

Meeting	Corporate Scrutiny Committee
Date	1 October 2025
Present	Councillors Fenton (Chair), Merrett (Vice-Chair), Baxter, Coles, K Taylor, Watson, Wells, Fisher (Substitute for Cllr Ayre) and Hollyer (Substitute for Cllr Widdowson)
Apologies	Councillors Ayre and Widdowson
In Attendance	Councillor Claire Douglas – Leader of the Council
Officers Present	Garry Taylor – Director of City Development Patrick Looker – Assistant Director of Finance Michael James – Head of Communications and Engagement Julie Gallagher – Head of Democratic Services Bryn Roberts - Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

24. Apologies for Absence (5:33pm)

Apologies were received and noted from Cllr Ayre, who was substituted by Cllr Fisher and from Cllr Widdowson, who was substituted by Cllr Hollyer.

25. Declarations of Interest (5:34pm)

Members were asked to declare at this point in the meeting any disclosable pecuniary interests or other registrable interests that they might have in the business on the agenda, if they had not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests.

None were declared

26. Public Participation (5:34pm)

It was reported that there had been two registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Ben Ffrench spoke on item 5 on behalf of York Green Party, discussing what good communication and engagement from the council should look

like. He stated that the communications and engagement strategy was a really important document and it was important to get it right, otherwise the Council would be failing York residents.

Andy D'Agorne spoke on item 4 on behalf of York Green Party, welcoming progress but raising concerns about elements of the plan and impact on completion of transport objectives.

27. Major Projects - Castle and Eye Project (5:41pm)

The report was presented by the Director of City Development, Head of City Development and Assistant Director of Finance.

The Director of City Development addressed member queries about the scheme, explaining that the present car park was of poor quality in a unique location, and there was also a fundamental need to take traffic out of the core of the city.

Members asked about the revenue implications to the loss of income from parking. The Assistant Director of Finance responded that there were no plans for further borrowing from the council, as funds were already secured, the intention was to seek additional grant funding from West Yorkshire travel.

He advised that two million pounds in revenue was expected from the Castle Car Park this year. There was typically capacity to accommodate this parking in other city car parks, but not all of these car parks were run by the council, consequently the redistributed parking revenue would not necessarily all come back to the authority.

Members asked for assurance that money for the development would be obtainable from West Yorkshire Travel and would not come out of the budget for the York Outer ring road. The Director of City Development confirmed this, stating that there would be no impact on this budget, and the West Yorkshire Transport Fund were positive about the plans.

Members wanted to ensure the earmarked £200,000 was enough to ensure all planned improvements could be completed around the Piccadilly multi-storey car park with regard to personal safety/CCTV. The Director of City Development assured that fully monitored CCTV was included in plans under this budget. Panic buttons would also be considered though were not part of current plans.

Members also raised the issue of Blue Badge spaces in this Car Park, given reports of problems with reliability of the passenger lift with the

current car park design. Members asked whether officers had considered maintenance of blue badge spaces at the Castle Car Park throughout the alterations. The Director of City Development advised there were no current plans to improve the lift but officers could consider this issue from a maintenance perspective. He said that currently continuity of Blue Badge spaces at the Castle Car Park was not being factored in, as there were a number of practical considerations that needed to be accounted for here, but he would look to maintain spaces if possible.

Members expressed concern regarding the potential revenue loss to remove the car park and the Director of City Development responded that while non-council car parks could be used in lieu of the Castle Car Park, the local NCP car parks operated with a substantial amount of contract parking. The Assistant Director of Finance added that historically when the Castle Car Park was full, other council car parks had benefitted from displaced traffic, and when the Rose Theatre occupied the space of the Castle Car Park there had not been a significant revenue loss.

Members asked whether officers had received any soft intelligence about car park choice among city centre businesses. The Director of City Development stated that some consultation with businesses had been conducted.

Members asked about the move away from using the planned park as an event space. The Director of City Development said this had been an Executive decision based on representations from heritage organisations. He explained that the site was not well served for a substantial power supply, but recent amendments based on consultation had been made to put in water and base-level electric so that small-scale events could be undertaken in the space.

Members asked about the bridge over the river Foss being removed from plans and asked whether anything in the scheme precluded reintroducing this concept at a later date. The Director of City Planning noted that the area of planned development for this bridge was located in an area of extremely special biodiversity which would need to be mitigated, and the bridge had been removed from the scheme for ecological, rather than financial, reasons. Were this to be revisited in the future, it would need to be brought back to council as a separate scheme.

Members raised concern over using the area for markets and events when the building adjacent to the site served as York's Crown Court. The Director of City Development said that officers had not previously engaged with the court, but the proposed area for events was on the other side of the site. Planting as part of the scheme discouraged lingering on court side of Eye

of York. Events would not be on this side, rather on the grassed area by the Tower, pulling people away from the court area.

The chair summed up the points raised, and the committee thanked officers and

Resolved: To note the report and support the resolutions of executive as set out in the report.

Reason: To support the progression of the Castle and Eye scheme to delivery phases.

28. Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy (6:42pm)

The report was presented by Head of Communications and Engagement and the Council Leader.

The Head of Communications and Engagement acknowledged the public speaker and explained that the strategy intended to developing a proper map of “seldom heard voices”.

He also discussed using partner advocates or “trusted voices” to help convey messaging and expressed the need to update the social media protocol to reflect that the executive was no longer a coalition.

Members asked about:

- The social media protocol – specifically the council taking a more proactive approach to setting the record straight and correcting erroneous statements.

The Head of Communications and Engagement explained that dealing with misinformation and disinformation was a complex issue and creating advocates in online spaces could assist in correcting this messaging.

