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North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Monday, 18th January 2021 commencing at 10.30 am.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman in the Chair. plus County Councillors Bryn Griffiths, Val Arnold, Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Goodrick, Mike Jordan, Richard Musgrave, Andy Paraskos, Yvonne Peacock, Tony Randerson, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

In attendance: County Councillors Carl Les, Phillip Broadbank, Clive Pearson and Karin Sedgwick.

Officers present: Melanie Carr, Catriona Gatrell, Jon Holden, Vicky Metherringham, Steve Walker and Justine Brooksbank.

Apologies: County Councillor Angus Thompson

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020

Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2 Apologies & Declaration of Interest

There were no apologies or declarations of interest to note.

3 Public Questions & Statements

There were no public questions or statements received.

4 Report on Sky Lanterns & Helium Balloons

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths introduced the report drawing Members' attention to the discussions on the item at the last Committee meeting as detailed in the Minutes of that meeting at agenda item 2. He noted the proposal to include helium balloons and confirmed he was happy to have them included. He also noted the other proposals in the report and the draft recommendations and confirmed his acceptance of those.

The Chair gave other non-committee members the opportunity to address the Committee. County Councillor Clive Pearson agreed that helium balloons should be included, and welcomed the report and its recommendations. County Councillor Karin Sedgwick gave her full support but raised concern about the continued release of sky lanterns and helium balloons from non-council owned land.

The issue of enforcement was raised, and it was noted there had not yet been any communication with tenants of North Yorkshire council land on the issue. It was suggested that in order for a ban to be successful, the problems arising from the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons (as detailed in the report) would need communicating to

council tenants and the public in general.

Legal advice was provided confirming there was nothing in existing tenancy agreements that would restrict this type of activity, but for any new tenancies, the legal documents/leases could be revised to include the Council ban. Schools and Academies could also be encouraged not to release sky lanterns and helium balloons, through the use of legal documentation.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths suggested some proactive engagement with the public etc would be required as suggested within the report. He also queried whether social housing providers could also be encouraged to ban the activity from their properties.

County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson agreed the best way forward would be to raise awareness among school children of the issues associated with the activity, both locally and nationally as they were becoming more and more environmentally aware. It was agreed that a letter to the Secretary of State for Education would be an appropriate way forward in regard to schools, together with the lobbying of local MPs for a national ban.

County Councillor Richard Musgrave agreed that a strong publicity campaign promoting the negative outcomes of the activity was the best way forward, particularly as enforcement would be problematic.

County Councillor Philip Broadbank agreed action was required and suggested that lessons could be learnt from other Authorities who had already introduced a ban.

Other members fully supported the proposal, and County Councillor Liz Collings proposed widening the engagement as much as possible.

Resolved – That the following recommendation be submitted for full Council's consideration:

The County Council is recommended to adopt and promote the following charter:

'North Yorkshire County Council has banned the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons on any property and land which North Yorkshire County Council own or lease or have any interest in or control over

We are committed to encouraging businesses, communities, landowners, schools, residential homes and individuals to switch to alternative ways of celebrating and commemorating events.

North Yorkshire County Council pledges to: -

- Promote the restriction of the release of all types of helium-filled balloon and sky lantern on property and land owned by the Council. This includes those that are made from bamboo or claim to be biodegradable.
- Ask all Parish and Town Councils within North Yorkshire to pass a similar motion, to ban the release of sky lanterns on Parish or Town Council land.
- Incorporate the ban into all future residential tenancy and land lease agreements.
- Proactively engage with businesses, landowners, schools, residential homes, council tenants, social housing providers, charities and community groups, to raise awareness of safer and more environmentally friendly alternatives that people can celebrate with, through promotion and campaigns.
- Work with the County's MPs to ensure that the issue is considered by Parliament.

5 Update on Staff Support during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Members considered a report provided by Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive, outlining the way in which the county council's workforce had changed in response to Covid, and the support provided to the County Council's workforce to enable them to do that and remain operationally effective and personally resilient throughout the pandemic.

Justine Brooksbank provided an overview of what staff had been through in terms of covid i.e. the impact on the workforce in terms of infection levels, the percentage of staff working, the numbers required to isolate, the numbers furloughed, vaccination levels etc. She also provided information on home working risk assessments, return to work covid induction arrangements and an overview of redeployment.

It was noted there had been some changes to both terms and conditions of employment (particularly around leave taking) and training and learning support, which had included some specific training for managers.

Specifically in regard to support for staff, the report detailed the different types of support provided, including mental health and personal resilience support. It was noted the induction of Yammer had proved timely in providing social interaction opportunities for staff. Some specific support for new starters and apprentices had also been provided.

The report provided a brief overview of the various tools and support available in terms of staff's health and wellbeing, including the recently launched 'Taking care of You' toolkit.

It was noted that regular updates and communication were provided for staff to ensure they remain informed of the support available, and the pulse survey provided useful feedback.

On behalf of the Committee, County Councillor Derek Bastiman recorded his thanks for both the report and the excellent ongoing work to keep staff and councillors informed and supported. He also recorded his appreciation for the hard work and dedication that staff had shown throughout the pandemic

County Councillor Caroline Goodrick welcomed the report and added her thanks to officers for all of their hard work and commitment.

