

## Minutes

### Scrutiny Committee

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Venue:	Microsoft Teams - Remote
Date:	Thursday, 20 January 2022
Time:	5.00 pm
Present:	Councillors S Shaw-Wright (Chair), W Nichols (Vice-Chair), A Lee, N Reader, R Sweeting, K Ellis, J McCartney and J Chilvers  Councillor Tim Grogan, Executive Member for Health and Culture
Officers present:	Karen Iveson, Chief Finance Officer, Stuart Robinson, Head of Business Development and Improvement, Sarah Thompson, Housing Service Manager, Phil Hiscott, Strategic Asset Management and Property Services Manager, Hannah McCoubrey, Housing Strategy Officer, Victoria Foreman, Democratic Services Officer
Others present:	Martin Blakey, Wildlife Habitat Protection Trust (WHPT) and David Craven, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT)
Public:	0
Press:	0

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#### **33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **34 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest.

#### **35 MINUTES**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2021.

**RESOLVED:**

**To approve the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 December 2021 for signing by the Chair.**

**36 CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There was no Chair's address to the Committee.

**37 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO REVIEW - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND CULTURE**

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Health and Culture to the meeting. The Executive Member gave an overview of the recent work within his portfolio, which included the following matters:

- Contract succession for waste management and collection; Selby District Council was currently the only authority in North Yorkshire that outsourced waste collection; a cross-party group would be meeting soon to discuss the contract.
- Hydro-treated vegetable oil was being trialled as fuel within the waste management operation.
- The covert camera to detect fly tipping had not yet been installed, but once permission had been granted and a location identified, it would be sited.
- The number of Covid-19 infections in the district was reducing steadily.
- With regards to gypsies and travellers, there were differences as to the speed of action that could be taken following their incursions onto public and private land. A pitch currently being dealt with was in Monk Fryston.
- The Executive Member informed the Committee that he was a member on the Culture and Visitor Economy Board, who were doing a lot of work to encourage members of the public from surrounding areas to visit the Selby district.
- Artist Dr Katayoun Dowlatshahi had been commissioned to create new public artwork as part of the Transforming Cities Fund, inspired by the ideas of students from Selby College. Examples of the students' coursework was currently on display in Selby Abbey.

Members of the Committee welcomed the use of the covert camera to tackle fly tipping and suggested that more were required; the siting of the cameras was important, which the Executive Member agreed with, and as a result he would be asking Officers to contact Bradford Council for best practice, as they had over 50.

The Committee asked a number of further questions on various issues including illegal gypsy and traveller camps, the development of arts and culture in the district, jobs, health and wellbeing, covert camera usage,

flytipping and environmental crime.

The Executive Member acknowledged the concerns around gypsy and traveller encampments and was working with Officers to deal with the current illegal camp on the A63.

With regards to art and culture there would be a focus on projects and use of grants not just in the district's towns but also in villages and smaller communities; there were upcoming meetings with Officers to discuss this work as well as a plan for jobs.

Members noted that there was close working by Officers with NYCC on health and wellbeing in local communities, including a link to outreach work with villages in the area.

The Executive Member was unsure as to the future arrangements for waste collection in the district after LGR as discussions and plans were still in their early stages; when he knew more, he would let Members know.

The Committee felt that fly tipping and environmental crimes were not taken seriously enough by the police and justice system, and as such, were not dealt with appropriately. More needed to be done to prosecute it, part of which would be involving the police to a greater extent, with ANPR units used more widely.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for attending the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**The Committee noted the update.**

**38 YORKSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST - BARLOW COMMON ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021 AND THE WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION TRUST - HAMBLETON HOUGH ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021 (S/21/13)**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Martin Blakey from the Wildlife Habitat Protection Trust (WHPT) and David Craven from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT). Members were asked to consider the content of the 2020-21 annual reports and make any recommendations.

The Committee noted that Barlow Common had been leased out to the YWT since 1 March 2013 on a 99- year peppercorn agreement; They report annually to the Council on their activity. The report covered the last six months of the year 2020-21 due to the extended report to the Scrutiny Committee on 26 November 2020, following reporting delays due to Covid-19.

