



Councillor Steve Shaw-Wright, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Update to Council – 21 March 2023

The Scrutiny Committee has met twice since the update given at the last meeting of Council in December 2022; the meetings took place on 19 January and 16 February 2023.

The following items were considered at the meeting on 19 January 2023

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (Barlow Common) and Wildlife Habitat Protection Trust (Hambleton Hough) Annual Reports 2021-22

The Chair welcomed to the meeting David Powell from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) and Martin and Craig Blakey from the Wildlife Habitat Protection Trust (WHPT).

Mr Powell advised Members that he had taken over the management of Barlow Common in April 2022, since that time he had been writing the new ten-year Management Plan, which would come into force from April 2023. Members heard that the new Plan had a more holistic approach to the management at the site which aimed to support and boost some of the species that had been found to be present at Barlow Common. It was noted that the site benefitted from a dedicated group of volunteers who had provided 449 hours of volunteer time in the past ten months.

Members heard that the YWT were working to promote and encourage the re-introduction of school visits as the site was important for educational purposes, along with exploring different funding options to help make better, sustainable use of the visitor centre building. The Chair stated that he visited Barlow Common regularly and he felt that the site had improved noticeably.

In terms of Hambleton Hough, the Committee were informed that over the past 12 months the WHPT had concentrated its efforts on planting 4000 new trees and putting measures in place to control bracken and undergrowth to allow the new trees to grow and mature unhindered. In April 2022 a large section of Hambleton Hough had been destroyed by fire, however Members were pleased to hear that the site had since been re-planted and re-staked. Moving forward the WHPT would be monitoring the site, providing regular maintenance of the woodland to ensure all the paths were clear; and replacing any trees that did not survive the replanting.

Members felt that Hambleton Hough was a lovely place which local people could reach easily by bicycle, with their families, for a cost-free day out.

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Adults and Children Boards Annual Reports 2021-22

The Committee heard that the aim for the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NYSAB) was to reinforce the message that keeping people safe in our communities during a pandemic was everyone's business. Other priorities for the NYSAB included homelessness, preparing for the introduction of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS), changes in the Integrated Care Systems (ICS), the Local Government Re-organisation (LGR); and creating a culture of shared learning to enable partner agencies to continue to work together to keep adults in North Yorkshire safe from harm, abuse and neglect.

In respect of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) Independent Scrutineers Annual Report, the Committee were informed that the priorities moving forward were focussed on the development of the NYSCP website to support the broader focus on the BYINY priorities, access to the information, and seeking to develop the way feedback from frontline practice shaped the work of the group.

In terms of the Selby Local Safeguarding Partnership (LSP), it had been agreed that the local priorities for further development would be domestic abuse and both child and adult exploitation, predominantly around online safety.

Director of Public Health – Annual Report 2021-22

The Director of Public Health presented her report which asked the Committee to consider and note the content of the 2021-22 Director of Public Health Annual Report: lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, with the report focusing on the broader experiences of what individuals and communities across North Yorkshire had lived through during the Covid-19 pandemic, the wider impacts felt by communities; and the lessons to be learned from these for the future.

Members noted that communications and cascading the messages out to the public had played a key part, and that the mantra had been hands, face, space. The vaccination programme had also played a critical part in moving forward and allowing the freedoms that the public enjoyed today, and that it was not only about protecting communities but also about improving health, the quality of life and having a healthy life expectancy.

Members acknowledged that the pandemic had brought out the best qualities in people and that the local community had come together to support each other during the pandemic.

Update on Leisure Services Provision

Members noted the quarterly update on the provision of leisure services, covering the period April to December 2022. It was confirmed that there had been a positive trend in terms of gym membership and attendance at the leisure centre but that the year-on-year performance figures did indicate utilisation of the facilities still remained below pre pandemic levels. The figures were attributed to a number of factors to include levels of inflation, utility costs, and households with less disposable money to spend on leisure activities, which all impacted on the service.

Members appreciated the difficulties being felt, the Chair stated that the issue of low attendance figures was County wide, and not just at leisure facilities but also at theatres and other facilities where people were in close proximity to other users.

Corporate Performance Report Q2, 2022-23

Officers summarised progress in Quarter 2, with 61% of KPIs reported showing improvement over the longer term, and 78% of KPIs reported were on target.

A query was raised in relation to the Council's housing revenue account and the additional funding requirements which had been presented to full Council at the meeting held on Tuesday 17 January 2023. A Member commented that they had heard a news bulletin run by Radio York earlier in the afternoon of the meeting. Radio York had reported that Selby District Council were to reduce the amount of money to be spent on housing repairs, while increasing the amount of money spent on Void properties, and it was queried if the figures quoted by Radio York were accurate. The officer stated that they would speak with the officers concerned to ensure that the radio station was contacted, and the correct monetary information supplied.

Work Programme 2022-23

The Committee agreed that the provisional meeting on the 16 February 2023 be confirmed in the Committee calendar.

The following items were considered at the meeting on 16 February 2023

Financial Results and Budget Exceptions – Q2, 2022-23

Members noted that at the end of Quarter 2, current estimated full year revenue outturn estimates indicated surpluses of (£371k) for the General Fund (GF) and (£68k) for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); these figures included the proposed pay award. The capital programme showed an underspend at the end of Quarter 2. The General Fund programme had two projects which had seen delays, these resulted in a £500k in year underspend, with the projects expected to be undertaken in 2023-24.

Officers explained that the key forecasted variances were mainly as a result of the return on Council investment income which had performed positively when compared to the budgets for the year. In addition, an expected saving of £195k in the HRA which would have been generated from the implementation of the housing system would now not be achieved in year, due to the timing of the implementation of phase two of the project.

Treasury Management – Monitoring Report - Q2, 2022-23

Officers explained that on average the Council's investments held in the North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) Investment pool totalled £85.9m over the quarter at an average rate of 1.37% and earned interest of £296.5k. The total interest earned to the end of September 2023 stood at £458.2 (£330.5k allocated to the General Fund; £127.7k allocated to the HRA) which was £382.0k above the year-to-date budget.

Members were informed that current performance trends indicated that forecast returns for the year could be in the region of £1,189.3k (£857.9k GF, £331.4k HRA) a total budget surplus of £1,036.8k.

Members noted that in addition to investments held in the pool, the council had £5.34m invested in property funds as at 30 September 2022. The funds had achieved a 3.08% revenue return and 2.20% capital loss over the course of the year. This resulted in revenue income of £84.5k to the end of Q2 and an 'unrealised' capital loss of £120.2k.

Work Programme 2022-23

The Committee noted the 2022-23 work programme as presented in the agenda.

Future Meeting: The next meeting of the Committee will be on 23 March 2023.

Councillor Steve Shaw-Wright, Chair of Scrutiny Committee