



## **Policy Review Committee Report to Council**

The Policy Review Committee has met once since the previous update given to Council in December 2020.

**12 January 2021**

### **Low Carbon Working Group – Standing Update**

In attendance at the meeting to contribute to the update was the Deputy Leader. Members were pleased that the Council was leading the way in the district on low carbon work and agreed that it was important to continue to build on the work already undertaken. Guy Thompson from the White Rose Forest Partnership (WRFP) gave an overview of the organisation's work. The Committee asked that the WRFP attend the next meeting of the Low Carbon Working Group for further discussions on tree planting to take place; Officers emphasised the importance of the work being evidence based and linked to the Council's new Local Plan.

### **Universal Credit Update**

Members asked a number of questions in relation to the report on matters such as the future of the hardship fund, incidences of homelessness relating to the number of people on Universal Credit and council tax support. The Committee agreed that they should still receive regular updates on Universal Credit, but that just headline figures would suffice as opposed to longer written reports; these next set of figures were requested for around six months' time.

### **Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2021-22 and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

In attendance at the meeting was the Lead Executive Member for Finance and Resources. Members were pleased to note that the proposal was to freeze council tax for the 2021-22 year, as many people were under a great deal of financial pressure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was suggested by some Members that rents should also have been frozen.

A number of questions were asked relating to the improvement of industrial units, grants, loans, savings and rents. Officers confirmed that numerous Council resources would be directed towards tackling Covid-19 in the coming year, and that the majority of proposed savings would be pushed back. Members were reminded that with regards to housing rents, this was a ringfenced account and as such these monies would go directly back into the service in order to invest in the planned improvements to tenants' homes.

## Preferred Options Local Plan Consultation Document

Some Members expressed concerns relating to the consultation, in that there were members of the public that did not have access to the internet and as a result would not be able to respond if they could not attend in-person events. Officers acknowledged that this may be the case for some residents but explained that a great deal was being done to ensure that people could still engage with the consultation and submit their views for consideration. It was also essential that the development of the Local Plan continued in order to give clarity and certainty to planning and development arrangements in the district.

The Committee suggested that further communications work be undertaken on the consultation to ensure that as many residents as possible were aware that it was going ahead but agreed that maintaining control of strategic planning in the district was very important in order to prevent inappropriate development. Officers were thanked for the work they had done on the Local Plan so far; Members emphasised the importance of encouraging responses to the consultation in their local communities.

## Draft Development Strategy for Affordable Housing

The Committee expressed the view that the Council should be pursuing new housing stock alongside housing associations. Officers confirmed that they would be able to look into this approach in more detail, but that some types of units were harder to bring forward than others. The Council needed to ensure that there was sufficient flexibility and opportunities that could be identified as they arose; the build costs for local authorities were often high, but that it was possible to find a solution to the delivery of housing with the right resources. Members agreed that as a local authority, the Council was best placed to know what development the area needed and where, but that developers needed to offer affordable housing and it should be pursued accordingly.

The Committee noted that it was costly for the Council to build housing compared to buying it. In the last year 120 affordable homes had been built in the district, but they had all been procured by housing associations. Members were informed that there was approximately £8m in reserves with which the Council could buy or build homes, and he was determined to see more done in this regard.

In response to a query, Officers explained the process for Right to Buy buybacks, and acknowledged that in some circumstances it was viable, but not always. The Committee then thanked Officers for the information and asked that the matter be brought back to the Committee again when more work had been undertaken on the policy.

## Empty Property Strategy and Action Plan

Officers explained that the North Yorkshire Empty Property Strategy and local Selby District Action Plan was agreed and adopted in January 2018. The strategy aimed to reduce the number of long-term empty homes through a co-ordinated approach and the local action plan set out how the Council would target empty homes across the

district, and encourage, support and enforce owners to bring empty homes back into use.

Members noted that the report provided an update on the progress of the implementation of the strategy and the action plan.

#### Work Programme 2020-21

The Committee considered the Policy Review work programme for 2020-21 and made a number of suggestions and amendments, including the Licensing Policy, business grants due to Covid-19 and summaries of public responses to the Budget and Local Plan consultations.

The Policy Review Committee will be meeting next on 16 March 2021.

**Councillor Andrew Lee**  
**Chair, Policy Review Committee**