

Meeting	Economy and Place Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date	17 January 2023
Present	Councillors K Taylor (Chair), Daubeney (Vice-Chair), Cuthbertson, Hook, Kilbane, Pearson and D Taylor
In Attendance	Simon Brereton (Head of Economy) James Gilchrist (Director of Transport, Environment and Planning) Ben Grabham (Head of Environmental Services) Patrick Looker (Head of Service Finance) Cllr Mason (Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning) Dave Meigh (Contracts Manager) Cllr Widdowson (Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change)

5. Declarations of Interest [17.35]

Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest that they might have in respect of the business on the agenda. There were none.

6. Minutes [17.35]

Resolved: That;

- i. the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.
- ii. the Democracy Officer follow up on the progress of the recommendations from the meeting held on 22 November 2022.

7. Public Participation [17.36]

It was reported that there had been one registration to speak under the Council's Public Participation Scheme. Flick Williams spoke on agenda item 4 Public Realm Update. She advised that York Disability Rights Forum had written to the council on 12 September 2022 regarding accessible toilets. She listed a number of problems with accessible toilets in the city centre noting that the only tangible improvement was to the lip of the Silver

Street accessible toilet and that the only accessible toilets were at York Explore Library and Marks and Spencer. She noted problems with Changing Places toilets and in particular the Changing Places toilet at the Guildhall, which needed bigger dimensions. She asked whether the council was getting value for money on external toilets. In response to a question from a Member she explained that she had been asked to use the toilet in reception at the Guildhall when she needed to access the bigger toilet. The Member undertook to follow this up with the Guildhall.

8. Public Realm Update [17.42]

Members considered a report that provided an overview and update on the services and functions managed by Public Realm. This included delivery through in house provision, the private sector and through a variety of arrangements with the community and voluntary sector.

The Chair expressed concern regarding reports being received in a timely fashion. The Director or of Environment, Transport and Planning, Strategy and Contracts Manager, Head of Environmental Services and Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change introduced themselves to the Committee. Officers provided an update on the core functions and areas covered by public realm, including challenges and opportunities for services. The Chair thanked staff in the public realm teams for their work.

In response to questions from Members, Officers clarified that

- Regarding conveying to residents on grass cutting that councillors had 100% agreed to the pollinator strategy, this was set out in the content of responses to residents.
- There were three types of machines for street sweeping. Two small articulated machines operated in the city centre and occasionally outside, for example on Lord Mayors Walk and the other four machines; two road sweepers and two path sweepers, work outside the bar walls.
- The frequency of grass cutting was being looked at.
- Regarding HGV training, there was a staff training agreement to retain staff which is being rolled out across the wider Environmental Services.
- The articulated mini sweeper has a fixed body and the cab moved left and right.
- Regarding the terms used for meadows, this was open to interpretation and the Strategy and Contracts Manager undertook to look into the different terms being used and work being done on Chestnut watermeadow in the Haxby and Wigginton Ward.
- The development of wildflower meadows was mostly resident led.
- The 56 corporate days of volunteers referred to when staff and volunteers were working on site.

- The council was doing a pilot with the University of York on establishing a maintenance plan at the Knavesmire as a model. The Knavesmire was chosen as for the pilot after contact from Ward Councillors and the outcome of the pilot would be a template for other sites. It was noted that mistakes had been made with a number of sites and this would be addressed as part of the restructure of Environmental Services.
- Regarding progress on the pollinator strategy, there was an update to the Climate Emergency Policy and Scrutiny Committee which included an update on progress against actions. There was also a Ward upwards driven implementation of the pollinator strategy.
- Members noted a number of issues with parking on verges and encouraged Officers to work with Parish Councils. It was also requested that there be community payback in one village in Rural West Ward and for there to be cleaning up of leaves beyond the city centre. Officers advised that parking on verges had been to scrutiny over a number of years and that the Department for Transport (DfT) had talked about outlawing pavement and verge parking. It was noted that community payback chose where they worked and they had worked in outer city areas such as Dunnington.
- Asked if there had been less leaf cleaning, Officers reported that there had not been less and the challenge this year was weather, resulting in looking at leaf collecting being extended by two weeks. It was noted that leaf cleaning teams were out every day and they worked with highways on working on gulleys during road closures.
- It was explained that grandfather rights to drive HGV vehicles referred to being able to drive a 7.5 tonne vehicle on a driving licence if the licence was before 1999.
- Regarding the use of electric caged vans, it was confirmed that there were 16 electric vehicles in use, with 22 being at Hazel Court or Harewood Whin. There were 11 vans at Hessay having caging fitted and concerning electric vehicle charging, this was a month behind schedule. It was noted that the electric caged vans were now more expensive.
- It was noted that there had been issues with the two electric bin wagons and they had been sent back to the manufacturer with all expenses and hire costs covered by the manufacturer.
- It was confirmed that 'goose scarers' were a sub group of the Friends of Rowntree Park. The issue of the management geese in Rowntree Park had been to scrutiny previously. The geese were shot humanely.
- The cost of running the service of the public toilet provision in the city was £95k. There had been problems with staffing of and misuse of accessible toilets and there had been a reply to the public speaker. There was to be a meeting with the contractor regarding the signage and maintenance of the accessible toilets and it was hoped that problems with accessible toilets would be addressed, which would be on a case by case basis. It was noted that the points raised by York

Disability Rights Forum in their email of 12 September 2022 would be looked into. It was noted that an Access Officer had been appointed.

