

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 May 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

Strategic Commissioning Event

Members will be aware that our commissioning strategy, 'Strategic Commissioning for Independence, Well-being and Choice' was recently approved by the County Council's Executive.

The strategy represents a major reappraisal of the way in which care and wellbeing services are provided to adults, seeking to achieve outcomes for the whole community, not just those eligible for social care support.

It places the county at the cutting edge of social care provision as one of only three local authorities in the country to be given the status of an exemplar for others to follow.

The strategy will be officially launched at a major conference at The Pavilions, Harrogate on 27th June 2007. The conference will be a significant event for the authority, featuring nationally recognised speakers such as Dr Ian Rutter, author of the Department of Health's Commissioning Framework for Health and Well-being, and Nigel Walker who leads on commissioning for the Care Services Improvement Partnership.

Up to 200 delegates will have the opportunity to discuss how we will work with partners and stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for communities in North Yorkshire. I would strongly encourage Members to participate in this event, and to have a say in shaping the future of care and well-being services in the county.

Copies of the strategy are available on the county council website, and booking forms will be widely distributed to members.

Extra Care Update

Extra Care housing is one very important strand of the future for care services. As members will be aware, it provides older people with a style of housing and care that falls between traditional sheltered housing and residential care homes.

To date there are 200 units of Extra Care accommodation, operating in schemes located in Knaresborough, Scarborough, Brompton, Stokesley and Bainbridge, being managed by Registered social landlords in partnership with District Councils.

Residents have recently transferred to their new accommodation in the scheme at Ripon, which brings another 40 units of mixed tenure apartments and community facilities on stream. Work has started on site at Brayton, with a sod cutting ceremony on 29th March. Schemes are underway at Easingwold, Esk Moors and Scarborough, with work starting at Norton later this year.

These projects will deliver a further 243 units by the end of 2009

A number of potential schemes across the county are now being worked up, in association with new and existing partners from the public and private sector and Health to accelerate the delivery program. These projects are at various stages of development, and officers are working in strategic partnership with providers and the County to bring proposals to a conclusion.

We believe that Extra Care type accommodation can “Enable not Disable” our older people and promote independence. This accommodation enables them to continue to live where they have always lived, but safely and securely, preventing ill health for as long as possible, and offering support where it is needed. The objective for such provision is to promote sustainable communities where older people can live and enjoy life to the full.

Major success for library-based projects

Funding from the Arts Council has allowed two North Yorkshire Libraries to stage innovative and extremely successful projects.

The Long Weekend was Scarborough’s first literature festival, running from 16 - 22 April 2007. The festival attracted a variety of writers, from the very local at the beginning of the week to nationally recognised best-sellers over the weekend. It has been hailed as a great success by audiences and authors alike, with nearly 2,000 people attending talks and workshops.

Feedback from authors has been particularly positive, with many already pledging to support the festival if it is staged again. The project has created new working relationships with local arts organisations, and the Scarborough Evening News has started a reading group on the strength of the event. It is safe to say that this festival has put Scarborough firmly on the literary map.

I was fortunate to attend an event which saw a group of youngsters celebrating a year of activities with family and friends.

The Crazy Creators, from Colburn library, worked with a range of creative artists to help encourage other young people to make the most of their local library.

The group have produced a range of art works, developed a library web page, and created an area of the library especially for young people to enjoy chatting and reading. This has been a very positive experience for all involved, and the project has built bridges between the young people and library staff.

Mental Capacity Act 2005

This significant Act comes into force in two phases in April and October 2007. The Act, which will affect people aged 16 and over, provides a statutory framework to empower and protect people who lack capacity to make decisions for themselves.

The Act will cover major decisions about an individual's property and affairs, healthcare treatment and where a person lives and will make it clear who can take decisions, in which situations, and how they should go about this. It also enables people to plan ahead for a time when they may lack capacity.

From April 2007 a statutory Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy Service covering the County has been in place. This will operate in specific situations where the person lacking capacity has no one else to represent them.

Government has allocated an amount of money to Local Authorities to commission the specialist advocacy service and train all staff required to operate under the Act. Preparing for the introduction of the Act has been a major undertaking for staff within the directorate.

Information leaflets in British Sign Language

I am pleased to announce that the Adult and Community Services directorate now has a range of key public information leaflets available as video clips in British Sign Language, helping us to make information about our services more accessible to Deaf people.

British Sign Language is the first or preferred language of nearly 70,000 Deaf people nationally. The Deaf community is a linguistic and cultural minority, and it is recommended that, wherever possible, a British Sign Language Interpreter should be used when communicating with Deaf people.

The video clips can be viewed on the county council website, or they can be emailed, provided on CD, or provided in high-quality DVD format, depending on the preferences of the service user.

The British Sign Language clips join a range of leaflets already available in community languages and alternative formats as we continue our efforts to make our information more accessible to the whole community.

Positive results for North Yorkshire's libraries

As Members will be aware, there has been a significant investment in library buildings and facilities over the past few years. A national survey recently confirmed that the improvements are having a positive impact on the service.

The government carries out its Best Value Satisfaction Surveys every three years, and the results for 2006/07 show that our performance in key areas is rapidly improving.

Almost 90% of adult users said they had found a book they wanted to borrow. Two thirds of books requested from other libraries within the county are now supplied within seven days, four times faster than previously.

Significantly, 95% of adult library users are now satisfied with their libraries, more than in almost any comparable authority. In a separate survey of people served by the Home Library Service, satisfaction has risen from 87% to 94% in the past year.

Improvements to stock, refurbishing buildings, introducing new services and opening for longer, especially at weekends, have all contributed to this positive outcome for libraries.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe

County Council Statement – Chris Metcalfe

Access to Services

I am pleased to announce that our new contact centre opened on schedule in April. The first calls are Highways fault reporting such as street lights and road defects. In early May, general informational requests such as hours of opening of a library will also be handled there. Implementation planning for further services to be integrated in the summer and autumn is underway. The centre is currently open from 8.30am until 6pm and also on Saturday mornings. These hours will be reviewed in the light of customer usage.

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COMMUNITY SERVICES

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Executive member Councillor John Fort and Gordon Gresty, Corporate Director Business and Environmental Services, represented the County Council at the third and final URBAL Conference in Ghent on 22 – 23 March 2007. The URBAL development project promotes integrated management of relationships between urban and rural areas. It is part of an EU funded programme to promote collaboration between member states. North Yorkshire County Council is the UK's representative in the project, which has resulted in joint working with The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Norway and Sweden. The focus of NYCC's project was the promotion of local produce by bringing urban residents and rural producers of food and drink together to increase their market opportunities. This was supported by EU and NYCC funding. Successful festivals were organised at Skipton and Castle Howard, as well as support for a number of smaller rural shows. Both Skipton and Castle Howard are being taken forward by the private sector. As members will be aware, the nature of EU funding is changing radically. After the new programme finishes in 2013 there will be no geographically targeted EU funding available in North Yorkshire. Increasingly, therefore, if North Yorkshire is to benefit from EU support for businesses in the future, it will need to focus on this type of funding based on collaboration between member states.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe
12 February 2007