



Policy Review Committee Report to Council – Cllr Chris Pearson

The Policy Review Committee has met once since the last update to Council in December 2021.

11 January 2022

Members considered the following matters:

Update from the Low Carbon Working Group (LCWG)

An update on the work of the LCWG covered the priorities identified at the workshop held on 9 December 2021, which included tree planting, the retrofitting of social housing, biodiversity and greener energy tariffs.

The LGR's (local government reorganisation) climate change working group would be held within the policy workstream, and that membership of the group would be drawn from climate leads across different North Yorkshire authorities.

Officers went on to give updates on various projects including climate change training module for Members and Officers, the collation of the remaining data for the calculation of the Council's 2019-20 and 2020-21 carbon footprint, moving the Council's energy tariff over to renewables from April 2022 and a three-month trial using hydrotreated oil with waste collection vehicles.

Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2022-23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan

Members discussed the draft budget, capital programme and medium-term financial plan for 2022-23. Members made several comments:

- the freeze on council tax;
- number of consultation responses;
- the impact of the rise in interest rates, the 2% rise in Council employee salaries and the increase in National Insurance;
- the importance of Members' understanding of the Council's reserves;
- receipt of renewable energy business rates;
- the differences between the expected and awarded financial settlement;
- public sector pay restraint;
- if IT projects and the replacement of systems were truly necessary ahead of LGR;
- the spending of funds within the Programme for Growth;
- the increase in housing rents by 4%;
- levels of business rate relief;
- that housing rent decisions should not be taken by the Executive but by full Council, as the 4% rise was unfair and unreasonable, and would be detrimental to tenants.

The Committee recognised that the recurring deficit was unlikely to recover and as such, it was likely that the new authority would have to tackle the matter early on. There would be challenges ahead and savings would need to be identified at some point in the future.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the proposed budget was accepted by the Committee without amendment.

Street Cleansing in Selby District

Officers gave an update on the recent review of the street cleansing service.

Members were encouraged by the change but expressed their concern about the amounts of litter on the edges of settlements but were pleased with the litter posters that had been produced and requested more copies for other areas.

Further work with schools was encouraged, and Members were pleased that data on litter and dog bin collection would be shared with ward Members.

Members asked about clearance of leaves on the highway and some members of the public who cleared litter themselves, sometimes on busy roads. Such people could borrow the Council's litter picking equipment, but a risk assessment was required, and they would not be covered by the Council's public liability insurance.

An assessment by the Keep Britain Tidy campaign had said that the district was a good and clear area for litter and fly tipping.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Adaptations Policy 2021

The Committee received the report which had come to Committee to allow Members to review the draft Adaptations (DFG) Policy 2021 and provide feedback as part of the consultation process.

Members asked if any consultation work had been undertaken with local disability groups; and there was general concern from Members as to the time it took to make adaptations to properties in order for people to stay in their homes, and how the Covid-19 pandemic could have made it worse.

Officers explained that Personal Independence Payments were a passported benefit, administered by the government, not Selby District Council.

Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23

The Committee received the report which would allow Members to review the draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23 and provide feedback as part of the consultation process.

Members asked how private homeowners would be aware of the assistance offered; Officers explained that it could be through North Yorkshire County Council, Selby District Council's website or social services.

Covid-19 Government Grant

The Committee received the report which had been requested by Members and set out business grants in September 2021 to give further detail about the use of the remainder of the government's Covid-19 grant to the Council, and details of security, fraud, and data protection for previous payments of the grants.

The Chair asked what could stop a small business from applying for a grant, and Members were pleased that constituents had reported that the Revenues and Benefits Team had been very helpful and efficient. In response to a question about remaining funds, Officers explained that the £167k could be spent up to 31 March 2022, after which it had to be returned to central government. However, this date could be extended. The Council would urgently be looking at businesses in the district that may need help.

Lastly, Members were disappointed that the recipients of the grants had to pay tax on the amounts; Officers acknowledged this and emphasised that they tried to make it very clear to all recipients that the amounts would be taxed.

Universal Credit Update

The Committee received an update on Universal Credit. Members acknowledged that UC was now a wholly DWP function, but that it would still be useful for them to be aware if numbers of claimants was rising. Officers explained that the Council didn't report back on any other legacy benefits; however, the Committee agreed that the update should be kept on the work programme going forward, but only when there was a significant change in numbers, i.e., a shift of 10% each way.

Work Programme

The Committee considered the 2021-22 work programme presented by Democratic Services.

An update on Universal Credit would be maintained on the work programme but the street cleaning item removed.

With reference to the Corporate Policy Framework, the development of this had been complicated by the upcoming local government reorganisation (LGR); as such it was suggested that this matter be removed from the work programme.

Members asked if a report on the Council's industrial units could be brought to the fore; Officers advised that such an item had been suggested as a joint project between the Audit and Governance, Scrutiny and Policy Review Committees.

It was agreed that the best way forward would be an information report for the Policy Review Committee, after which the matter could be brought forward as a joint piece of work between the three committees. It was acknowledged by Members that this work would be subject to the demands of LGR, specifically Officer time and availability.

The Policy Review Committee will be meeting next on 12 April 2022.

Councillor Chris Pearson – Chair of the Policy Review Committee