

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 July 2020

STATEMENT FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT, SCRUTINY, AREA COMMITTEES, PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND LOCALITY BUDGETS**COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE****Stronger Communities****Community support during coronavirus pandemic**

Members will be aware that as part of the county's response to the pandemic 23 Community Support Organisations or CSOs have been established to ensure that every resident of North Yorkshire has somewhere to turn to if they need help and support with things like food shopping, prescription deliveries, hot meals or a friendly chat with someone. The CSOs and their dedicated teams of volunteers have been working tirelessly to deliver essential services to thousands of residents and have been the backbone of the county's response to ensure no one is left to cope on their own.

Over the past three months the CSOs have delivered:

- Over 10,000 bags of shopping
- 7,635 hot meals
- 7,286 prescriptions
- 1,681 food parcels
- Nearly 1,000 bags of activity and craft materials

In addition, they have also been calling people every week to check on their general health and well-being as well as carrying out other activities to support people during the lockdown.

- 6,758 welfare calls and 6,278 befriending calls have been made
- Over 3,000 calls providing advice and guidance
- Over 600 pets have been cared for, and
- 425 transport trips have been carried out to take people to urgent medical appointments.

The CSOs have over 3,000 volunteers registered with them and half of those have been volunteering every week clocking up an average of 3,498 hours every week – a total of 49,891 volunteering hours since the lockdown started.

But that is only part of the story. In addition to the CSOs there are also many small groups of volunteers giving support to their neighbours and their local communities. Many voluntary and community groups have come up with inventive ways to help people whether that is by setting up community kitchens or fridges to ensure everyone can access affordable food, providing virtual social activities or friendship groups, ensuring people's pets are cared for if they go in to hospital or are unable to leave the house or using their sewing skills to help make much needed personal, protective equipment.

The level of help offered by our communities to our communities as part of our 'Team North Yorkshire' approach has been essential, valued and humbling. We thank everyone for their individual and collective efforts.

Our support will continue over the next few months. Over 25,000 people in the county are identified as 'shielded' and have been self-isolating since the start of the lockdown in March. As measures are to be eased on 1 August for this higher risk group, we are ensuring that

support will still be there for those people who decide to continue to self-isolate and will continue to work with our District and NHS colleagues along with other partners to co-ordinate this support.

Our CSOs will continue to operate until at least the end of September both supporting people who continue to self-isolate and also helping people to re-integrate and regain their independence by organising safe outdoor meet ups and providing advice and guidance.

Our community support arrangements will also play a role in our Local Outbreak Plan and arrangements around Test and Trace activities in order to ensure that short term support continues to be available for anyone required to self-isolate either as a result of being contacted by Test and Trace teams or if any local outbreak measures are instigated.

Community Grants

Our Stronger Communities Inspire grants have been on hold during the pandemic and replaced with Covid-19 Small Community Grants. Awards of up to £500 are available to grass roots groups who are providing activities for people during the pandemic. To date, 95 awards have been made (total value of £42,452) for items such as equipment for food delivery schemes, laptops and zoom licences, craft and activity packs and supplies of personal protective equipment for volunteers.

Legal and Democratic Services

In response to the Government announcement on 23 March 2020 regarding restrictions on public gatherings and social distancing, the Council postponed all formal, public meetings of the committees. In April, the Government issued new Regulations which then enabled remote/virtual meetings to be held that are legally binding. Since then, Democratic Services and Scrutiny have been working with Technology and Change to establish a system of live broadcasting to the Council's YouTube site of committee meetings using Skype and OBS software. To date, three live broadcast meetings have been held. Live broadcasts of the Executive, Planning and Regulatory Functions, Pension Fund Committee and Audit are planned over the summer. Work is underway to look at how all of the Council's committee meetings will be held through to the County Council elections in May 2021. This is likely to involve a large number of remote and live broadcast meetings.

Informal meetings of the Council's six Area Constituency Committees have been held regularly from early April 2020 using Skype. The Area Constituency Committees have now agreed to move to four weekly meeting, during the pandemic. The intention of these meetings was to provide councillors with an opportunity to meet, share experiences, raise local issues of concern and be briefed on key issues. The vast majority of councillors have engaged in these meetings and have readily adopted new technology and working practices.

As with most of the Council's committee meetings, the meetings of the overview and scrutiny committees were postponed and are not due to restart until early Autumn, at which point they will be live broadcast, public meetings. In the interim, Democratic Services and Scrutiny have been supporting the committees with regular email updates and briefings. The Chairs of the five committees have also been briefed by Executive Members and Directors at key points during the pandemic to ensure that scrutiny has been kept informed of significant changes to policy and practice. Scrutiny Board will be co-ordinating a review of the local response to the pandemic and what this means for the Council going forward.

