

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Monday, 19th April, 2021 commencing at 10.30 am.

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

Officers present: Justine Brooksbank, Neil Irving, Fiona Sowerby, Jonathan Spencer and Keeley Metcalfe.

Apologies: County Councillor Mike Jordan

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**Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book**

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### **141 Introductions & Chairman's Remarks**

The Chair welcomed members of the Committee to the meeting, and County Councillor Bryn Griffiths acknowledged the contribution of the late County Councillor Geoff Webber to the past work of the committee. In particular, the recently completed review seeking the banning of the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons on council owned land

### **142 Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021**

#### **Resolved –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021 having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **143 Apologies & Declaration of Interest**

The Chair confirmed additional apologies had been received from the Leader of the Council - County Councillor Carl Les, and Executive Member for Stronger Communities - County Councillor David Chance, who were both unable to attend due to other meeting commitments.

### **144 Public Questions & Statements**

There were no public questions or statements received.

### **145 Annual Workforce Plan**

Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive for Business Support, provided an overview of the detailed report presented, and highlighted the following:

- Staff numbers had settled with the bulk of restructures now completed. In regard to the composition of the workforce, there had been a slight increase in the under 25s and the number of men employed. The average length of service was 9years, compared to a national figure of 4.5years, with an overall average workforce age of 47.4yrs. It was

noted the Authority had historically had an older workforce and that there had been no complaints about discrimination against older members of the workforce, and additional support was provided to them where necessary e.g. IT training. It was also noted that there were more male employees in the higher pay bands;

- There had been a slight improvement in the number of staff with protected characteristics, with LGBT playing a more prominent role in the report;
- There had been a drop in sickness absence (20-25%), It was noted the figures were likely affected by the number of furloughed staff (700-800 staff). It also thought that staff were continuing to work because they were working from home, when previously they may have taken time off;
- A re-introduction programme for furloughed staff was underway;
- Mental health resilience and support was available to all staff, together with training for managers – Justine Brooksbank agree to provide a written update on take-up.
- A number of young people initiatives were underway to help address youth unemployment, which was increasing across North Yorkshire and had doubled in the last year;
- The Kickstart Scheme, with 40 placements with NYCC and a further 307 provided by other organisations across the region. It was noted that NYCC was the Gateway organisation, supporting those placements, which were all at various stages of the process (27 appointed to date);
- In regard to traineeships, NYCC had hosted the work experience element for 4 traineeships in early 2021 in business support and Technology and Change, with a further 2 planned this month;
- Apprenticeships at NYCC were doing well but the scheme was now much smaller than pre austerity days. It was noted that it had not been possible to spend all of the levy, so some of it had been returned. It was also noted that some schools across the region were unable to participate due to their small staffing numbers, and it was confirmed that up to 25% of the levy could be transferred to organisations across the North Yorkshire border, with the county already close to that level;
- The NYCC graduate programme had a successful track record, leading to the take up of substantive posts by those graduates;
- The focus on Diversity and Inclusion through a range of employee networks and events etc;
- Staff engagement through a range of means including the pulse survey;
- The rollout of TEAMs;
- Learning & Development opportunities;
- There had been a reduction in the spend on agency staff;
- Work was ongoing to address vacancies in the adult care sector and schools, with an intake of teachers from outside the area. It was suggested that delays in teacher training had arisen as a result of the pandemic, due to a delay in the take up of placements, and Justine Brooksbank agreed to provide written feedback on this after the meeting;
- There was no sense of anxiety amongst staff around LGR at this stage, in part probably due to the regular updates provided. However, it was noted that as LGR progressed, a recruitment issue may arise for middle management roles, due to the uncertainty of those posts going forward;
- No more than 20% of staff would be able to return to the workplace as of 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 unless the Covid safety requirements changed. It was noted that some staff would welcome a return to the office where others would not. There was also a sense of

fatigue amongst some staff from constant online meetings and some staff were struggling to separate work and home life;

- Future working arrangements post Covid would be based on service requirements, with the introduction of a framework to support services in identifying the most appropriate way forward. It was noted that whilst a new hybrid contract would not be required, some changes may be required to employees terms and conditions;

In reference to the last annual update, the Chair queried progress with the Committee's suggestions made at that time about the provision of staff training on Mental Health issues and dealing with people with Dementia, and the possible development of a future apprenticeship opportunity associated with Autism Plus. Justine Brooksbank agreed to provide feedback on those suggestions after the meeting.

The Committee were pleased to note the steps outlined that would assist and support staff in their development of new working arrangements, post Covid. They also acknowledged that staff had gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic, and agreed this should not be exploited going forward.

Members thanked Justine Brooksbank for her detailed report and requested that she pass on the Committee's thanks to all staff.

