

North Yorkshire Council

North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 5 February 2026 at County Hall, Northallerton, commencing at 10.30 am.

Councillors Peter Wilkinson in the Chair (North Yorkshire Council); Chris Aldred (North Yorkshire Council), David Chance (North Yorkshire Council), Kevin Foster (North Yorkshire Council), Tim Grogan (North Yorkshire Council), Heather Moorhouse (North Yorkshire Council), Michael Pavlovic (City of York Council), Andrew Waller (City of York Council), and Steve Shaw-Wright (North Yorkshire Council).

Community Co-opted Members: Fraser Forsyth and Caroline O'Neill.

David Skaith (Mayor of York and North Yorkshire).

Jo Coles (Deputy Mayor for Policing, Fire and Crime).

Chief Constable Tim Forber (North Yorkshire Police).

Officers from the Mayoral Combined Authority / Policing, Fire and Crime Team: Rachel Antonelli (Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Mark Ayres (Head of Public Confidence and Assurance), Michael Porter (Assistant Director of Resources (Deputy s73 Officer for Police, Fire and Crime Functions)), Tamara Stevens (Director of Policing, Fire and Crime), Amanda Wilkinson (Head of Partnerships and Commissioning).

Officers present: Diane Parsons (Principal Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Danny Myers (Vice-Chair), Emilie Knight and Mags Godderidge.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

132 Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from Councillors Danny Myers and Emilie Knight as well as Mags Godderidge. It was noted that Councillor Andrew Waller was substituting for Councillor Knight.

133 Declarations of Interest

In the interest of full transparency, a number of Panel members declared interests in relation to Item 5 due to their involvement in planning committees at North Yorkshire Council, as follows:

- Councillor Chris Aldred – Member of Strategic Planning Committee
- Councillor Kevin Foster – Member of Richmond (Yorks) Area Planning Committee
- Councillor Heather Moorhouse – Vice Chair of Richmond (Yorks) Area Planning Committee
- Councillor David Chance – Substitute Member to Scarborough and Whitby Area Planning Committee
- Councillor Steve Shaw-Wright – Member of Selby and Ainsty Area Planning

Committee and a Substitute Member for Strategic Planning Committee.

This did not preclude the councillors from speaking to the matter raised at Item 5 but that as the question concerned a live planning application, the Chair noted that the Panel would not address the specifics of that case and would look to speak to broader principles.

Councillor Michael Pavlovic also highlighted under Item 5 that he is Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning at City of York Council but it was clarified that the planning application referred to within the question was a North Yorkshire Council matter.

134 Consideration of Exclusion of the Public

The Chair moved that the Panel determine after consideration of Item 7(b) whether to move into closed session. The Panel voted unanimously via a show of hands to retain the right to retire at that point in the agenda if necessary.

Resolved

That the Panel retains the privilege to move into closed session under Item 8 if deemed necessary following consideration of the Mayor's draft precept proposal at Item 7(b).

135 Minutes of the Panel Meeting held on 21 January 2026

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2026, having been printed and circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

136 Public Questions or Statements to the Panel

A question was put to the Panel by Caroline Clayton, as follows:

"Thank you for taking my question today.

I'd like to ask for the Panel's views on whether there is scope for the police and fire Services to be statutory consultees and take a formal role in the planning process for solar farm developments in North Yorkshire, and what opportunities or challenges the Panel sees in that approach.

Solar farms bring new and very real safety considerations. These sites often span hundreds of acres and contain photovoltaic modules, with vegetation underneath, inverters, high voltage direct current cabling and associated electrical infrastructure. These present a tangible risk of electrical fault and fire.

Remote installations can attract theft, vandalism and trespass. Good security design from the outset protects critical infrastructure and reduces risks to both the public and responding police officers.

Early involvement from the police and fire services helps ensure sites are designed so crews can reach incidents quickly and operate safely.

In some proposals, an example being the proposed Stell Solar Farm, Lords Lane,

Bedale, planning reference ZB25/01246/FUL, there is an existing family home located in the centre of the proposed solar farm. This proposed site is also criss-crossed by public rights of way running north to south and east to west.