- Whether the work of neighbourhood caretakers, health trainers and work undertaken by the Social Care teams, had been considered as part of the strategy.

The Head of Communications and Engagement responded that the work of neighbourhood caretakers could set a precedent for other frontline services and while the communications team had told their story, they had also asked the team to tell their own story. If this method proved to be a success, then that could be rolled out to other services.

The Council Leader added that communications team had really changed how the council communicates with residents, and as a result engagement levels had significantly increased. The new strategy, particularly the employment of personal stories, had really been successful.

- How “trusted voices” are chosen to communicate on the council’s behalf.

The Head of Communications and Engagement clarified that the “trusted voices” were people and groups linked to an objective the team wished to communicate; for example, when reaching out to a community to discuss an issue, the council might look for a key business such as a local hairdresser’s to interact on its behalf.

As to who decided these voices, he said the communications team would make a judgement on how best to reach residents, whether through direct communication from the council or “trusted voices”.

- Digital exclusion and whether the council could better acknowledge people who are not online.

The Head of Communications and Engagement acknowledged this issue and conceded it was something that could be looked into.

Members suggested that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation had undertaken work in this area and it was suggested the Council could potentially work with them.

The Council Leader also acknowledged this challenge, though she noted citywide magazines like Local Link were open to printing direct council communications, and this magazine had a circulation of 85,000 households.

- The difference between communicating things people need to know and communicating things the council would like them to know.

The Head of Communications and Engagement assured that “bad” news was not being buried and giving residents information on local services was at the core of their work. He explained that there were limits to the extent the council could put certain information through official digital channels without impacting the algorithm, therefore care was taken to balance the information put out via official channels and use of partners was beneficial here.

The Council Leader added that partner organisations could be doing more to facilitate smoother communications and public engagement, but the renewed strategy allowed for these conversations to happen.

- How it was decided whether a public response was provided by an Executive Member or an officer.

The Head of Communications and Engagement said the strategy outlined it should be an Executive Member speaking on policy and an officer speaking on process. A liaison via the political assistant was also outlined in the media protocol.

- Whether the council could post in community groups or use social media and paid promotion to get more engagement.

The Head of Communications and Engagement suggested working with ward councillors and the Communities team on this.

He advised that “the council” (formally) often cannot join community groups due to entrance criteria, but it was certainly possible for ward councillors to join community groups and advocate.

He confirmed that paid posts were used by CYC to promote projects such as Station Gateway and acknowledged that Emojis/TikTok could be a potential strategy, but that more work would need to be done regarding how to best use these with the team’s current limited resources.

- How the stated delivery priorities had been chosen.

The Council Leader confirmed that the delivery priorities were outlined by the administration, having been laid out in the Council Plan, which spoke to the city’s priorities.

Members suggested that within the strategy it should be explicitly stated “why we are doing this” and providing information of use to residents getting to where they need to get to.

The Chair summarised suggestions, and the committee

Resolved: To note the draft strategy, with particular regard to the following considerations:

- a. The approach and actions within the strategy to enable the Council to achieve the following aims:
 - i. To directly support the council’s core commitments and priorities

- ii. To communicate effectively with all the groups listed, in order to deliver the roles of the function.
 - iii. To be inclusive and accessible in how this is done.
- b. The need to structure the work in the most effective way to ensure delivery against the Council Plan priorities and organisation's objectives.
- c. To ensure the proposed approach to branding and tone of voice supports the objectives of the strategy.

Reason: To support effective delivery of the communications function.

29. City of York Council's Size Submission - report to the Boundary Commission, Phase One, October 2025 (7:36pm)

The report was presented by the Head of Democratic Services and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group for the Boundary Commission Review on Council Size (Cllr Merrett).

The Task and Finish Group Chair explained that the Group met on four occasions and alongside its members, in attendance at all meetings, was a representative of the Boundary Commission. The Task and Finish Group was also supported in its work by Officers within the Council, including the Council's Monitoring Officer, the Head of Democratic Services, the Electoral Services Manager and the Head of Business Intelligence. Through these discussions the Council's submission to the Boundary Commission was produced.

The Task and Finish Group Chair thanked officers for their work and asked that formal thanks be passed on to Tom Rutherford of the Boundary Commission, who had assisted the group.

He advised that the group had agreed to recommend that the council should retain an odd number of members, to avoid politicisation of the Lord Mayor's role in the event of a tied vote. This followed the convention observed in prior submissions to the Boundary Commission.

He noted that consensus had not been reached between political groups regarding council numbers, and that therefore ultimately each group had put forward their own suggestion.

The Head of Democratic Services added that the Boundary Commission were very clear on what they expected from the report, and that their guidance had been followed in writing the report.

She explained that in addition to building a factual profile of York, the report also discussed governance arrangements and scrutiny functions in the city.

She reiterated that the task and finish group had hoped to work towards a consensual position, which had ultimately not been achieved and the second part of the report was therefore composed of four separate submissions from the three different political groups and one independent councillor.

The committee noted several minor points of amendment concerning terminology, clarification and accuracy. The Head of Democratic Services acknowledged these.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that, if approved by the committee, this submission would be presented to Full Council at an extraordinary meeting on Thursday, 16 October, before being submitted to the Boundary Commission on Friday, 17 October. The Boundary Commission would then look to begin public consultation on Tuesday, 25 November. She clarified that this did not need to go to the Executive for approval.

Subject to the minor corrections identified during the meeting, after a show of hands it was

Resolved: That the Committee note and endorse the Report, with unanimous approval.

Reason: In order that the Report may be presented to Full Council and then submitted to the Boundary Commission.

Cllr S Fenton, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.33 pm and finished at 7.48 pm].