

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18th July 2007

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

COUNTY COUNCILLOR HELEN SWIERS

In my new role in relation to communities I look forward to helping to develop the Council's approach to locality working. I know that the Area Committee chairmen have discussed how their committees can use officer support from the Corporate Policy Unit in order to look more thoroughly into issues affecting the wellbeing of their communities.

The County Community Fund is an important element in our working with local communities. The area committees have been operating this fund for some time now and have developed various approaches. I think it will be useful to look at those approaches, see what good practice has developed and see if we can strengthen the impact the fund is having.

I have noted the optimistic start that the Scarborough Local Strategic Partnership's area forums have made. These are supported jointly by the County and Borough Council. I will be watching their progress with interest and looking for opportunities to extend that good practice to other parts of the County.

In relation to community safety, it will be a priority of mine to look at how the Council measures up to its responsibilities under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, especially as these have been extended following the review carried out during 2005 and 2006.

Through the Compact and through targets set out in the Local Area Agreement, the County Council is seeking to strengthen its engagement with the voluntary and community sector. The Compact is currently being developed through the addition of a code of practice in relation to working with Black and Minority Ethnic community organisations and will shortly be subject to an overall assessment through a survey of voluntary organisations about its effectiveness.

A project I am particularly interested in is the work we are doing in relation to a Credit Union. We have entered negotiations with York Credit Union about the possibility of extending their common bond to cover the County as well as York. Whether or not this goes ahead will depend on the view taken by YCU and by the Executive about advice we have commissioned from a specialist in this area. We believe that doing things this way will be quicker and more cost effective than trying to start from scratch, but that doesn't mean that there won't be real challenges to address. So we will be interested to see the outcome of that advice in September.

This is one feature of the County Council's multi-faceted approach to social inclusion. The corporate Social Inclusion Strategy contains the Council's commitments in this regard and in due course I will be reviewing how these commitments are delivered.

The North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership is central to our working with partners to improve conditions for local communities. Now that the Local Area Agreement has been signed, it is time to up-date the County's Sustainable Community Strategy which will re-state what we and our partners agree should be the priorities for our work. That will be done over the summer so that it can be ready in time for the re-working of the Local Area Agreement as it is rolled forward for 2008-11.

In parallel with that work the NYSP is consulting on a revised structure. The purpose of that consultation is to create a structure which retains the effectiveness of the current arrangements and makes them more inclusive of agencies which, following the proposals in the local government white paper, will have a duty to cooperate with the NYSP in developing its community strategy and in delivering the Local Area Agreement.

TRADING STANDARDS

Exercise Rose

On 21 June, 2007 officers from Trading Standards & Regulatory Services took part in a contingency planning exercise on animal infectious diseases. The exercise was called Exercise Rose and was an Animal Health (formerly the State Veterinary Service) led exercise which tested the ability of Animal Health and their operational partners to respond to an outbreak of Classical Swine Fever. Classical Swine Fever (CSF) is a highly contagious and serious viral disease of pigs. In its acute form the disease generally results in high levels of infection and mortality. Animal Health operated a Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC) from their regional office at Leeds which simulated as closely as is possible a real life event.

North Yorkshire County Council was represented in the LDCC by Trading Standards & Regulatory Services officers who are the designated body required to enforce the disease control measures in the event of any outbreak occurring in North Yorkshire.

As part of the exercise the County Council also took the opportunity to test some of its own responses under controlled conditions. Service units that were contacted to respond included Highways, Development and Countryside Services and other services within the Business and Environmental Services directorate. The exercise proved to be very realistic and valuable. As with many

exercises vital lessons were learned which will be incorporated into the County Council's future contingency planning.

Seamer Horse Fair

Following its success in the past years, the trading standards service will be undertaking a joint operation with North Yorkshire Police during the run up to Seamer Horse Fair, to tackle doorstep crime in the Scarborough area. Intelligence from previous years shows there is an increase in the level of doorstep crime and other offending in this period. The operation will involve the use of mobile patrols to locate offenders and prevent consumers being conned. Investigations will also be conducted into all those found to be committing offences. In addition, a mobile police office will be situated in Scarborough town centre and will be staffed jointly by trading standards and the police. Consumer advice will be offered, including advice about avoiding rogue traders.

Home Information Pack (No2) Regulations 2007 & Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations 2007

Home Information Packs are being introduced as part of wider package of reforms to home buying and selling. Their aim is to improve the process by bringing together key information for the buyer at an early stage. The information includes Energy Performance Certificates which must be issued by an accredited assessor.

The regulations were originally due to come into force on the 1 June but were revoked at the last minute. One of the reasons for this was that there would have been insufficient accredited assessors to carry out the number of assessments that would have been demanded. The regulations will now be implemented in three stages. The first stage, commencing on 1 August 07, this will be for houses with 4 or more bedrooms. Further requirements will be introduced when there are sufficient accredited assessors.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The focus of activity within economic development has been around continuing to develop opportunities for North Yorkshire in terms of ongoing work on future European funding and the beginning of new economic activity on the 2012 Olympics.

The Rural Development Programme for England will deliver £9.5 million per annum to the region between 2007 and 2013. This will be directed at rural business start-ups, improvement of rural businesses, investment in skills in the farming and forestry sectors and finally to community initiatives through the LEADER programme. This funding will be delivered through Yorkshire Forward but unlike other Yorkshire Forward funding streams there will be no specific financial allocations to each sub-region. It is important therefore that North Yorkshire is sufficiently organised to secure maximum benefit for its businesses

and communities. Priorities for business support and skills will come through the Sub-Regional Investment Plan. In terms of LEADER, the

York and North Yorkshire Partnership Executive has asked the Sub-Regional Rural Partnership to lead on defining potential LEADER areas. The County Council is playing a major role in the work of the rural partnership, along with the Rural Community Council and the York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit.

The region has recently launched "Yorkshire Gold" - a strategy for seizing the opportunities of the 2012 Olympic Games. The Strategy identifies 5 key themes – sport; healthy communities; culture; tourist potential; and business opportunities. Each theme has a regional lead organisation. Plans are now being put in place to roll out the strategy across the region. It is important that the County Council is alive to the opportunities presented by the Olympics. While the focus in much of the UK is on securing training camps, we should recognise that North Yorkshire does not have the infrastructure to support these. The economic benefit is also likely to be short-lived. Instead the county should aim to play to its strengths to secure maximum long term benefit from two key areas – attracting visitors to London to North Yorkshire and particularly by ensuring that our businesses can derive maximum benefit, by bidding for contracts, delivering services and goods to the olympics . The aim is to secure long term, lasting benefits for businesses beyond the Olympics.

Following a major review by Yorkshire Forward of the way in which business support services are provided across the region, it has now finished a procurement process to award the contract to deliver the national Business Link service. The four existing sub-regional Business Link organisations have not been successful in securing the contract which has been awarded to a private sector consortium comprising of Reed in Partnership PLC and Exemplas Holding Ltd. It will now begin to put in place delivery structures across the region to take effect from April 2008. This will include a new Regional Gateway – a telephone and on-line access point for information and advice – together with on-the-ground business advisors.

County Councillor Helen Swiers
18 JULY 2007