That raises serious questions about evacuation routes, and how incidents could affect other nearby residents too. Those risks must be properly assessed at the design stage — not after problems arise. The site is located in a rural setting with narrow lanes, narrow field entrances, soft verges, and with distance to hydrants this could significantly impede the emergency services' ability to access the site quickly and deploy appropriate resources. In a fire scenario, solar panel arrays may also propagate flames across long rows of panels or trigger adjacent field fires, placing nearby residents, fauna and property at risk.

In the event of a fire involving PV modules, the release of toxic fumes from plastic resins, heavy metals and chemicals is a recognised hazard. Further, fire-water run-off may carry contaminants into soil and watercourses, potentially causing long-term environmental harm.

Making emergency services statutory consultees doesn't delay renewable energy — it ensures it's delivered safely, responsibly and with the protection of local communities at its heart.

In other areas of Yorkshire, examples being East Yorkshire and Doncaster councils, the police and fire are statutory consultees in solar farm applications.

To recap - I'd like to ask for the Panel's views on whether there is scope for the police and fire services to be statutory consultees and take a formal role in the planning process for solar farm developments in North Yorkshire, and what opportunities or challenges the Panel sees in that approach."

The Deputy Mayor outlined current practice, namely that the fire service is not a statutory consultee but provides operationally-focussed risk-based guidance when invited by local planning authorities. Early engagement between developers and emergency services is strongly encouraged and a structured process is in place for pre-application dialogue. The Deputy Mayor also underlined that it is important that the right balance is struck between carbon reduction and investment in sustainability and that the public and firefighters are kept safe. The Deputy Mayor offered to provide a response in writing to Caroline.

Following discussion among Panel members, it was noted by North Yorkshire Members that if the fire service provides comments on an application that these should ordinarily appear on the planning portal held by the council and it would be noted in the committee papers that the service had responded/commented. It was noted by a York Member that police and fire are similarly routinely engaged regarding solar farms and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) but are not statutory consultees unless the application pertains to a nationally significant level of infrastructure.

Panel members discussed the opportunities and challenges of the potential for statutory-consultee status of the police and fire services. Of particular concern was the potential impact on resource, should the services be compulsorily required to attend and review each application for solar farms. Members highlighted that parish councils provide a useful way of raising concerns on applications as well as individually.

The Chair thanked Caroline Clayton for attending the meeting.

It was noted that an additional public question had been received regarding road

safety statistics but that the individual was not able to attend and ask their question at the meeting. The Deputy Mayor offered to contact the individual to provide a response.

Resolved

That the Panel

- (a) receives a written response to the public question regarding solar farm applications from the Deputy Mayor, to provide to the questioner; and
- (b) receives a written response from the Deputy Mayor to a question forwarded regarding road safety, to pass on to the questioner who was absent from the meeting.

137a Panel's Scrutiny of the Policing Precept Proposal 2026/27

Resolved

That the Panel notes the guidance provided by the Panel Secretariat regarding the legal role and powers available to the Panel when considering the Mayor's policing precept proposal.

137b Policing Precept Proposal 2026/27

Considered

The Mayor's policing precept proposal for 2026/27.

The Mayor introduced the proposal for a £15 increase (Band D), citing strong public support following the consultation and the various pressures on policing services including inflation and pay awards.

Panel members noted the 9% reduction in crime overall in North Yorkshire and York in the last two years and commended improvements made in neighbourhood policing in particular. However, in the context of the removal of national funding for police officer uplifts and the freezing of the Neighbourhood Policing grant, Members expressed concern around the continued commitment to deliver sustained, visible local policing moving forward.

The Panel noted the Chief Constable's assurance that the planned 17 additional neighbourhood officers will still be delivered in 2026/27 as funding will be at risk if this is not achieved. However, concern was expressed that in view of the funding pressures and challenges facing the police service locally, an increase in the precept of £15 will still leave a funding gap for the service. Members conveyed concern that this could result in a 'worst case' reduction of up to 21 police officers and that the impact of this could be felt across communities. The Chief Constable acknowledged the concerns but also highlighted the need for the service to balance resource across frontline and specialist functions (such as cyber crime). Members felt it important that within communities, people perceive that they are safe.