Members were informed that as part of the lease, YWT had to provide a site-specific, ten-year Management Plan. With the ten-year anniversary of the lease approaching in 2023, YWT will renew the Management Plan for

the next ten years, throughout the coming year.

Hambleton Hough had been leased out to the WHPT since 17 September 2012. The agreement was also on a 99-year peppercorn agreement lease; the WHPT also provided the Council with an annual report. An initial ten-year Woodland Management Plan was put in place for the site. The plan was due to expire and would be reviewed and updated by the WHPT soon.

Members suggested a visit by the Committee to both Hambleton Hough and Barlow Common when it was warmer to see the work that was being done at both sites.

**RESOLVED:**

**The Committee noted the annual reports and agreed that a visit to both sites by the Committee should take place later in 2022.**

**39 UPDATE ON THE CONTACT CENTRE MOVE - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Head of Business Development and Improvement gave an update on the move of the Contact Centre and information about the impact of the pandemic on the original plans.

The Committee noted that there had been changes in how residents were communicating with the Council, in particular a shift towards more online and telephone contact. Despite the pandemic there were still a significant number of contacts every month (around 10k), but contact centre staff were continuing to support customers whilst working from home. Support had been provided to residents throughout the pandemic through the use of web forms and by focusing efforts on developing online access to Council services that receive the most queries, such as council tax and benefits. In February 2022 an online housing portal would be launched.

Members acknowledged that the extension to the Council offices had been completed in 2019, into which the telephone service had now been moved. Face to face customer service delivery had recommenced in August 2021 on an appointment-only basis; numbers for such appointments remained relatively low.

Officers explained that the Market Cross lease would run out in 2022 and that the current year would see the continuation of face to face appointments at the Civic Centre supported by improvements to online services. Any service development would be done in alignment to the expectations for future service delivery at the new North Yorkshire Council following LGR. Contact Centre services are being looked at in two LGR workstreams; locality and customer services.

Members discussed the cost of the lease at Market Cross and if it had to be paid while empty, the impact on face to face appointments now that the Contact Centre wasn't in the town centre and the safety of the rooms

in which face to face appointments took place, i.e. the installation of panic alarms.

**RESOLVED:**

**The Committee noted the update.**

**40 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND BUSINESS PLAN 2020-2025  
(2021/22 REVIEW) (S/21/14)**

The Committee received the report of the Housing and Environmental Health Service Manager and the Housing Strategy Officer which asked Members to consider the report which set out the HRA Business Plan 2020-2025 and reflected the revised cost and income profiles in the budget proposals for 22/23 - 24/25. The HRA Business Plan report had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 6 January 2022.

Officers explained that on 5 December 2019 the Executive had approved the final version of the Council's Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. This plan detailed how, over the period 2020-2025, the Council would both invest in current stock, as well as increase overall housing supply in the district.

Members noted that it also provided a long-term financial forecast for the HRA over the period 2020-2050. It was now time to complete a review of the plan, in light of the time that had passed, as well as the unprecedented circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, along with other socio-economic factors, the Council faced significant financial difficulties in trying to maintain the Business Plan's commitment.

The key issues were:

- the introduction of new and essential safety investment in Council properties;
- a continued deficit within the Housing Development Programme, which meant that the Council continued to sell more properties via Right to Buy than it replaced;
- an ever-growing decarbonisation agenda which resulted in a widescale need for property refurbishment and potential regeneration; and
- increased costs of materials and labour meaning the Council received less for its money.

The Committee acknowledged that growing cost and income pressures meant that changes to the Council's plans for debt repayment were needed. The revised Business Plan proposed that, rather than maintaining repayment against the original 30-year timeline, repayment was extended to match the loans actually taken out. The potential for this change was signalled in the approved Business Plan, but Officers were now recommending that this was formalised so that a viable HRA could be sustained.