- It was confirmed that there were break clauses in the contract for accessible toilets which related to performance. This did not include items that the council held liability for.
- Referring to the points raised by the public speaker, Officers were asked what the plan was to make sure accessible toilets were usable. Officers explained that the council had worked with the police on addressing drug use and vandalism and were looking at making the toilets cashless. There was a number of solutions to problems and the officers were working with the Changing Places team on options to improve the estate. It was noted that it would cost more money to open the accessible toilets later and there needed to be an awareness around the cost.
- Concerning a business continuity plan due to the floods, staff were multi-tasking where possible and prioritising tasks to where they were needed.
- Asked if the council was good or proactive enough in communicating to residents, officers advised that information was updated on the council website. Regarding public realm, notifications were put out to Councillors. It was accepted that communication was not as good as it could be and would hopefully be addressed through the restructure.
- Regarding how secure farm tenancies were on the strays, these were not under stress and the farmers paid to graze the land. Anecdotally this seemed robust.
- Concerning staffing, there were six FTE estate workers and twelve FTE city centre workers. Overall there was 65 staff in the public realm team including the city centre and estate workers.
- Regarding how dirty the city centre was, this was not getting worse and the nature of the historic environment made it harder to clean. The council had started to work with YorkBID on work on a deep cleanse. A cleaning schedule had tried to be maintained but can be impacted by events such as the flood response.

The Chair thanked officers and the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency for attending the meeting. The Executive Member thanked the committee for their debate.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

Reason: To improve the care and maintenance of the local environment including roads and streets, the city centre and parks and green space.

[The meeting adjourned from 18.52 to 19.01].

9. Quarterly Economic Update [19.01]

Members considered a report that provided a quarterly update on the York economy. The Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning and Head of Economy were in attendance to present the report. The Head of Economy outlined the report highlighting the claimant count, job vacancies, and economically inactive statistics in York. It was noted that costs for recruitment and energy were a concern for York businesses. He added that the council continued to work with the rail sector and that there was no appetite for Great British Rail in the government. It was also noted that COVID funding had ended and that funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund would be used on Acomb Front Street.

In response to Members the Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning and Head of Economy explained that:

- There were similar levels of job vacancies in low and high paid jobs. Half of these were in hospitality and retail and the remainder split across different sectors.
- Concerning inward investment, there had been six overseas queries. The new Head of Inward Investment started in post in January and would be working on getting development partners on board for York Central. It was hoped that a government department would be coming to York and there had been a lot of interest from different parts of the rail sector.
- There had been inward investment in the city. The Head of Economy undertook to circulate the information on this to Members following the meeting. The Executive Member added that this could be included in the next update paper.
- Regarding the impact of Brexit on businesses in York, a number of European businesses based in York had been expanding.
- Regarding vacancies in hospitality, Members asked if the council needed to work more closely with housing on the cost of housing in the city. It was noted that housing was included in the economic strategy and that York was relatively expensive compared to areas outside York. It was noted that York was a difficult place to live for those on low wages.
- A Member asked if data on wage rates across the city was available and they were advised that the council only held city wide data.

Resolved: That;

- i. The content of the report be noted.

- ii. Future quarterly economic update reports be circulated to the Committee by email in the days following the Executive Member Decision Session.

Reason: In order to be updated on the progress of York's economy.

10. 2022/23 Finance and Performance Monitor 2 [17.37]

The Committee considered a report that provided details of the Quarter 2 2022-23 position for both finance and performance across services within the Place Directorate. The paper incorporates data to September 2022, which was reported to Executive on 22 November 2022. The Head of Service Finance and Director of Environment, Transport and Planning were in attendance to present the report. The Head of Service Finance gave an overview of the report noting increased costs and financial pressures. He advised that there was an estimated overspend of £600k and it was hoped this could be mitigated and brought down to £0.

In response to Member questions they clarified that:

- Regarding CYC have entering into a trial with Virgin O2 to assist the cleansing and painting of their utilities boxes, the council was keen to do this with as many national companies as possible with the arrangements varying between companies. As a minimum the council would break even and it would improve the income stream and responsiveness.
- With reference to the number of vacant shops, the council had had been successful across income streams from commercial properties.
- Concerning the reduction in respark income, there had been a reduction in the number of visitor badges sold and the council was not seeing income from parking enforcement from the badges. Traffic levels were down and parking levels were up. The impact of working from home and hybrid working had had an impact of travel to the city centre.
- With regard to income from parking, the cost of living pressures meant that people had less disposable income. It was noted that the council was trying to get more people on buses and that the rail strikes may result in more car journeys into York. It was noted that there had not been a return to bus use pre pandemic.
- It was not known how many trees had been planted and the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning confirmed that this could be looked at as a data set.
- There had been a decline in workers cycling to work because of working from home and hybrid working. There tended to be a peak in cycling levels around sporting events. It was clarified that the reference to the Tour de France was part of the narrative of the report.

- To achieve net zero carbon emissions there would need to be some challenging policy decisions, whether across transport and housing.
- The carbon assessment of the dualling of the ring road showed a neutral impact of traffic movement.

Resolved: That the financial and performance management position across services within the Place Directorate be noted.

Reason: To ensure expenditure is kept within the approved budget and performance is effectively scrutinised.

11. Work Plan [20.04]

Members considered the work plan for the remainder of the municipal year.

Resolved: That the Democracy Officer check if a commissioned scrutiny meeting slot was available for the committee to consider the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Reason: To consider Bus Service Improvement Plan before the end of the municipal year.

Cllr K Taylor, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.35 pm and finished at 8.06 pm].

This page is intentionally left blank