

COUNTY COUNCIL STATEMENT

FOR COUNTY COUNCILLOR HELEN SWIERS

19 DECEMBER 2007

Community Planning

Crime and Disorder

Further to my last statement to Council confirming my role on the York and North Yorkshire Safer Communities Forum I am pleased to report that I have now attended my first meeting. The same legislation that affords me a seat at this table also requires the Forum to take on wider responsibilities – for example producing a countywide community safety agreement and participating in strategic intelligence assessments with partners – these changes have prompted the Forum to reconsider its membership and reconstitute itself accordingly. Final proposals are being worked up as we speak for formal agreement at the next meeting on 20th December and I hope the “new look” Forum will meet from February 2008.

The Forum is currently engaged in negotiating new funding arrangements in support of joint outcomes and considering the new National Indicator Set to determine areas of work for inclusion in the revision of the Local Area Agreement.

The issue of funding for crime and disorder continues to be a concern. Government grant allocations have been reduced and some difficult decisions will have to be taken particularly in relation to district allocations and countywide issues such as domestic abuse and alcohol related problems. The Forum is currently looking at an appropriate way forward on these issues.

Post Offices

Post Office closures are high on our agenda at the moment. Post Office Ltd. proposes to close 2,500 sub post offices nationwide during 2007/08. To date announcements have been made in all parts of the county except for those in the Richmond Parliamentary constituency. As things stand at the moment we are facing a closure rate of around 19%; nationally the closure rate ranges from 13-23%. The proposals to date are for 22 outright closures with a further 18 post offices being replaced by much more limited outreach services. Our strategy is to closely examine any facts or figures that the Post Office has produced for its rationale on individual closures to raise awareness of the issue and to encourage people to respond either directly or through the County Council. This involves making the most of local intelligence and Members have an important role to play here. In encouraging people to respond to the consultation we are asking them to write not only to the Post Office but also to Postwatch, the independent watchdog, and to copy their letters to the County Council's Corporate Policy team. This will help us when producing our own response. Additionally, we will also be examining the 'alternative branches' specified by the Post Office to see if there is a risk that they could close in the near future due for instance to the retirement of the

sub-postmaster there. Representatives from the Post Office have offered to come along to our Area Committee meetings to respond to questions.

Credit Union

I am pleased to announce that the Executive has approved the York and North Yorkshire Credit Union Business Case and we are in the process of securing the agreement of other key partners identified in the business case. Assuming we get this sign up, the next steps will be to formalise a county-wide Advisory Group to take the work forward. This will include requesting the Financial Services Authority to approve the extension of York Credit Union's common bond and then appointing a Development/Payroll Manager. Although Scarborough and Selby will be in the first phase of development, from day one every area of the county will have minimum access in the form of postal and internet access and PayPoint. This initiative provides us with a major opportunity to contribute to the fight against Social Exclusion and all of the many problems that surround the issues of debt in the County.

North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership

The revised North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership structure, after full consultation, will be implemented from 2008. The major change within this new model is the inclusion of a NYSP Board which will meet as a minimum twice yearly. Its membership will include both County and District Councillors along with other key partners and the primary role of this group will be to establish and maintain the policy framework of the partnership. Work is now underway to seek nominations and establish the membership of the NYSP which will hold its inaugural meeting on the 13th March 2008.