

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**17 November 2021**

## **STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN OF SCRUTINY BOARD**

Scrutiny Board brings together the Chairs of the five thematic overview and scrutiny committees at the Council and the Older Peoples' and Young People's Champions. It provides an opportunity for a whole council view of scrutiny activity, which avoids gaps and overlaps and helps establish a lead committee for areas of joint interest. It also provides a forum in which the key performance issues for the Council can be reviewed and items for further scrutiny identified.

The scrutiny function was created to act as a check on and balance to the executive and it is a statutory requirement for all authorities operating executive arrangements.

Members will be aware that I stood down as the Chairman of Scrutiny Board on 24 August 2021, at which point I took up a position on the Executive. I had been Chairman of Scrutiny Board since 16 May 2019. Scrutiny Board continues to play an important role in the co-ordination of scrutiny activity, particularly during a time of such upheaval and change. I am pleased to note that County Councillor Stanley Lumley was unanimously elected by board members to the position of Chairman through to the end of this Council.

There have been one meeting of Scrutiny Board since my last statement to Council.

The meeting of Scrutiny Board on 19 August 2021 focussed upon the scrutiny of the Q1 Performance and Finance Management Report, ahead of the members of the Board attending the meeting of the Executive on 24 August 2021. Some of the issues raised at the Executive meeting by members of the Scrutiny Board are highlighted below:

- A key element of the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan is greater use of electricity for domestic heating and transport. There will need to be significant investment in infrastructure, particularly in the more remote rural areas where there is little or no commercial incentive to invest, to enable this.
- The YorBus Pilot appears to be going well, albeit that it is early days. Subject to a successful pilot, how widely can or will this new approach to rural bus services be rolled out and influence how public transport is provided.
- Highways operational data and the DfT highways survey both suggest that the quality of the roads in the county is high and that the highways service responds quickly to concerns raised. The data is for the county as a whole. Are there significant variations across the county or across different road classifications (A, B, C and unclassified).
- There are skills shortages across most, if not all sectors of the economy and in particular in health and social care. What more can be done to attract people to work and live in North Yorkshire, particularly in rural and coastal areas.
- Is the increase in referrals to the Living Well Service driven by people who were in need but did not seek help during the height of the pandemic, now seeking help and assistance.
- With the changes to the way that OFSTED inspects schools and the backlog in inspections taking place, do we really know how good our schools are. What more can we do to understand their performance and to support those that are struggling.

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 19 August 2021, members also discussed the report and recommendations of the Rural Commission.

Members of Scrutiny Board made the following comments, which were then used to inform the report that went to the Executive on 21 September 2021:

- Investment in the electrical infrastructure in the county is key
- The use of small hydro-electric schemes to generate electricity for small communities needs to be explored. This has been missed in the report and will be followed up by the Transport Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The issue of supporting small schools and how you grow or sustain communities in rural areas was not fully addressed in the report
- The work of the Commission has been innovative but it will need political buy-in for its recommendations to be implemented
- Concerns were expressed about the recent surge in the number of air-bnbs, in response to the rising demand for staycations, and the impact that this is having upon rural communities where housing is in short supply and often not permanently occupied
- There is a need to enable rural communities to grow and develop and not simply be kept frozen in time
- The catchment areas for rural schools could be reviewed so that rural schools admissions are managed in such a way that promotes long term sustainability
- Consideration may need to be given to long term subsidisation of rural transport, as it is simply not profitable and so unattractive to commercial providers.

The Transport Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the lead committee for the scrutiny of the report and work of the Rural Commission.

Members of Scrutiny Board are next due meet on 1 December 2021. At that meeting, the Executive Q2 Performance and Finance Management Report will be scrutinised.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DEREK BASTIMAN

1 November 2021