

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**11 NOVEMBER 2015****STATEMENT OF THE LEADER**
COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES**1. Devolution**

The issue of devolution has captured a large part of our time over recent months. As many colleagues will have picked up not least from the Prime Minister's own comment when in Yorkshire, things are complex and subject to some dispute!

And in all this we must never forget or neglect the "day job" – educating children, safeguarding young people and adults, maintaining roads and all the rest.

I'm clear about the position that I would like us to achieve for the County and that is to have a meaningful and strong devolution settlement that covers the whole of the County area. My first preference is for that to be in a combination of councils from East, North and West Yorkshire in what is being described as the Greater Yorkshire devolution proposal. If that cannot be delivered then I am strongly supportive of a partnership that involves North Yorkshire, York and East Riding.

In terms of the Greater Yorkshire proposal I have been struck over the last few months in my discussions with business leaders how supportive they are of this proposal. They see the benefits of larger sectors of industry working together across local government boundaries that are arbitrary lines on maps in a powerful partnership with a wider public sector to deliver more growth for the region and to collectively have a stronger voice with government.

As I said above there are divisions across Yorkshire. South Yorkshire is moving forward as its own combined authority and at present there is opposition in West Yorkshire to being involved in a Greater Yorkshire model.

Given the potential blockage in West Yorkshire to a Greater Yorkshire proposition we have been working with colleagues across North Yorkshire York and East Riding to develop a series of meaningful "asks" from government that would enable our partnership to have greater control and influence on our own economic destiny. Officer working groups, each led by a Chief Executive of a local authority from within the area, have developed these asks in more detail.

Positive discussion on these asks has taken place with Government in an effort to move the individual issues forward even though discussion around the geography of the partnership has not been finalised.

At this moment in time there is still a third option that covers part of North Yorkshire and that is for a devolution proposal involving West Yorkshire, Selby, Craven, Harrogate and York. I remain opposed to this as a geographic basis for devolution. I strongly feel there are better alternatives for all the residents we represent in all parts of the County that deliver more growth and investment and I cannot agree to a proposition that disadvantages another significant part of the county area.

This agenda is changing by the week, and even by the day, and I am sure I may have more to say on this matter at the County Council meeting.

And once we have agreement about what the wiring looks like, and how we can work together and with central government, and what that will mean for our residents and businesses and the service we will give them, then we will need to sell the benefits to them, to give them confidence that the “day job” will continue.

2. Local Government Finance

We are at the time of year where we are focusing on future year’s budget settlements particularly in the lead up to the comprehensive spending review announcement on the 25th November 2015 and the more detailed Local Government settlement that is expected just a few days before Christmas. The period of austerity continues and we know that all government departments have been asked to model spending reductions of between 25% and 40%. We have drawn up our own assumptions using information from the Office of Budget Responsibility and previous statements made by the Chancellor but we wait to see whether these are in line with the actual statement that the Chancellor will make on future spending allocations, and what changes will be made to previous deliberations following the House of Lords opposition to welfare reform.

We do know the situation will be very difficult and will be compounded by pressures that we face from within our own services most notably adult social care along with announcements that have already been made such as the National Living Wage. I’m sure we all collectively recognise the many benefits of an increased living wage but it does have an impact on council finances and if this isn’t taken in to account in the comprehensive spending review will have an impact on the delivery of services. Our current estimate is that implementing the living wage in full will directly cost the Council an additional £3m with schools picking up a further £3m. In addition to this we also know that there will be impact upon the Council’s supply chain that is likely to be passed back to us and this is likely to be much greater than the Council’s own direct costs. Financial challenges in the Health Service are also likely to have significant impacts for us.

The positive aspect of our own situation is that we have a strong and sound financial position, we have solid financial plans in place and we have been delivering our

savings within the 2020 North Yorkshire Programme ahead of expectations. There will be the usual programme of Member's Seminars to enable all councillors to understand the financial position as and when it is set out to us.

There has however already been an announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the future funding of Local Government. George Osborne stated that by 2020 Local Government would retain 100% of business rates. As an overall statement of intent I welcome the ability for North Yorkshire to have more control over its own funding. However there is little detail at present and this is certainly an issue where there will be considerable "devil in the detail". It is likely that there will be some type of redistribution to establish a base position and the increases in business rates beyond that base line will then flow to Councils (as will reductions). It is imperative that the benefits of this new approach follow service responsibility and the present position of a 4:1 ratio of distribution of business rates to districts will not be tenable in the future. The largest elements of local government expenditure are adult social care, children's services and the maintenance of highway infrastructure. Future funding needs to reflect these realities. In terms of defining any base line position the essential characteristics of North Yorkshire also need to be recognised in terms of an ageing population and the cost of delivering rural services. We will engage in the discussions that will take place around this issue in the coming years and I will keep members of the Council updated in respect of these issues.

3. North Yorkshire Partnership Conference

I was delighted to attend and host this conference which brings together the Statutory Public Sector with the Voluntary Community Sector. Ideas and opportunities were discussed and shared throughout the day with the aim of enriching and benefiting our communities, and recognising the varied, excellent and essential work that our Third Sector does.

The highlight of the day was the launch of the North Yorkshire Community Awards, a brand new and well received initiative introduced this year by our Chairman, David. The Awards were presented out by our Chairman and showcased and recognised the actions of special people in our community who work tirelessly for others. My congratulations go to the winners of the four awards

Best Community Group: Osmotherly Community Group

Osmotherly Community Group - organise coffee mornings and soup lunches to reduce loneliness and isolation by bringing together people all ages, including young children and families, the elderly, recently bereaved, men living alone, those with recent health issues, and the housebound. The group raises money for a wide range of local and national charities.

Best Community Project: Corrina and Friends

Corrina and Friends - Harrogate's first non-profit pay-what-you-feel café, which operates like any other café, but uses food donated by businesses and the public and all proceeds go to the project. Every day at 5pm, the cafe opens to the homeless and vulnerable to take leftover meals or food. The project also delivers emergency food parcels and supplies furniture to local people in need.

Volunteer of the Year: John Scoble

John Scoble – set up a 'Music in the Community' project, aimed at all ages, teaching the ukulele to people aged 9 to 90 in a variety of different groups in the Ryedale and Scarborough areas (including Sight Support). These groups have gone on to perform in public, helping to raise thousands of pounds for charity and entertainment for many hundreds of people.

Young People Volunteering Award: Easingwold School Youth Peer Mentors

Easingwold School Youth Peer Mentors - The peer mentors help other young people with many issues: the transition from primary to secondary school, confidence and self-esteem issues, family issues, socialisation, illness, sexuality and gender, equality, resilience, responsibility. The mentors do a lot of work around self-esteem and can signpost their mentees to other agencies when needed; because of their age and the trust built between them, they have much success in this area.