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team has also helped support other areas of work during the pandemic, including: the Locality Budgets programme; the school admissions appeals team; the Resilience Forum Silver Group meetings; and the Outbreak Management Advisory Board.

Refugee Resettlement

A number of the refugees resettled in North Yorkshire have been volunteering during the COVID pandemic, ranging from delivering groceries to sewing protective clothing for hospital staff and for a care home. A volunteer has also been involved in translating vital public health messages into Arabic for Healthwatch. Those volunteering have spoken of feeling an added sense of purpose again by being able to give back to their local community. As one of the volunteers has said: "I feel it allows me to do something positive during this difficult time for us all, for the community which welcomed me and my family when we first arrived to the UK."

Most of the families resettled in North Yorkshire seemed to have coped with the lockdown, aided by the fact that their refugee experiences have meant that they have experienced worse situations. Early on in the lockdown however it was recognised that frequent contact needed to be maintained with the families so that they did not become more isolated, and also so that they could continue to progress with their understanding of the English language and general integration. Consequently, video conferencing technology is being used to deliver multiple English language sessions for the adults each week. The learning sessions have been shorter than the face to face classes were, but it has allowed the adults to continue to progress with their understanding of the English language. Separate sessions are held with the women and men to allow both parents in each family to continue with their learning whilst the other parent is looking after the children. Education support has been provided to the children through the County Council's English as an Additional Language Team. This has included serving as an initial point of contact for all the refugee families' concerns and enquiries regarding their children's education; support with accessing online learning provided by schools; provision of one to one pupil support and tuition; and liaising between students, schools and colleges to ensure that students attending college, or due to start college have selected suitable courses for the forthcoming academic year and completed necessary applications. The EAL team has also organised, advised and provided ongoing support to volunteers to provide one to one home learning support for pupils.

About 20% of the working age adults had secured employment before the pandemic but it remains to be seen how the pandemic may have affected these jobs. In anticipation of the jobs market being more difficult to get into, those adults not in employment are being offered video conferencing sessions to provide employment-related advice and support, including advice on CV writing and interview techniques.

Globally there has been a temporary hold on refugees being resettled to other countries, necessitated by disruptions and restrictions to international air travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This delayed the departures of some 10,000 refugees to resettlement countries many of whom were caught up in worsening situations. During this time work continued behind the scenes by the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and other relevant international organisations to ensure that when flights resumed refugees could once again be resettled. Recently the UNHCR has announced the resumption of resettlement departures for refugees. Although many travel restrictions still remain in place, as these begin to lift in many resettlement countries more refugee departures can be anticipated. While there is no news at present regarding the UK, once flights can resume North Yorkshire will be taking part in the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme, with five families (25 persons) expected to arrive at some point this year or early next year. The families do not have complex health needs and were chosen in part to ensure minimum strain on the NHS at this point in time. Quarantine measures will be put in place during the first two weeks of their arrival in the UK, if still required by then.

County Councillor Locality Budgets

The sixth year of the scheme started on 03 April 2020 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations will be 31 January 2021. The start date was earlier than normal to enable County Councillors to respond to needs arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and because there were no elections in May 2020.

This year County Councillors are particularly encouraged to focus on projects or activities that respond to local needs and community initiatives arising from the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of climate change, and/or that promote the Council's Stronger Communities programme.

Because of the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic the Chairman of the County Council has given a blanket call in exemption to enable the Executive Member for Stronger Communities to make decisions swiftly and with immediate effect, thereby allowing County Councillors to react quickly to changing circumstances and to respond promptly to local needs arising from the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

35.50% of Locality Budget Grants made to date are directly related to supporting organisations assisting communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

NYLAF Covid-19 Support Grant Scheme

North Yorkshire County Council has set up the Covid-19 Support Grant Scheme to help individuals and families who are most in need or most at risk, to access food, utility, and other household essentials to support them through a 14-day period of self-isolation because of Covid-19.

Community support organisations are coordinating volunteers who go to supermarkets to do shopping on their behalf. The local community support organisation will confirm that people are eligible and complete the application with people. If an application is successful, a volunteer from the local community support organisation will make contact to find out what food and other household essentials are needed, go to the local supermarket and drop the shopping on the doorstep.

During the period from late March to mid-June the scheme made 644 awards to 430 households, totalling £61,055.

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