



Police and Crime Commissioner Statement

North Yorkshire County Council Executive Committee

15 August 2017

I embarked on this journey for one reason and one reason alone – to improve support to the public, police and fire services. They deserve, and can have, better frontline services.

It is disappointing therefore that amongst North Yorkshire County Council members in particular, there has been no balanced discussion about the benefits of my business case to the public and to the key public services concerned. Indeed, the report prepared for the oversight and scrutiny committee did not contain a single area of questioning to help members understand the potential benefits better. And the Chair opened the meeting with a statement opposing the proposals.

By contrast, in setting out on this journey, I have simply asked for people to approach my proposals with an open mind. Sadly, the evidence to date is that we are for the most part, in ‘I just don’t like it’ territory.

I say this because most of the objections received from elected members to date are focused on the impact of the proposed change on their own roles, responsibilities and powers.

So today, I am asking you to look at the genuine opportunities for the public of North Yorkshire. Or at the very least, to wait and see what the public and staff have to say. Not doing so risks demonstrating scant regard for their views. This risk is potentially underlined by declining my request for face to face meetings with staff, in a forum at their workplace where they can express their views freely.

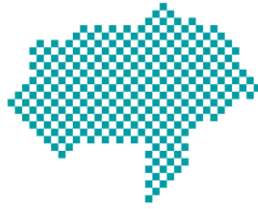
But let’s be clear, these concerns notwithstanding, first and foremost, my proposals themselves are not a criticism of you or how you have done your job. I can understand that you feel you’ve done a good job, the service is performing and you believe there is no good reason for a change in governance.

However, this is an opportunity to look at how we might move forwards in a different way, to the benefit of the public.

The government has introduced this policy for good reason, plus we have meaningful local factors, which I will outline.

1: THE WORLD IS CHANGING

Especially since the last major review of North Yorkshire’s fire service in 2013, which led to the model now being rolled out.



Gareth, I am with you – you have described funding cuts as a ‘crisis’ and have pledged to ‘do everything in your power to make sure vulnerable people are not disadvantaged’. You are quite rightly putting vulnerable people first, and with these proposals, I am doing the same.

Carl in May this year you said: "Our priority will always be to protect the frontline services that benefit all residents of North Yorkshire as much as we can, but in these uncertain times when we will continue to face austerity for many years to come, it is inevitable that the nature of services and the way they are delivered will continue to change."

I agree with you too Carl, change is here, and it is only right we focus on the frontline.

We are all dealing with cuts to and stress on our key public services – especially social care and health, both physical and mental health. It is clear that the health service is seriously challenged, here and in York, with the Yorkshire Ambulance Service also facing real issues, especially in rural areas. And I appreciate that this is putting real pressure on local authorities.

Indeed, the fallout of these problems, combined with cuts to our own services, is affecting all of us, not least the people we serve. We are all, every one of us, very keen indeed to work better with health.

This challenge requires a joined-up response, in particular:

1. To support vulnerable people – particularly the young and old, but also those affected by issues such as suicide, mental health problems more widely and people with ‘chaotic’ lives, often marred by alcohol and drug misuse
2. To tackle increasing demand – Police and Fire now have to deal predominantly with incidents that are not actual crimes or actual fires – they are mental health crises, road traffic incidents, missing persons, disadvantaged young people, isolated and vulnerable elderly people.

However, in contrast to the Fire Service, the police have a strong track record of working with health.

We have the Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat which includes myself, North Yorkshire Police, CCGs, YAS, TEWV, amongst others. We have a dedicated Inspector whose full-time role is to work with the NHS, plus a number of programmes including the highly successful and innovative York ‘Pathways’ programme initiated by the police, which has led to very significant reductions in demand for City of York, A&E, ambulance callouts, substance misuse, calls to 101 and 111, plus a range of real tangible benefits for the citizens involved in the programme – not least hope for a better life. We also have mental health nurses working in the force control room. We have street triage teams working with frontline officers, making a real difference in areas such as Scarborough. And, of course we have a full range of counselling and victim services, including health-based places of safety and the sexual assault referral centre which is health, not police led.





These are all things upon which we can collectively build.

Yet still 54% of calls into the police have little to do with crime per se, but are calls from people seeking support and help when no one else is available to provide it.