In response to questions from members, Justine Brooksbank confirmed:

- The apprenticeship programme was continuing, with more structured contact being provided for new apprentices, designed around specific roles;
- For lone workers, additional support was available to combat feelings of isolation;
- The work like balance survey results evidenced the increased difficulty of having a clear boundary between work and home – a issue recognised nationally;
- The type of roles being furloughed e.g. catering and cleaning staff;
- Under-performance continued to be managed with support for managers to do it remotely;
- Discussions were ongoing to consider future working arrangements post-pandemic, including a more hybrid approach to home working that worked for both service needs and individuals;
- TEAMS was being rolled out to all staff;
- Work was ongoing to introduce an LGBT network;
- Vaccinations were ongoing and on track, with nearly half of all frontline staff already vaccinated.

The Chair thanks Justine Brooksbank for her attendance at the meeting, and it was

Resolved –

That the update be noted.

6 Update on a recent assessment of the Youth Justice Service

Members received a presentation from Steve Walker, Youth Justice Officer, which provided an update on the welfare of children detained in Wetherby Young Offenders Institute, and an overview of the findings from a recent inspection of North Yorkshire's Youth Justice Service.

The presentation detailed the welfare of children currently in Wetherby YOI, including their access to exercise, education, activities and family visits. Steve Walker confirmed that the Service had received explicit assurance from the Institute that late admissions were no longer happening following improvements to the system, but noted there was still some concern about the level of professional access to the children, particularly those who were looked after children or those with safeguarding needs.

He went on to confirm that whilst North Yorkshire Youth Justice Service had been rated good (15th of the 45 Services inspected) there had some issues identified for improvement. In response an improvement plan had been submitted, practitioners had received refresher training, and guidance and processes had been reviewed.

In relation to ASSETPlus, it was noted that whilst it had some strengths, particularly in managing very complex and risky young people, portability between YOT areas and secure establishments etc, it also presented significant barriers to effective practice e.g.:

- The computerised system required high levels of inputting and maintenance which reduced capacity for direct work
- It resulted in completed assessments and plans which could exceed 200 A4 pages, in a dense, complex and repetitive format, which excluded service users from meaningful understanding or co-production, and obstructed effective collaboration with other services.

Members were therefore pleased to note the ongoing pilot of the 'My Assessment Plan' (MAP) system of assessment, commenced in 2019, which had enabled an advanced, family-centred and strengths-based assessment, designed for close alignment with the Signs of Safety model. It was confirmed the pilot had resulted in a condensed approach compared to ASSETPlus, with usually less than 20 pages of plain and direct language, readily understood by children and their families.

Steve Walker confirmed the findings from an internal evaluation of the MAP system had shown it to be both effective and critical to the goal of closer working with other Children's Services teams. As a result, the service had been given approval to continue the pilot for a further two years, and a Youth Justice Board/HMIP working group had been set up to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.

Attention was drawn to the positive feedback from a direct consultation exercise undertaken by the county's independent consultation team 'Young Voice' which noted the positive impact of MAP on the relationships, trust and influence that the Service could now achieve, unleashing staff from their desks and allowing more time for working with children, families, schools etc.

In relation to the impact of Covid on service delivery, the presentation highlighted the ongoing work to maintain support to children and their families, and the creative new practices introduced to enable that work.

Finally, concern was expressed about backlogs i.e. reported offences yet to be investigated and charged by the Police, and charges awaiting court. It was noted that whilst there had been government funding for additional police officers resulting in an approximate 16% increase in recorded crime, there had been no additional resources for the rest of the justice system e.g. courts, YJS and Probation etc.

In response to questions from members, it was confirmed that:

- The ability of the Service to protect and look after children was being compromised as a result of being unable to carry out visits to Wetherby YOI, although the various teams within the institution were working hard to ensure their needs were met;
- There were five new re-settlement practitioners employed by Wetherby YOI, but it was not clear what their role entailed;
- Links were often maintained beyond the end of a court order, and other services were brought in to provide support e.g. Early Help, with joint visits and a phased withdrawal;
- To ensure consistency of support for higher need cases during holidays, a co-worker was allocated to the family ahead of time;
- The backlog in the court service pre-Covid, was due to reduced resourcing and inefficiencies in the system;
- Children within the Wetherby YOI were currently receiving approximately 30mins a day informal outdoor exercise and access to structured PE facilities once a week;
- In regard to the operation of youth services during Covid, a 'Streets Ahead' project had been run by the Early Help service looking at how to target provision of support to young people with a range of opportunities being offered;

Members noted an invitation to re-visit Wetherby YOI post Covid, and welcomed the opportunity to do so. It was also agreed that a letter be sent to MPs regarding the Committee's concerns about the impact of Covid on delays in the magistrates courts.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman thanked officers for their update and it was

Resolved: That the update be noted

7 Work Programme 2020/21

The report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of 2020 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

Members agreed to replace the planned mid cycle briefing on 19th April 2021 with a formal meeting, and to defer the following items of business from the March meeting to the new April meeting:

- Review of Annual Workforce Plan
- Update on Corporate Volunteering Project
- Annual Review of Corporate Risk Register
- Annual Update on Insurance Claims, Risk Exposure

Resolved – That the work programme be revised as detailed above.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

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