The Panel noted the high level of public support for an increase in the precept of £15 and that planned savings and efficiencies will also help to ensure a balanced budget for 2026/27. The Panel welcomed the efforts of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to make ongoing representations to government around the challenges of policing such a large rural area.

The Chair invited Members to consider whether it was necessary to remove into closed session to consider the recommendations. The Panel agreed this was not required. Members voted unanimously via a show of hands to support the Mayor's proposed precept proposal for policing for 2026/27. The Panel will provide a statutory report confirming its recommendations.

Resolved

That the Panel

- (a) supports the Mayor's proposal to increase the policing precept for 2026/27 to £335.86, representing an increase of £15 (or 4.67%) for a Band D property;
- (b) will provide a statutory report for the Mayor, with any recommendations, by 8 February 2026;
- (c) receives copies of the correspondence highlighted at the previous meeting, including from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to the Home Secretary around the challenges of rural policing;
- (d) receives confirmation that commissioned services have been advised about the confirmation of funding from the Ministry of Justice for victim services in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

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Members' Questions

A member asked the Deputy Mayor to clarify the expected role of police officers in identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns, particularly regarding children, given recent media commentary suggesting instances of alleged "police overreach" in child-protection contexts. The Deputy Mayor confirmed receipt of a letter from an MP relating to a specific publicly-reported incident, and noted that the correct response was to direct the affected individual to the formal police complaints process if they believed an officer had acted improperly. The Deputy Mayor emphasised that safeguarding is the responsibility of all public-sector professionals, including police, social care, education and health.

The Deputy Mayor was also asked whether the police are making full use of private-sector Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems - particularly those operated in the car parks of major retail parks and supermarkets - to support the detection of prolific shoplifters and cross-border crime. The Deputy Mayor highlighted a retail-crime symposium which was convened in 2025, where the role of technology and partnership working was a major theme. A further symposium is planned, indicating continued focus on strengthening partnerships with retail parks and shopping centres. The Chief Constable explained that he is the national policing lead for ANPR, and therefore responsible for national data standards, governance and oversight. He set out clear distinctions between:

- the public ANPR network, which meets strict standards, is centrally governed and feeds into a secure national database; and
- the private ANPR network, which does not follow the same regulatory, security or data-quality requirements.

For these reasons, it's key that the police work with the Information Commissioner's Office to ensure a continued balance moving forward between maintaining civil liberties and being able to access private ANPR systems for specific operations where lawful and appropriate.

Resolved

That the Panel notes the responses provided to Members' questions.

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139 Road Safety - Progress in York and North Yorkshire

Considered

The report from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor regarding progress in delivering the partnership priority regarding road safety in York and North Yorkshire.

Members were invited to note the priority being placed on Vision Zero, the new national Road Safety Strategy, and the need for robust partnership across policing, fire, highways and local authorities.

Panel members highlighted the lack of fixed and average speed cameras in the region in comparison with some neighbouring authority areas and that this had been noted by the Chief Constable as an “untenable” position. The Chief Constable highlighted:

- the high number of fatalities and serious injuries over the past decade;
- the need to improve safety through engineering, education and enforcement, with fixed-camera infrastructure key to modifying driver behaviour; and
- the pressures created by seasonal spikes in visitor traffic.

Members raised issues relating to:

- requesting data on collision causation and the need for further identification of what learning has resulted from the reduction in fatalities in 2023/24;
- the need for time-bound delivery plans and clarified future funding for the Road Safety Partnership.
- 20mph zones and enforcement challenges around the implementation of these;
- the importance of early engagement with schools and communities on road safety and
- the emerging risks from e-bikes and e-scooters.

Resolved

That the Panel

- (a) notes the reports provided;
- (b) receives further information from the Deputy Mayor highlighting collision causation for KSI figures; and
- (c) requests further detail on where e-bikes and e-scooters have been involved in collisions in future data packs.

140 Work Programme

Resolved

That the Panel notes the outline programme of work for 2026/27.

141 Any other items

The Chief Constable offered to provide Panel members with an additional informal briefing if helpful at the Joint Police/Fire HQ, on developments within the service.

The Chair thanked the Chief Constable for this offer and further arrangements will be co-ordinated in due course.

142 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday, 23 April 2026 at 10:30am at Selby Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 12.34 pm.
DP.