

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****19 February 2020****COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES****Financial Settlement**

Elsewhere in this agenda we will consider in great detail the financial settlement made to us by the government. In arriving at a balanced budget as required by law we must consider the savings and efficiencies we can make, the settlement made to us, and the level of council tax we need to levy to make the equation work.

I'm grateful to government Ministers for listening to our concerns, either made directly to them or through our membership of the County Council Network, and for the support given to us by our MP's who have also taken up our issues.

We have played our part in the programme of austerity that has allowed central government to address the imbalance in the national economy. Now as austerity comes to an end we can look forward not only to increases in infrastructure spending, but also a fairer funding review to address the iniquitous position where rural areas must pay 3 or more times the level of council tax compared to large cities and London.

We will also welcome a more equitable way of funding adult social care.

**Climate Change**

Progress is being made on developing the Council's carbon reduction plan linked to with our aspiration to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.

I would like to thank Cllr Stanley Lumley and his joint scrutiny committee, and Cllr Greg White leading a small part of the Executive, for the work they have done since the last Council meeting. I intend continuing making a statement about progress made at each Council, but I anticipate that Greg will present more detailed reports as we proceed.

The council's aspiration to be carbon neutral has been included as an integral part of the council's ambitions and values in the draft council plan that you be considering later in this meeting.

As reported to the Climate Change Scrutiny Joint Sub-Committee on 22 January 2020 (<https://democracy.northyorks.gov.uk/committees.aspx?commid=117&meetid=4398>) we have established a baseline carbon footprint figure for the Council in 2018/19 of 13,492 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, which includes corporate buildings, street lighting and business travel. This is down from 19,574 tCO<sub>2</sub>e four years earlier, a reduction of just over 30%. Our carbon footprint is moving in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go in next 10 years. We also need to reduce our wider carbon footprint and to encourage, in conjunction with partners, a reduction in the carbon footprint of the whole county.

We have identified eight areas with the potential to make a very significant change to the Council's carbon footprint and have started to explore the feasibility and impact of these:

- Solar farm
- NYCC vehicle fleet
- Home to school transport
- Converting all buildings to high efficiency gas boilers

- Converting all buildings to alternative methods of heating
- Tree planting and peat restoration as a method of offsetting
- Buying only electricity produced from renewable sources
- Support for schools and other organisations related to the council to significantly improve their energy efficiency

Each of the eight areas will have its own challenges and costs, and these will need to be worked on and understood. In some of the areas we may be able to recover the capital cost within a few years, for others it may take significantly longer. One of the questions that will need to be explored is what level of 'green premium' is the council able and prepared to spend for what reduction in our carbon footprint, and where is that money going to from?

Alongside the eight areas we will continue to increase our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint through everyday management and personal activity such as reducing energy use through simple things like switching off lights and computers when not needed, challenging the necessity for travel, taking every opportunity when equipment need to be replaced or services need designing to make the best choices.

### **Rural Commission**

The eight independent Rural Commissioners have started their investigation into the sustainability of our most rural communities. This is a unique and dynamic initiative by the Council to address the crisis in rurality, and we should congratulate the Commissioners for the way they are going about their task, and be grateful to them for giving up their time so willingly. The Commission's job is to provide an action plan and workable recommendations to maximise sustainability over the next 10, 20 and 30 years and to refresh the evidence base as leverage for increased Government support.

The Commission is wanting to hear from local people, businesses and organisations about the issues that affect our most rural communities. Written submissions can be sent by email to [ruralcommission@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:ruralcommission@northyorks.gov.uk) at any time up until May 2020. The Commission is also holding focused meetings with local people, farmers, businesses, business networks and support organisations, public sector partners and academics, and will be visiting some rural communities.

Meetings to date have focussed on food, farming and the economy; with future sessions focusing on housing, transport, education, connectivity and the environment. The Commission is expected to report in autumn 2020 and the report will then be considered by the Council, and our partners, and action plans developed.

I would ask you to encourage local people, businesses and organisations with views and practical ideas about the issues that affect our most rural communities to contact the Commission – further information is available at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/north-yorkshire-rural-commission>.

### **Salt of the Earth – celebrating kindness in North Yorkshire communities**

There is already an abundance of kindness in North Yorkshire, with an active and thriving network of volunteers and dedicated community groups. Acts of kindness make a huge difference to people and that giving and welcoming culture is something we are famous for the world over.

We are celebrating that North Yorkshire spirit - with Salt of the Earth - a kindness movement which aims to galvanise even broader social action in our communities.

In partnership with JPI media and Newsquest, and supported by BBC Radio York, we aim to engage and inspire a wider audience to make a difference by seeing kindness as 'just what we do in North Yorkshire'. We will tackle misconceptions over the next 12 months and try, where we can, to remove the barriers - perceived real -that get in the way of people helping each other out.

### **Devolution**

This seems to have been a long time coming, but we are finally making some progress. Clear messages have been received from government, that One Yorkshire will not happen in this Parliament, and that sub-regional deals if pursued actively will be successful in outcomes. Consequently Sheffield City Region is agreed, and we should recognise the compromises that will have been made on all sides to allow this to happen; West Yorkshire is ready for signing, and negotiations have started for a York & North Yorkshire set of devolved powers.

Devolution remains the right thing to do, if only for two reasons – it comes with gainshare of many millions of pounds over a long and guaranteed time period, and decision making on our existing funding streams passes from Whitehall to local town halls.

However, once we have the details to accompany the framework of devolved powers we will then need to communicate the benefits to our communities, as one change in governance that will be required will be the creation of an elected mayor, working with a Combined Authority. It will be essential to keep this arrangement small, responsive and above all inexpensive.

CARL LES