortage of wheelchair accessible vehicles (including imposing a mandatory wheelchair accessible requirement on all licensed vehicles). The current proposal, however, is considered a more reasonable and proportionate measure to satisfy the Council's public sector equality duty and its air quality obligations without imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on businesses.

580 Adoption of a revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director Environment seeking approval to consult on a revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy. The existing policy had been revised to take account of the draft Inclusive Service Plan considered at Minute 579.

The item was considered in conjunction with Minute 579, with only the recommendations and vote being taken separately.

Resolved (unanimously) - that

- 1) the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy attached at Appendix A and the alternative version recommended by the General Licensing and Registration Committee at Appendix D be noted

- 2) the content of the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy attached at Appendix D be approved as a draft for consultation
- 3) the commencement of a public consultation to seek views on the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and any viable alternatives be approved

(Councillor Gareth Dadd was not in the meeting room for the vote on this item)

Reasons for recommendations

The Council has committed to reviewing the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy with a view to making hackney carriage and private hire services more inclusive and the Council must have regard to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance.

Alternative options considered

The Council may consider retaining the existing policy. However, the current shortage of wheelchair accessible vehicles would be highly unlikely to change and any outstanding items from the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance would not be implemented.

Alternative options have already been explored to encourage more wheelchair accessible vehicles to be licensed in North Yorkshire by waiving the licence fee and relaxing the age limits on WAVs. However, the number of hackney carriage WAVs in North Yorkshire remains very low and there is no reasonable expectation that this will change without further intervention.

Alternative options have subsequently been considered to address the shortage of wheelchair accessible vehicles (including imposing a mandatory wheelchair accessible requirement on all licensed vehicles). The current proposal, however, is considered a more reasonable and proportionate measure to satisfy the Council's public sector equality duty and its air quality obligations without imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on businesses.

581 Joint Place Committee with Humber and North Yorkshire NHS Integrated Care Board: 'Ambitious for Health' - a new approach to transforming health and care in North Yorkshire through an NHS/North Yorkshire Council Joint Committee and Section 75 agreement

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director Health and Adult Services which outlined proposals for a bespoke and far-reaching delegation arrangement between North Yorkshire Council (NYC) and Humber and North Yorkshire (HNY) Integrated Care Board (ICB). The proposal included establishing a North Yorkshire Health Collaborative and supporting governance to enable the delivery of a single programme as described in the attached paper, *'Ambitious for Health' – a new approach to transforming health and care in North Yorkshire*.

The Executive Member for Health and Adult Services introduced the report and stated that the proposed agreement was set in the context of health and social care being more integrated, which would require a greater focus on the community. Funding would be devolved to a new Joint Committee, and the Council would gain increased influence over prevention and community spend over the next two years.

Richard Webb, Corporate Director Health and Adult Services, gave an overview of the

report and highlighted key points as follows:

- This would be the first time there would be a single work programme across health and social care, and consisted of three elements:
 - (1) A Core work programme in relation to prevention, health inequalities and barriers to work
 - (2) A strong assessment of the current state of health and social care across the Council and the NHS
 - (3) Opportunities in relation to healthy places and the role of the NHS in communities
- The Joint Committee would be chaired by the NYC Chief Executive and would have implications for the Health and Well-being Board
- This would involve an alignment of budgets of £850m, which is the totality of community spend in North Yorkshire. The pooled budgets that are proposed would be the nationally-mandated Better Care Fund, the existing s75 delegations for 0-19 and sexual health, £500k of NHS health inequalities funding and, potentially, the integrated quality team, but details to be considered when a final report comes back to Executive

The Chief Executive welcomed this report which presented a new approach to how community health services and adult social care could work together.

In response to a question from Councillor Janet Sanderson on why children's services were not included, Richard Webb advised that the report set out building blocks over a multi-year programme and opportunities in relation to children and young people would be explored as part of this and are mentioned in the proposal.

Resolved (unanimously) - that

- 1) the commitment from the North Yorkshire Place Board on 27th November to transform the community and neighbourhood health and social care model in North Yorkshire be noted
- 2) the proposal in principle to establish a formal partnership in the form of a joint committee between HNY ICB (and the 2 other ICBs, subject to agreement) and North Yorkshire Council be approved
- 3) the intention to have a new Section 75 agreement in place be noted, which in some cases will replace and subsume current Section 75 agreements, subject to any public consultation as may be required legally
- 4) it be noted that final proposals will proceed through governance arrangements for formal decision making including ICB board and Executive approval.

582 Mayoral Investment Fund – Acceptance of funding to deliver priority projects

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director Community Development requesting approval to accept funding from the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (YNYCA) to deliver the priority projects as set out in the report. Delegated authority was also sought for the Corporate Director Community Development, in consultation with the Corporate Director Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services, to agree and enter into the final terms of the grant agreement with the YNYCA,

The Executive Member for Open to Business, Councillor Mark Crane, introduced the report and welcomed the support for the eight projects which had been submitted to the

YNYCA for assessment and subsequently approved. The projects were: Selby Station Gateway, works to accompany the Harrogate Station Gateway TCF scheme, Scarborough Boat Lift, Electric vehicle charging, the Wyvern Link Road, Abbey Quarter, Selby, Accelerating Housing Delivery and Ripon Connectivity and further details were included at pages 269 to 271 of the report.

Resolved (unanimously) - that

- 1) the funding awarded by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority towards the delivery of priority projects and development of business cases for pipeline projects by North Yorkshire Council be accepted
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director of Community Development in consultation with the Corporate Director of Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive for Legal and Democratic to agree and enter into the final terms of the grant agreement with the YNYCA
- 3) the funding allocations and responsibility for seeking any necessary further internal project approvals in relation to project delivery are allocated to the lead Project Managers and relevant Directorate/Service as set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report

Reasons for recommendations

The recommendations will secure additional external funding to bring forward significant regeneration proposals in North Yorkshire and accelerate the development of a pipeline of future schemes to help meet local and regional objectives.

583 Harrogate Convention Centre – Outcome of Soft Market Testing

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director Resources informing Executive of the results of the soft market testing (SMT) carried out by 31Ten for the Harrogate Convention Centre (HCC), and providing recommendations for the next steps including the development of Studio 2 and the consideration of adopting a more commercial operating model.

The Executive Member for Open to Business, Councillor Mark Crane, welcomed Paula Lorimer, the Director HCC, to the meeting and referred to the importance of the HCC to the economy of Harrogate.

Paula Lorimer then gave an overview of the soft market testing undertaken and made the following key points:

- Executive had agreed not to continue with the £57m redevelopment due to escalating costs, the prospects of large parts of the venue being closed for three years and failure to get Levelling Up funding. The SMT had been undertaken to determine the best way forward.
- The objectives set by the Council for the SMT were to look at ways of retaining the £45m benefit to the economy of Harrogate, protecting the public purse, reducing carbon emissions and exploring alternative operating models
- Findings of the report indicated there would be little market interest in running such a venue and local authority venues normally operated at a loss. Market feedback on the venue was positive, though Studio 2 could facilitate conferences better. Ongoing maintenance was critical and further income could be leveraged from developing partnerships with local organisations.

- Five options were identified, as set out at paragraph 3.9 of the report, with Option 3 being the recommended way forward: commercial investment of £7m in Studio 2 to create breakout spaces for larger conferences and an escalator for easier access, which was projected to generate an additional £1.5m in annual income

Gary Fielding, Corporate Director Resources, thanked Paul Lorimer, Nick Edwards and Paul Foster for their work on this and confirmed that the venue required investment. There was a need for match and other funding to be sought and it was hoped that the Council's willingness to invest would mean others would be confident to come forward with funding.

Resolved (unanimously) – that

- 1) Executive agree in principle to support the Soft Market Testing recommended Option 3 - the creation of Studio 2 and explore the shift to a more commercial operational approach.
- 2) Officers scope and tender the most cost-effective construction works to create Studio 2, engaging with NYC Align Property Partners and utilising preparatory work already completed, with cost estimates indicating a budget of £7 million.
- 3) a new Business Plan for HCC be developed including investment in Studio 2, commercial operating models and the future vision for HCC supported by financial, operational, and sustainability plans.
- 4) authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources, in consultation with the Corporate Director Community Development, Executive Member for Finance and Resources, Executive Member for Open to Business, the authority to approve the business case to implement the improvements to Studio 2 to the value of £7m and to undertake any associated decisions.
- 5) the governance requirements for HCC be reviewed and defined
- 6) future funding opportunities be actively pursued and secured, including North Yorkshire Mayoral Investment, government grants, and other sustainability initiatives. As part of the business case, consider rebranding HCC to broaden its market appeal and align with the strategic goals for the wider Yorkshire region.
- 7) Scope and implement immediate sustainability improvements and develop a long-term strategy, including identifying external funding opportunities.
- 8) essential property maintenance repairs be prioritised to ensure the safe management and operation of HCC and explore delivering essential works via a small in-house team utilising existing North Yorkshire procurement frameworks.
- 9) authority be delegated to Officers to continue engaging with potential external operators or buyers of HCC, with further reports as required to be brought back to Members.
- 10) Authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources, in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive for Legal and Democratic Services, to review and approve specific officer delegations, for the HCC Director, to support commercial operating.

Reasons for Recommendations

Studio 2

Investing in Studio 2 will attract larger conferences that require more breakout spaces. Estimated at £7m this investment is expected to be repaid through increased income, presenting a clear invest to save opportunity.

This investment will help rebuild confidence in the venue, paving the way for future investments and funding. Developing Studio 2 will enhance HCC's economic impact by creating jobs and improving its viability as a financially sustainable venue.

Commercial Operating Model

The proposal includes exploring a commercially driven operating model for HCC as part of a broader business case. This approach would align operations with other successful council-owned convention centres, offering greater flexibility and oversight. It is anticipated that this change will enhance HCC's ability to become financial sustainable.

Strategic Partnerships

It is recommended to pursue strategic partnerships with local governments, universities, mayoral combined authority and other entities to expand HCC's services and create an innovative business plan. Such partnerships could unlock new growth opportunities and funding, making HCC more appealing to a wider audience. These collaborations would also align HCC's activities with regional economic development strategies, strengthening its long-term sustainability and potential for rebranding.

Incremental Capital Improvements Over Large-Scale Redevelopment

Instead of pursuing a large-scale redevelopment, which is unaffordable due to limited funding and potential operational disruptions, the proposal is to focus on phased, incremental capital improvements targeting external funding opportunities. This approach would minimise disruptions, keep the facility operational, and ensure its gradual upgrade while maintaining safety standards.

Remaining Open to Market Opportunities for Freehold Sale or Lease

The Council is advised to remain open to market opportunities, including potential offers for the freehold sale or lease of HCC. While initial market testing showed limited interest in a full sale, ongoing engagement with potential buyers such as a recent approach from a global conference operator may uncover new opportunities. Staying receptive to these possibilities will enable the Council to act swiftly if a viable offer aligns with its long-term goals.

Prioritising Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Measures

Prioritising efforts to reduce HCC's carbon footprint is essential for both environmental and financial sustainability. A long-term strategy should be developed, focusing on carbon reduction and linking future investments to external funding opportunities.

Summary

These recommended steps aim to improve HCC's financial performance, operational efficiency, and sustainability while maintaining its contribution to the regional economy. By focusing on practical, incremental improvements and strategic changes, the Council can ensure HCC remains a key asset to Harrogate and North Yorkshire.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative options were set out in the 31Ten report and covered in section 3.9 of the report.

584 Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies

Considered – A report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services in relation to changes to appointments to outside bodies.

Resolved

That the Executive appoints Councillor Nigel Knapton and John Corden to the Kyle and Upper Ouse Internal Drainage Board.

585 Forward Plan

Considered – The Forward Plan for the period 9 December 2024 to 28 February 2026 was presented.

Resolved

That the Forward Plan be noted.

586 Date of Next Meeting - 7 January 2025

The meeting concluded at 12.41 pm.