Officers also gave an update on housing repairs, due to the concern expressed at a previous Council meeting about the delays to work because of the pandemic. The Scrutiny Committee had considered the matter at its meeting in June 2021, where Officers had explained the processes and the issues being experienced. Since that meeting additional resources had been brought in to work on the backlog of jobs for the past seven months; 86% of the work had been cleared and a significant effort was being made to complete the remaining 14% as soon as practicable. Pre-pandemic there would have been around 1,500 to 1,800 jobs on the housing repairs system; at present there was around 1,000. The work was far from complete but Officers were working hard to get the delays cleared.

Members considered the report and repairs update and asked numerous questions on matters including the possibility of earlier and more specific appointment times for working residents, external painting, repairs to paths and fences, misting in double glazed windows, thermostat installation and their availability in Council properties, repairs turnaround for empty and void properties, contact details on letters to residents, grass cutting and properties with remaining solid fuel systems. Members were informed that grass cutting was the responsibility of the Contracts Team and that this would be forwarded to them as a concern.

Officers explained that specifically timed appointments were not possible at present, but that the new housing system would make the arranging of appointments more detailed; specific times would be strived for when using the new system. With regards to the painting of the outside of homes, this wasn't undertaken by the Council, although some render had been renewed at properties on Abbots Road in Selby.

With regards to fencing, around £50k worth of fence works were done each year, but when it came to paths there was no overall scheme across the district; where there were continual issues with paving the Council used concrete in order to reduce the need for further repairs. Around 4000m of new paths had been installed on the Council's estates, but were not a priority compared to the work required inside tenants' homes. Misting in double glazing had been addressed partially in 2019, but there was scope for further work again on this, as some units did need to be replaced.

Officers explained that there were three types of void properties with differing targets and delays; standard voids were doing well, major voids were slightly over the target 45 days due to resource issues, and refurbishment voids were ahead of the 180 day target. Members requested data comparing the past three years of progress on void properties and emphasised the importance of bringing voids back into use so that people needing homes could be housed. Officers informed the Committee that there was an ongoing shortage of some tradesmen which often further delayed work.

Lastly, as there were different heating systems operating in properties across the district, the installation of thermostats varied; however, it was confirmed that the new air source heating systems did have thermostats installed as standard. A small number of properties were still using solid fuel as a heating system which made thermostat use very difficult. The Council was keen to move away from solid fuel (i.e. coal) due to the cost and the impact of the resulting carbon on the environment. Thermostats were useful so that tenants could monitor and adjust the energy use in their homes, which would be very important with the forthcoming increases in gas and electricity prices and the overall desire to reduce carbon emissions. Officers were asked to bring any back further figures and information on the above to the Committee.

Members acknowledged that they had asked Officers for a significant range of information and data; the Committee agreed that a single issue meeting on housing repairs should be arranged in the next few months in order to give Officers time to collate answers, and to give the Committee the opportunity to focus on what was clearly an important topic. The Executive Member for Housing would also be invited to the single issue meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. The Committee noted the report.**
- 2. Officers were asked to provide the following information after the meeting or at a future 'single issue' meeting of the Committee focused on housing repairs, to which the Executive Member for Housing would be invited:**
  - figures on the last 3 years of voids, breakdown of repairs progress, how many voids there currently were; and**
  - the lack of direct contact details (i.e. email addresses/telephone numbers) on letters to residents.**

**41 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the 2021-22 work programme.

Members asked that the Leader be invited to the single issue meeting on housing repairs, and that Officers try to arrange the PFCC's attendance at committee earlier than June 2022. The Executive Member for Health and Culture offered to contact the PFCC's office regarding the matter as he was a member of the North Yorkshire Police and Crime Board.

Members discussed other future topics and suggested public transport provision in the area, i.e. buses and trains, plans for the future and potential cuts to services; representatives from companies such as Arriva

could be invited.

Members noted the work programme.

**RESOLVED:**

**The Committee noted the work programme 2021-22 and:**

- **asked that a single issue meeting on Council housing repairs be arranged in the 2022-23 municipal year, to which the Leader would be invited as Lead Executive Member for Housing;**
- **that the attendance of the PFCC at a future meeting of the committee be arranged for earlier than June 2022 if possible; and**
- **that the topic of public transport be added to the work programme for consideration at a future meeting.**

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm.