

Leader's Statement - County Council

Yorkshire Forward

I have completed my first six months on the board of Yorkshire Forward. Although I do not directly represent the County Council on the board, I believe it would be useful to occasionally update members on the activities of the Regional Development Agency.

This summer's big event was the Indian International Film Awards at Sheffield on June 9th. Featuring many tourist landmarks and sites, this promoted Yorkshire to a world-wide television audience of some 500 million people.

There is currently a task and finish group investigating tourism delivery in the region which is currently the responsibility of the Yorkshire Tourist Board and six local delivery groups, three of which are in the North Yorkshire sub-region.

One of the more controversial decisions concerns the question of small business support which is currently the role of four Business Links. The proposal is to replace these with one organisation for the region, but with local access points in North Yorkshire.

Local Government Reorganisation

The consultation period for our proposals for a new Council for North Yorkshire ended on 22nd June. We await a decision from the Government which is expected in the last week of Parliament, i.e., the week beginning 23rd July. Whatever the outcome of the debate I trust that everyone will work together to ensure that high quality, value for money services are delivered to residents across North Yorkshire.

Floods

During the second two weeks of June very high levels of rainfall have been recorded across the county, leading to the highest levels of rainfall recorded for the month of June since records began. At Fylingdales weather station 449% of average rainfall has been recorded, with Leeming recording 344%. Unsettled weather now continues into July.

This has led to both main river flooding and surface water flooding throughout much of the county area. Properties and highways have been flooded and damaged by flood water in the Craven, Harrogate, Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby areas, effecting residential and business

properties alike. Currently the rivers are high and surrounding fields are very wet, with standing water.

Over this two week period a concerted effort has been continuous from directorates within the County Council, 24 hours a day. Ranging from laying sandbags, highways closure and repairs, reception centre staffing and management, as well as emergency co-ordination and liaison with Government Office.

Our efforts have now turned to recovery and learning lessons and we will be working with partners.

Effort will be applied to continue to work with Town and Parish Councils to better prepare communities to plan for these and other events, improving their own ability to respond to the early stages of an emergency in a planned and organised way.

LGA Conference

I attended for part of the LGA conference held in Birmingham during the first week of July. The new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears MP, and the new Minister of State, John Healey MP, both spoke at the conference. I was encouraged by their attitude and approach and sincerely hope that local government will have strong advocates at the heart of the Government. This will be very important in the face of what clearly will be tough financial settlements for next year and beyond.

Council Plan

Since the Council approved the Council Plan at its last meeting the document has been printed and published in accordance with Best Value Regulations requirements. It is a clear and accessible document which shows the community what it can expect from the County Council in the coming year.