

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 July 2021

## STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN

### CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### User Participation and Engagement

1. The current COVID-19 pandemic creates unusual challenges for engaging with users of our services. The committee wanted to understand how the pandemic has affected user voices and participation. We rearranged our meeting dates so that we could hold an informal, virtual meeting, with user representatives from the North Yorkshire Disability Forum and the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board. What we heard and learned was both heartening and reassuring.
2. These groups contain hard-working and committed community representatives, who - prior to lockdown – held regular face to face meetings across the county – at least one meeting somewhere in the county every week. They are not talking-shops; they look at work plans, strategy delivery, and projects in local communities. They are coproduction in action.
3. They also link to other forums and groups so meeting them in a virtual meeting was always going to give us an up to date, informed picture of how successful people had been in adjusting to the constraints of the pandemic.
4. The concern of members was that many people could have “lost confidence” and were not sure they would be able to engage during the pandemic. Yet from the start of lockdown, both forums quickly adapted by staying in touch via Facebook, zoom meetings, phone and post. Videos and podcasts were other ways that people shared their views. A good deal of support was provided to develop digital skills and confidence - from the P&E Team and our commissioned self-advocacy support service.
5. Many moved online to hold group meetings, including regular joint forums Q&A sessions with the HAS Corporate Director and Public Health; these Q&A sessions involved representatives of older people’s and mental health forums as well. In particular, user representatives praised Richard Webb for his willingness to meet with them, and were pleased that this is set to continue.
6. Digital meetings can be convenient, but they do not work for everyone – at least, not right away. People’s experience of digital meetings and problems coming to terms with the technology will be familiar to all of us - chairs cannot “read the room”, it is not easy to tell whether an aspect of a presentation raises confusion or objections among the attendees, managing the mute button. Quizzes, for example, helped people to be confident - not just with the platform, but also with the atmosphere and the purpose of the meeting.
7. People’s voice and involvement has had a positive, tangible impact:
  - People have responded in a way, which suggests the whole experience has been empowering.

- Many groups support their members successfully and can campaign effectively – the group established to look at and campaign for safe Care Homes visiting is an example.
- Concerns about Do Not Resuscitate Orders and emergency care legislation shared with NHS colleagues.
- Creation of an accessible Covid communications library for information and advice.
- Helped to inform HAS colleagues about concerns around support during Covid, and people of the support available e.g. Personal Assistants, emergency contact, PPE, Outbreak Management Plan.
- Raised awareness of the importance of accessibility for disabled people locally and via NYCC Communications.
- Issues raised have been fed into the North Yorkshire and York Vaccine Response Group and Locality Groups.

8. Our impressions and conclusions from this meeting:

- When running an event all opinions and diverse views are encouraged and respected.
- Participants know that their contribution is being sought and is appreciated by all involved.
- The directorate has worked with (not to or for) people to give them a voice.
- It showed how most people have adapted to the innovative thinking.
- The range and diversity of options and avenues chosen to bring people in and give them the means to represent themselves is impressive; it means more people can find at least one method that works for them.
- The range of views that people are able to express shows that people feel comfortable in raising issues both big and small, personal and service orientated.
- Leadership commitment is strong - Richard Webb making himself available is good in itself but it sets the tone, the culture: “We are all in it together”.

9. It is clear that people have continued to speak up and influence despite the challenges of Covid and remote meetings. Some described how, because of social distancing, they were missing the physical contact with others that they had relied on before the pandemic. However, no matter what other cultural changes come about, most agree that digital meetings and different ways of being involved are here to stay and, used well, they can enhance service users’ voices.

### **Looking Ahead**

10. At our next meeting, we will review:

- **Living Well** - experience over the last year and reflections on the impact of the pandemic.
- **Direct Payments** - revisiting a review of how NYCC is ensuring that Direct Payments enable more choice and control over the support people receive and how Direct Payments help to meet their social care needs.

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR KARIN SEDGWICK**

5 July 2021