I am sure that we all recognise this picture. The question is, what more can we do about it?

Councillors have said that there is no ‘burning platform’. There is no reason for haste.

Well I disagree. We have a perfect storm of increasing demand, combined with a ‘crisis’ of cuts to our collective services.

2: IT IS VITAL THAT WE PUT THE FRONTLINE FIRST

In this climate, the type of governance that can get things done quickly, and make sure they are being done for the right reason REALLY matters.

In this crisis, 10% of the fire service’s budget will be spent on interest and debt charges by 2021, an increase of £800,000 from this year. With a budget of £32 million, they will have loans equalling £29 million. This is compared to Cleveland FRA which will only spend 2% on debt and interest.

A 5% reduction in spend on debt and interest would free up £1.6million to spend on the frontline – approximately 40 firefighters.

In this crisis, the fire service is proposing to increase its spend on buildings by 2% by 2021. It’s not buildings that save lives.

In this crisis, two senior promotions have been awarded at a cost of over £60,000, within a year or so of those officers reaching a point when they can retire. And at a time when frontline firefighters have received very modest pay rises indeed.

In this crisis, 30 firefighting roles are being cut. Since 2012, the number of wholetime firefighters has reduced by 15%, while support staff have only reduced by 5%.

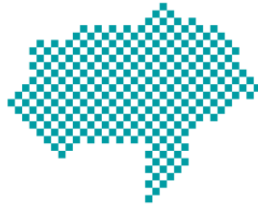
This is not putting the frontline first.

In your counter-proposal, you state that:

TRVs ‘respond to the same types of incident as standard fire engines, but with fewer staff’. Currently this means 3 firefighters, but the medium term financial plan already budgets for this to reduce to 2.

This is may be innovative, but it is also risky.





To enter a building and rescue people you need 3 firefighters - 2 to go in and 1 to look after them outside, monitoring their air usage, the temperature, the hazards inside – understanding what is going on so that actions can be coordinated. That is standard safety practice.

But what happens if that person outside gets distracted by a distraught relative? What happens if they are checking the stats at the critical moment that the smoke changes colour or the wind picks up?

What happens if you move to 2s and there are people inside who need rescuing? Do the firefighters risk everything to go in, or stay outside and wait for backup, wasting those vital minutes that could be the difference between life and death? That is not a dilemma our critical frontline should be put in.

Reducing crews down to 3, and even further down to 2, severely limits the incidents they can respond to in the first instance, effectively and safely.

I have already had one member of the public tell me how he watched his house burn down as firefighters were unable to tackle the blaze due to too few firefighters on the initial response vehicle and back up taking too long.

Particularly in rural areas, that back up can be a long way away. That's assuming there are sufficient firefighters available in any event as resilience in the service is a major and persistent problem, with around 14 fire engines unavailable on many days due to crew shortages.

The fire service says the changes are because demand has decreased, and it's not about making savings. But the long and short of it is that they need to save a further £1.3 million by 2021 to balance their budget, and they are doing it by cutting the frontline.

The difference between 3s and 2s is £800,000 – the same as the increase in borrowing costs by 2021. The FRA say they have not approved that change, but it is already factored into their Medium Term Financial Plan, as a report to the FRA in February 2017 clearly states.

I have identified that significant savings can be made by doing things differently.

And here's the crucial point – if the savings are made quickly, we can reverse these cuts – protecting our frontline, putting the public first. I am committing to ensuring a safe response by increasing the number of firefighters on TRVs from 3 to 4.

So, do we proactively do things differently and invest in the public's services, or stay still and cut?

Shouldn't we look to develop a new model, as they've piloted in other areas that has the potential to improve resilience, increase visibility in local communities, get people into the right service more quickly, prevent harm, and save money?





Indeed, these opportunities were acknowledged back in 2013 with the ‘Safety Service’ pilot. But despite universally positive feedback from the police, fire and public it never got any further than Bedale.

3: THE FACT IS, THAT FOR THE PAST 5 YEARS, COLLABORATION HAS BEEN MOVING AT A SNAIL’S PACE

If you look beyond business and statutory arrangements, the fire service has just 4 meaningful collaborations. Some of which are very recent, or at a pilot stage.