**Resolved** – That:

- The Update be noted
- A further update be provided in 12 months' time

#### **146 Annual Update on Risk Management**

**Considered -**

A report detailing the amendments to the Corporate Risk Register since the Committee's last update received in March 2020.

Fiona Sowerby, Head of Insurance and Risk Management introduced the report highlighting two new risks, the risks removed and those risks that had significantly changed. She drew specific attention to:

- The ranking of risks, shown at Appendix A, and provided an overview of the process for deciding their rank;
- Paragraph 4 of the report and Appendix B which highlighted the links between corporate and directorate risks;

Members were pleased to note the work underway to formulate risks registers for both North Yorkshire Highways and the Brierley Group, and were reassured that following a decision regarding the Local Government Review, work would commence to consider the risks associated with the transition to the new local government arrangements.

The Chair thanked the officer for her report, and it was

**Resolved** – That:

- i. The update be noted;
- ii. A further update be provided in twelve months' time

#### **147 North Yorkshire Syrian Refugee Settlement Programme Annual Update**

## **Considered –**

An update and progress report on the resettlement in North Yorkshire of people resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and persons resettled under the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme.

Jonathan Spencer, Project Manager for North Yorkshire’s Refugee Resettlement Schemes provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken throughout the pandemic to support those refugees already resettled across the eight local authority areas in North Yorkshire. He also detailed the delays cause by the pandemic in progressing the resettlement programme, and confirmed that only five new families (considered high priority) had been resettled since the last update report, four of which were from the Lebanon.

Members noted:

- The quarantine period had provided a welcomed period of rest for the new families;
- The resettled families had shown a lot of resilience throughout the pandemic, with some refugees wanting to volunteer in their communities;
- English speaking had fallen, particularly in the younger children;
- The provision of computers to each family to allow online English lessons;
- The successful use of communication technology to keep refugee families connected, and to enable volunteers to maintain contact and provide support, with face to face meetings being limited to emergencies;
- The delays in accessing training through the employability Service due to the pandemic;
- There was no cost associated with seeking indefinite leave to remain, but it cost approximately £1,000 per person to seek British citizenship;
- Retention rates continued to be good with only 8 out of 55 refugees choosing to move outside of the region, in most cases to be closer to other families;
- The age demographic of refugees tended to be Adults in the late 20s/early 30s and primary school aged children. There have been some larger family groups that included grandparents, which brought with it some additional issues due to the lack of education in the older family members;
- The need for the scheme to continue at pace post Covid in order to achieve the previously planned number of resettlements in North Yorkshire between 2020 and 2024 (approximately 200);

Members queried how many North Yorkshire Schools were already or were in the process of becoming a School of Sanctuary. They also questioned what part North Yorkshire might play in the Hong Kong British National Overseas UK Welcome Programme. Jonathan Spencer agreed to provide additional feedback on both those issues following the meeting.

Members thanked the officer for all his hard work and commitment in support of the Scheme and requested a further update in a year’s time.

**Resolved – That:**

- i. The report be noted
- ii. A further update be provided in 12 months’ time

## **148 Corporate Volunteering Project Update**

Considered:

A report of the Assistant Director for Policy, Partnerships & Communities providing a progress update on the Corporate Volunteering Project.

Neil Irving presented the report which detailed the impact of COVID on the delivery of the project with nearly all regular NYCC volunteering services either being halted or significantly reduced during lockdowns.

Members were pleased to note that as services were starting to return, volunteers were being asked to return to their previous roles. They also noted:

- The new volunteer group set up to respond to covid related community need on a weekend;
- The delay in developing a range of online processes for volunteers due to the pandemic;
- the online application form had been fully tested prior to its introduction;
- the introduction of online processes would not replace the traditional methods used previously;
- The changes in delivering volunteering celebration events in response to Covid

Members welcomed the retention of more traditional methods as they were concerned that some older volunteers may be put off by having to use online processes. They went on to query how sustainable the County council's reliance on volunteers was due to their age demographic, and what was being done to promote volunteering among younger people.

Neil Irving confirmed work to understand the age profile and motivation of volunteers was an ongoing part of the work of the Volunteer sub-group. He also confirmed:

- Universities played a key part in encouraging young people in to volunteering;
- Volunteer coordinators worked closely with their volunteers and were able to monitor their contribution and ensure it remained a positive experience;
- Some additional work would be required to gather feedback from volunteers on the application process and their volunteering work;

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and it was

**Resolved:** That the report be noted

#### **149 Draft Work Programme 2021/22**

The report of the Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer inviting Members to consider the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2021/22 taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous agenda items and any other developments taking place across the county.

Members agreed that the new Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner should be invited to attend the Committee's September 2021 meeting as it provide them sufficient time to prepare, following their take up of the post in May 2021.

**Resolved** – That the draft work programme be approved.

The meeting concluded at 12:24pm