

North Yorkshire County Council

5 May 2021

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman's Statement

Committee – 14 April 2021

- Air Quality Strategy:

The committee received the County Council's draft countywide Air Quality Strategy – Protecting North Yorkshire's Air Quality Strategy 2020-2045 - and the consultation results. The strategy complements the council's wider climate change agenda and its aspiration to become carbon neutral as close as possible to 2030.

The majority of those who responded to the public consultation agreed with the overall aims of the strategy but whilst some felt that the strategy did not go far enough others voiced concern about the financial costs of delivering the actions.

The strategy is clearly a substantial document and one that the committee supports in its approach.

Some Members on the committee made suggestions for further actions to be included in the action plans and we probably reflected the spectrum of public responses in terms of what we consider achievable.

It is important to bear in mind that there is also great potential for private sector investment and not just the County Council acting alone. The strategy's success will therefore, depend upon leveraging in external funding. For example, there is a need for more electric vehicle charging points across the county and that will come with private sector investment especially in relation to the tourist/visitor economy.

An aspect that we asked for further investigation is how the County Council can ensure that it takes more account of the impact that proposed developments will have on air quality when it considers planning applications directly or as a consultee. More scrutiny might be required of the environmental impact assessments in this regard. Where possible, in relation to the impacts on air quality, the planning process needs to be part of the answer not part of the problem.

- Rural Bus Services:

We had a wide-ranging discussion about road passenger related rural transport in the county including funding, policy and strategy. Inevitably, our discussion centred on the sustainability of bus services and community transport in the county arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

It comes as no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on local bus services due to sharp falls in passenger numbers. The County Council and the Department for Transport have provided a lifeline to bus operators during the pandemic by providing them with much needed income to survive. However, despite this there are indications that post-pandemic, bus patronage could be up to 20% lower than pre-pandemic, due to changing working and shopping patterns.

Linked to the future sustainability of bus services are radical changes proposed by the Department for Transport about how bus services will function in the future, arising from its recently launched national bus strategy for England: ‘Bus Back Better’.

We were keen to explore the implications of the national bus strategy further. This is especially as the current arrangements in the county of subsidising services that are not viable, is looking less sustainable. There will be reduced funding from government if we keep the status quo. Of the two options for change, a franchise model would allow the County Council to take control of all the bus services in the area but it would take on the revenue risk. The enhanced partnership option would allow the council to work with the operators to put new contracts in place but the revenue risk would stay with the operator. The County Council has until 9 June to confirm what our proposed approach will be and will then be required to produce an action plan by October. We have asked to have sight of the response at our next mid cycle briefing on 7 June before submitted to government.

We received a public statement from a member of the public wishing to emphasise the importance of retaining and expanding rural bus services. With the new national bus strategy and devolution, we can be more confident that this will be possible rather than relying on the current arrangements and having had to make difficult financial decisions over the past few years about the level of bus subsidy that is affordable for us.

Committee – 12 July 2021

We plan to have the following items presented to our next committee meeting on 12 July 2021.

Rural Commission (North Yorkshire)	To discuss the findings and recommendations of the Rural Commission.
Climate Change Assessments	To receive a report on the climate change assessment requirements for inclusion in reports.
Active Travel	To discuss the implementation of Active Travel schemes in the county including the impacts on managing traffic congestion and promoting healthier lifestyles.
Review of North Yorkshire County Council’s 20mph Speed Limit Policy	To receive an update on the progress of implementing the Committee’s recommendations arising from its review of the Council’s 20mph speed limit policy.

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Chairman
 Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 County Hall
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19 April 2021