- Transport and logistics hub
- Control room with Devon & Cornwall
- Emergency First Responder (pilot, 3 Retained Stations) with YAS
- Joint Fire Investigation

In reality, the only thing that has galvanised action is the prospect of a PCC ‘takeover’.

Let’s take Alverton Court. I have been championing sharing HQs formally since my election in May last year. It is such an obvious, common sense way to save money. Money that could go straight into the frontline.

At the last Collaboration Committee meeting it was clear that no meaningful progress had been made. Indeed, it was said that there needed to be a full assessment of what was ‘right’ for the fire service. Well what about the public? What’s right for them? It’s their money.

What’s more, there was confusion about who was doing what and whose ‘fault’ the lack of progress was.

So, last week Lisa and Owen finally met to have a discussion. This is exactly my point.

With separate governance structures, it is all too easy for the buck to be passed between organisations and for people in each respective organisation who may not want change to block it or at the very least, slow it down.

This is precisely why previous attempts at collaboration have been so challenging and the Collaboration Committee does not solve this fundamental problem.

It can only take decisions for the Fire Service, and to date there has been no proactive collaboration with my office in developing the agendas, a joint plan or proposals going forward.

Instead, joined up governance, i.e. one executive board, will:

- Bring all the senior decision-makers together – there can be no buck-passing
- Remove the need to revert back to separate decision-making processes as it could be done under one roof
- Speed up decision-making as it will no longer be predicated on deadlines for physical, formal meetings or committees and the number of ‘actors’ in the process is streamlined



- Make it much simpler and clearer for partners to engage.

What's more, the Fire Authority are disguising the fact that under the Representation model, the PCC would only be one voice in 17 on other important matters such as the Fire Cover Review. You have clearly stated why.

“In all respects other than collaboration, the Authority is high performing and has driven forward change.”

There is a strong belief that overall governance cannot be improved, that there is no need for the PCC to be involved substantively in anything other than collaboration. So, we are back to my starting point that objections are all about the influence and power of elected members.

But – and I stress this point – I do have a duty to listen to this and take it seriously. As a consequence of your feedback, I have taken the opportunity to reflect on how I've gone about this in the past – in my drive to move things forward, I recognise that at times I need to spend more time taking people with me.

So as part of my response to your feedback, I will be making proposals to ensure the voice and experience of local councillors who represent their local communities, will have a substantive input in the future development of both the police and fire services.

4: HOW WE UNDERSTAND AND REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC IS IMPORTANT

Given that you have an Executive every Tuesday, it is disappointing that NYCC is taking its decision before:

- the views of other district and boroughs are known
- the results of the public and workforce surveys are available
- proposals for future councillor input are developed

You assert that the current structure – 16 councillors – on the FRA is more representative than the PCC model, yet at the same time you are deliberately choosing to ignore the views of the public and the workforce on the proposals.

As you have said yourselves many times, there is no rush. I would therefore question your rush to make a decision before the views of the public are known.

Indeed, one district council has already indicated that they would want to know the views of the public and workforce before they make their final decision.

So, I want now to say a little about the public consultation.





Firstly, as you would imagine, I am acutely aware that people will try to question the ‘impartiality’ of the methodology. So, you will not be surprised to hear that it is extremely robust.

- 1,500 random, statistically representative face-to-face surveys, avoiding the risk of ‘self-selecting’ bias
- Online ‘self-selecting’ survey that can be benchmarked against the random survey
- Workforce survey – police and fire
- Stakeholder survey and focus groups
- 8 x public outreach events – 7 complete and 1 more to come (York)

In summary, today I am formally asking that the NYCC Executive delays its decision on this business case until it has all the material evidence to hand.

You have clearly stated a desire for an evidence-based process and I believe it is important to ensure:

- The results of the public and workforce surveys are available
- The views of local overview and scrutiny meetings are known – the last meeting being on 20th September (given the voice of locally elected members are clearly so important to your favoured model)
- Proposals for future elected member involvement are developed

And finally, in order for me to respond properly to your concerns, I need to understand the specific objections you have to my proposals, which I ask you to outline clearly today.

Thank you for your time, attention and open mind.

