

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 February 2007

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Adult Social Care, Economic Development, Library and Information Services, E-government and Communications)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CHRIS METCALFE

Commission for Social Care Inspection Star Rating

Each year the Commission for Social Care Inspection announce the Star Rating for Councils providing social care services for adults and older people. The rating excludes Children's Services, which are now regulated separately as part of the Children and Young People's Service.

The Directorate has maintained its two star rating for 2005/06. This is a positive achievement, given the tougher targets set by the Commission, and the challenging financial environment within which staff were working.

The Commission's judgement is that many aspects of our service delivery are strong. However, there are areas for improvement, in particular helping more older people to live at home.

A programme of work focusing on improving this and other services is already underway within the Directorate. I trust that this, together with the change to the Fair Access to Care Services criteria, which I will discuss separately, will result in the Directorate continuing to maintain and improve its star rating in the future.

Fair Access to Care Services

Under Fair Access to Care Services, the government requires that we state the level of assessed need for which we are able to provide social care to adults. Until recently, in order to meet the Council's key objective of providing affordable care, we have only been able to support individuals assessed as having 'critical' needs.

I am delighted to announce that members of the executive offered their full support to a recent proposal to relax the eligibility criteria, and we are now able to offer care and support to adults whose needs are assessed as 'substantial'.

Operating at a 'critical' level has made it difficult for us to deliver on key performance indicators, such as older people helped to live at home. In addition, The Government White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* sets out the expectation that we will move towards providing preventative care for the wider community.

It will continue to be necessary to manage the budget effectively, but this change will allow us to address care issues at an early stage, which could make a real difference to service improvements as well as performance outcomes.

I would like to acknowledge the splendid work done by staff in managing the financial situation, particularly the difficult decisions that frontline staff have had to take when assessing the needs of clients.

New Outcomes Framework for Performance Assessment

From 2006/07, the Commission for Social Care Inspection are introducing a new performance framework, the 'New Outcomes Framework for Performance Assessment'. The framework is based on the seven social care outcomes from the White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* plus two additional measures on leadership, and commissioning and use of resources. The performance measures will be based on outcomes and experiences for service users, and it will present a 'harder test' for authorities.

This means that we have to show that our services are making a difference to users now, and are also helping to improve their lives in the longer term. We must demonstrate that we actively promote our services so that the public know about them, and that we treat people fairly when they approach us for help.

The New Outcomes Framework also seeks to ensure that resources are fairly distributed within the community, and not focussed on specific groups. A percentage of the total score will relate specifically to the care and support given to groups such as older people, those with physical and sensory impairments, and carers.

Overall, this will prove to be a testing set of performance criteria for the Directorate, but work is already underway to ensure that we are able to meet the challenge.

Archive Service Star Rating

North Yorkshire County Council's Record Office has recently completed a self-assessment pilot scheme for local authority archive services. The pilot was run by The National Archives, the government department with responsibility for setting standards in information and records management across the UK.

The assessment measured six aspects of performance, including Customer Responsiveness and Searchroom Services. I am pleased to announce that the County Record Office achieved a two star rating, with an overall score of 62.5%, against a national average of 55%.

I am advised that improvements to the Archive Service within existing resources are likely to allow us to achieve the top three star rating within three

years. It is important that we do so, as The National Archives plan to repeat the exercise annually, and are currently in discussion with the Audit Commission about incorporating the results into performance assessment ratings.

The Benefits of Partnership Working

North Yorkshire County Council has entered into a formal Joint Working Partnership with the Pension Service, which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions, so that the council's team of benefits and assessment officers and the Pension Service's team of visiting officers do not duplicate each other's work. Anyone helped with their benefits by one of the council's team will see the claim being processed as if they had dealt directly with the Pension Service, without having to provide any further information or evidence.

It is vital that vulnerable people receive the benefits they are entitled to because this helps them to buy the support they need to maintain their independence for as long as possible. The new partnership with the Pension Service is giving people quicker access to the services that they need.

The Benefits and Assessment Team carries out around 7,000 financial assessments a year for adults who have care or housing-related support needs and makes over 1000 benefit claims on their behalf. Claims made on behalf of service users are increasing income into the local community by nearly £55,000 per week. The team is already working closely with the seven District Councils in North Yorkshire to ensure speedy processing of council tax and housing benefit claims.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Inward Investment

The County Council has agreed to provide funding support for inward investment in North Yorkshire through york-england.com. The County Council will work in partnership with Yorkshire Forward and York City Council to fund jointly a sub-regional delivery structure which will promote York and North Yorkshire to UK and overseas investors. The County Council will provide £30,000 in 2007/8 which will enable key strategic sites in the county to be promoted – such as Business parks at Sherburn, Scarborough and Colburn - together with smaller opportunities in rural areas. A Service Level Agreement will be drawn up which will set specific targets around the number of inward investments secured and new jobs created. Discussions will be held with york-england and funding partners to develop a new organisational structure which will seek to reduce overheads and direct more funding into service delivery.

Economic Development Strategy

A programme has been agreed that will see an Economic Development Strategy for the County Council being drawn up by September 2007. This has been developed in conjunction with the Economic Development and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, members of which will contribute to the process at key stages. The Strategy will focus on activities across the County Council which support economic development and regeneration capacity and will link into other key regional, sub-regional and Council strategies.

Sub-Regional Investment Plan

Work is progressing on the Sub-Regional Investment Plan for York and North Yorkshire. Through the Partnership Executive groups are developing the five Transformational Themes – Science and Innovation; Enterprise; Culture and Tourism;; Skills and knowledge; and Connectivity. Work has now started on relating these themes to specific geographic areas of the sub-region – York area, including Selby and southern Ryedale; Scarborough Town; Upland rural areas; and Harrogate, Skipton and lowland areas.

The Groups will identify specific outcomes to be achieved to grow the sub-region`s economy. This will be completed by the end of March. It will then identify activities that will deliver these outcomes and set up a process of commissioning projects to deliver. This will be completed by June 2007.

Access to Services

Considerable progress has been achieved in the last few weeks to develop the corporate contact centre. Building work is complete as is equipping the centre. The first staff, have arrived and are currently undergoing training and shortly the first trials will be undertaken to test the systems. We remain on track to open the centre in early April. The first calls will be Highway fault reporting such as faulty street lights, road defects and other general informational requests such as hours of opening of a library. Implementation planning for further services to be integrated in the summer and autumn is underway. Two significant elements of this will be adult and children`s social care telephone calls and the telephone contact currently received at Local Education Offices.

Work is on-going to improve the e-forms on the website that allow the citizen to report highways faults through the web site by making them more user friendly. It remains an essential part of the strategy that the citizen is offered the choice of different means of access to services and the web site is a particularly attractive choice for those who have internet access, providing as it does a 24 hour a day service. It is also the most cost effective means of providing information.

Agreement has been reached with colleagues in District Councils about a network of locations to develop single points of contact for all Council Services. A joint steering group has been established to oversee the initiative and to develop further joint working in the area of providing access to

services. Work will now focus on drawing services together into one place in each of these 34 locations across the county.

Our promise of service to our citizens has been refreshed and republished as a Customer Charter. This is being distributed throughout the authority and should be on display in all public facing buildings. All service teams are being encouraged to build on this by producing a local charter to reflect the local circumstances of their service and to exceed the minimum standards where possible.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe