

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 3 December 2018 at 10.30 am.

Present:-

County Councillor in the Chair – Derek Bastiman

County Councillors Val Arnold, Margaret Atkinson, Caroline Goodrick, Bryn Griffiths, Mike Jordan, Richard Musgrave, Andy Paraskos, Tony Randerson, Cliff Trotter and Annabel Wilkinson.

Also in Attendance

Julia Mulligan, Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner & two supporting officers

Executive Members: County Councillors Carl Les and David Chance

North Yorkshire County Council Officers: Karen Iveson, AD Strategic Resources; Nigel Smith Head of Highways Operations; Deborah Flowers, Highways Customer Communications; and Melanie Carr, Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer.

Stuart Minting, Local Democracy Reporter.

Apologies for Absence

Received from: County Councillors Angus Thompson and Stuart Parsons. There were no substitutes.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

67. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2018, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

68. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

69. Public Questions or Statements

There were no public questions or statements.

70. Chairman's Announcements - Any correspondence, communication or other business brought forward by the direction of the Chairman of the Committee

County Councillor Derek Bastiman updated the Committee on the ongoing work to produce a report for Management Board on the Council's assessment of its performance against the Equality Framework for Local Government, and potential areas of improvement. Members were made aware that discussions would be completed by early December and the main points summarised for inclusion in the report. Also that work was underway to better assess cumulative impact of service changes over time, utilising a performance dashboard approach.

71. Attendance of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Considered -

An update on the implementation of plans for formal collaboration between North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue.

The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC), Julia Mulligan attended the meeting to provide the update, which highlighted the major changes happening within North Yorkshire's Fire & Rescue Service (NYFRS) both to its senior management team and its governance model. She also outlined the work ongoing to carry out a full service review of NYFRS and the findings arising from the initial phase of the review.

County Councillor Andy Paraskos questioned who was scrutinising the work of NYFRS and in response the Commissioner outlined the various levels of scrutiny, which now mirrored those methods used to scrutinise North Yorkshire Police.

County Councillor Mike Jordan raised concerns about turnover of staff and staff training, and the Commissioner confirmed that the training facilities available at Easingwold were very good, enabling the delivery of a comprehensive training programme. She also confirmed that whilst previous training had been affected by the industrial action taken by the Fire Brigade Union, 40% of retained firefighters had now received the necessary training.

County Councillor Tony Randerson raised concern about the length of time it was taking to carry out the full service review and get a Fire and Rescue Plan in place. The Commissioner confirmed that responsibility for putting the Plan in place had only passed to her as of 15 November 2018, and that formal consultation would be required as part of the formation of the Plan.

The Commissioner also confirmed that currently day to day NYFR services was being funded out of reserves, and that those reserves were likely to be depleted by 2023. In response, a Finance Working Group had been formed to consider all saving opportunities in order to identify the best way forward for the Service to live within its means. Members noted that the use of reserves meant that NYFRS had no buffer to address possible pension issues going forward.

In response to a question from Members, the Commissioner also confirmed her ongoing work to clarify which Ministry was responsible for Fire Services, in order that she could lobby the appropriate Minister on the issue of precept, which in her view should be along the same lines as for the Police. It was noted that the Government currently capped Police Fire & Crime Commissioners' rights to consult on raising the precept.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths asked for clarity on the current cap, and the Commissioner confirmed that currently the cap allowed for a rise of 2.99% which was the equivalent of £1 but that she would like to raise it by £5. Also that the full-service review would not be

completed in time to inform the next setting of the precept, which prevented its use for plugging the shortfall in available funding. The Commissioner confirmed that whilst some saving opportunities had already been identified e.g. moving the headquarters, changes to back office staffing, and extending the life of Fire Service vehicles, they were insufficient to cover the £3.5m shortfall, and therefore further savings would be required if the current level of service was to be maintained.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths also questioned how the Commissioner engaged with residents who were unable to access meetings and decision making online and received an outline of the comprehensive communications programme in place, both formal and informal. The Commissioner went on to highlight the well established strategic partnerships in place to ensure community safety, which included work with third sector bodies, but agreed there was a need for greater consistency and flexibility in that partnership work. She also confirmed there had been a good level of interest shown in the Chief Officer post, both internally and externally.

Resolved -

- i) That the Commissioner be thanked for her update
- ii) That a future update be added to the Committee's work programme.

72. North Yorkshire County Council Investment Strategy

Considered -

A progress update on the delivery of the County Council's alternative investment framework provided by Karen Iveson which highlighted;

- An alternative approach had been required following a decade of low interest rates and therefore the difficulties in finding places to invest;
- That the alternative approach was a more commercial approach than previously taken;
- The County Council had considered fourteen potential investment opportunities before agreeing to take three forward;
- Bids on two investments had been successful following substantial due diligence – a £900k investment in a freehold bank unit and lease in Stafford Town Centre had been completed and a £9.1m leaseholder investment in Harrogate Baths building was in progress;
- £6m had been invested in two property funds
- Specialist advice had been sought where needed

Karen Iveson went on to detail the estimated returns from the investments made to date and the focus of the work to be undertaken in the next twelve months.

In regard to the potential for the council to own a solar farm, County Councillor Derek Bastiman suggested agricultural holdings may prove a suitable site.

County Councillor Richard Musgrave queried how the County Council planned to mitigate the risks associated with the property funds and in response Karen Iveson acknowledged that:

- Investment in property funds did bring a greater degree of risk than traditional investment routes
- The approach taken in considering any potential investment opportunities did ensure diligent consideration of all the risks involved
- The financial modelling tool used enabled the varying of assumptions.
- Risk mitigation limited exposure to the risks

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- An element of funding would be set aside to address any issues that might arise during the lifetime of each investment.

County Councillor Mike Jordan suggested the Government was looking at what local authorities were doing as it was concerned that they were losing sight of what they were here to do, and that a lot of time and resources were involved in maintaining the County Council's approach. In response Karen Iveson confirmed that the approach had required changes to working structures, not additional resources.

County Councillor Bryn Griffiths suggested it was important to manage the public's perception of the county council's investment approach and in response Karen Iveson confirmed that the County Council had not borrowed money in order to invest unlike some other local authorities, and always took the necessary time to apply due diligence to the process. Members thanked the officer for the report and

Resolved -

- i) To note investment progress to date and the planned focus of the work over the coming 12 months.

73. Parish Portal Update

Considered -

An update report on the operation of the Parish Portal and parish Council engagement.

Nigel Smith, Head of Highways Operations introduced the report, highlighting that:

- 518 of the 731 parish councils were now live on the portal;
- The number of service requests since the launch was now over 4,000;
- Parish clerks had provided positive feedback and had growing confidence in the portal
- Positive feedback had been received on the workshops held during summer 2018

County Councillor Tony Randerson raised concern that the report did not go far enough and reminded officers that 2 years ago the Committee had requested a portal specifically for Councillors where they could register issues brought to their attention by members of the public, in order to address the expectation of the public that a County Councillor would be able to progress an issue where they had failed.

County Councillor Derek Bastiman reiterated the pressing need for councillor access to the information held within the portal and County Councillor Caroline Goodrick suggested that being able to pull off a report on all issues raised by a specific parish council, ahead of attending a parish council meeting, would be really helpful.

In response, Deborah Flowers, Highways Customer Communications Officer acknowledged the delay in responding to that previous request by the Committee and confirmed that at present a design flaw in the portal meant that only the parish clerk as the submitter of the issues could raise a report that detailed all the issues/faults registered and the responses to date. However, the planned development of a Members' Dashboard would provide an appropriate tool for councillors going forward. She confirmed that the dashboard would capture all information relevant to a division registered within either the parish portal or the customer portal.

County Councillor Mike Jordan confirmed he was pleased with the parish portal and that he often received reports from members of the public through social media.

County Councillor referred to the possible further improvements to the portal highlighted in the report and asked that all those improvements be realised, which Nigel Smith confirmed

would happen.

County Councillor Richard Musgrave suggested it would be helpful if there was a one stop shop for councillors that linked up with district councils, incorporating information on planning and highways. He also questioned the level of confidence in the system to prevent the kind of data breaches which had happened elsewhere.

In response officers confirmed the system was being constantly monitored, and that a one stop shop approach could be added as a lower priority to the list of future functionality improvements listed in the report. They also reminded Councillors that the portal was there to complement existing traditional methods of communication with parish councils, and that the county council was leading the way as other local authorities had expressed interest in the system.

Resolved -

That:

- i. The report be noted;
- ii. Work be undertaken to explore either how the portal could be adapted for use by councillors, or the introduction of an alternative portal specifically for councillors;
- iii. A further update be provided to the Committee in 6 months.

74. Bank & Post Office Closures Review

Considered: The draft final report arising from the scrutiny review of bank and post office closure across the county.

Melanie Carr, Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report, highlighting the feedback from MPs at Annex C and the new information shown at Annex D which provided an overview of the UK's ATM network and deployment and changes to network coverage across North Yorkshire during 2018. She also drew attention to the mechanism already in place which would enable county councillors to submit possible locations for new ATMs within their divisions.

County Councillors Derek Bastiman and Tony Randerson expressed their disappointment at the lack of positive response from the council to the Committee's suggestion that the county council should lead the way in providing ATMs in rural communities i.e. the feedback from officers that due to the limited number of council owned properties across the county, the opportunities for the introduction of an ATM in a council-owned building may be limited.

In response Melanie Carr confirmed that the ATM providers based their decisions on location solely on the commercial viability of a location, and on not on its value to a community. She also confirmed it would likely prove difficult to encourage a provider to re-install an ATM in a location where one had previously been removed, as there would already be information available that suggested that location was not commercially viable.

In line with proposed Recommendation C in the report, County Councillor Bryn Griffiths suggested that as and when a County Councillor identified a possible location for an ATM, they should inform the Stronger Communities Team so that they can assist in the process and encourage the community to support the proposal and provide evidence of need.

Resolved –

That:

- i) The proposed recommendations shown in the review draft final report at paragraph

28 be endorsed for submission to the Executive

- ii) The following additional Recommendation be added to the final report prior to its submission to the Executive:

‘Recommendation D)

That the Stronger Communities Team support all submissions of possible site locations submitted by County Councillors via the LINK’s online tool, by encouraging the relevant community to support a proposal and provide evidence of need.’

75. Work Programme

Considered -

The report of Melanie Carr, Principal Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer, providing Members with a copy of the Committee’s Work Programme for review and comment.

Attention was drawn to a Motion on the ‘Charter Against Modern Slavery’ considered at the last meeting of full Council and the decision of full Council that the motion be referred to the Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee before going back to Council on 20 February 2019.

Resolved -

That:

- i) A report in support of the issues raised in the aforementioned motion be added to the committee’s work programme for the mid cycle briefing on 21 January 2019.
- ii) The work programme be updated to include future meeting dates during 2019/20
- iii) That the updated work programme include the progress reports requested, as detailed elsewhere in these Minutes.

76. Other business which the Chairman agrees should be considered as a matter of urgency because of special circumstances

There was no other business.

The meeting concluded at 12:35 pm.

MLC