

North Yorkshire County Council Meeting

Wednesday 15 February 2017

Leader's Statement

Coastal flooding January 2017

I want to express our thanks to County Council staff, partners and local volunteers for their work to assist the local communities before, during and after the East Coast Tidal Surge on 13/14 January. About 20 properties were flooded in the county, but we were fortunate that the winds and highest waves did not coincide with the peak tides.

Syrian refugee families

I am pleased to say that we have now welcomed over 110 refugees in North Yorkshire having escaped violence and torture in Syria. Thanks to thorough preparation by the organisations involved, we are confident that their settlement and integration will be as smooth as possible. They are being supported by local volunteers as well as public sector partners, and we are locating people in areas where there is good access to services. The priority for the refugees, and for those supporting them, is that they settle in and start to make independent lives for themselves as quickly as possible.

Settlement

When I wrote about the settlement at this time a year ago it was in the anticipation that the government had listened to our concerns about funding, and the final settlement was better than the provisional. Sadly I don't think we can expect any more better news this year. We have a difficult task to do later in this meeting's agenda, but the fact is that we have lost 34% of our spending power over the life of this Council. We can't do what we used to do, in the same way that we did it, so we have had to adapt, but our staff still continue to serve our communities 7 days a week, supporting schools, safeguarding young and old, mending roads, rebuilding bridges etc. We will continue to make the case with government as part of its fairer funding review for the rural parts of the country such as North Yorkshire where cost of delivery is higher yet funding lower than in urban areas.

Because we have a longer term approach to our planning and finances we are able to make investments and develop innovative ways of working rather than simply slashing services. That is why we have been able to continue roll out broadband in our aim to provide 100% high quality coverage, continue to develop extra care facilities, continue to support rural transport with excellent community led initiatives, and with the great help of our volunteers continue to provide our residents with a library service that is often open for longer and offering more facilities. In austerity we often see only the negatives, but we should also recognise the achievements in and for our communities.

Retiring Members

There are a number of Members who intend to retire at this May's election. As this is the last Council meeting of this Council, I feel Council should record our gratitude today to all of them, of all political persuasions or none, for the work and efforts they have put in on behalf of their divisions and the wider community of North Yorkshire.

Michael Heseltine

When we stand in silent remembrance at our meetings it is usually in memory of a past colleague, long since retired. Sadly in recent times we have paid our respects to valued colleagues Polly English and Tony Hall, both serving Members. This morning we will have done the same for Michael Heseltine. Michael occupied an almost unique position in the County Council, being the longest continuously serving Member, and was in fact only 4 months shy of serving for 40 years. Moreover because of changing boundaries in those 4 decades he represented communities not only in his "own patch" as he liked to describe it, but also in the divisions now represented by Roger, Helen and myself.

With his encyclopaedic knowledge of NY history and geography, and of NYCC procedure, he was a good friend to many a new Member, myself included. He will be sadly missed by many on all sides of this Chamber.

County Councillor Carl Les
Leader of the Council

February, 2017