

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 November 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

Communities continued support to vulnerable

The support offered by our communities to the most vulnerable people in the county since the start of the pandemic will continue through the winter months. The government has issued new national guidance that will help to protect the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' (CEV) – these are those people who were formally required to 'shield' - with advice on any extra precautions people should take, depending upon which tier of risk they live in. The level of guidance increases depending on the level of risk.

As a new national lockdown has been announced for 28 days starting on 5 November 2020, all CEV people will be advised to take a range of additional precautions over and above the advice issued to the general population. This includes being advised not to make any unnecessary journeys, including only going shopping for essential items and only working if they are able to work from home.

There are currently circa 25,000 people identified as CEV in North Yorkshire. Support for CEV people has been largely devolved to local authorities as the national arrangements were stood down in July. We are very confident that the arrangements we have across the county, with our network of Community Support Organisations (CSO), is well placed to meet those support requirements both during the 28 day lockdown period and beyond. The CSOs have been re-contracted until the end of March and they all continue to support thousands of people across the whole county – both people who are identified as clinically extremely vulnerable, those people who are self-isolating and the wider population where people may need some help as they don't have any friends or family nearby.

Since April, the CSOs have delivered:

- Over 22,000 bags of shopping and food boxes
- 22,000 hot meals
- 13,000 prescriptions

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.

- 14,502 welfare calls and 17,483 befriending calls have been made
- Over 12,000 calls providing advice and guidance
- Over 1,300 pets have been cared for, and
- 2,033 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 a total of 65,166 volunteering hours since the lockdown started.

In order to ensure that we can continue to offer support 7 days a week, and to ensure that we have volunteer capacity to meet any new demand generated through test and trace we are also shoring up our internal volunteer pool. The 'Team North Yorkshire' volunteers will be directly deployable from the Customer Services Centre. Support is also available from colleagues in North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to help with things such as delivering emergency food boxes for which we continue to be extremely grateful.

Outbreak Management Support

To support localities with ensuring that visible information and advice is available to areas of high risk or high footfall, we have partnered with North Yorkshire Youth and North Yorkshire Sport. This allows us to both deploy detached youth work teams on the ground who will engage with young people to reinforce guidance around social distancing and other measures and to develop social media messages with young people themselves. Wider population information about any new measures in place or guidance regarding safe operation of services will be cascaded through our CSOs.

Additional Hardship Support

In addition to the extra funds allocated to the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund by the Council in April, in September, the Council received a grant from Defra (£530k) to support essential food supplies and to offer support to people and families experiencing financial hardship. This grant has been used to award 24 food charities, such as food banks, meals on wheels and community fridges, with grants of up to £10,000. This funding aims to increase capacity across the county network of Citizens Advice Bureaus, to offer financial advice and support and has increased the number of payments available to families from the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund.

Legal and Democratic Services

Democratic Services have been working with Technology and Change to introduce live broadcast meetings for all the Council's formal public committee meetings. This has involved training and support for members and officers and the move from using Skype to using Microsoft Teams. To date, nearly 40 live broadcast meetings have been held, including two meetings of the County Council. The intention is to continue with live broadcast meetings through to May 2021, when the Government Regulations allowing the meetings to take place remotely expire. I hope that we will be able to continue to have the option of live broadcast meetings for all of our committees, as the savings in time, carbon dioxide emissions and travel and facilities expenses are considerable. Another advantage of having the live broadcast meetings, has been the greater engagement by the public and members of the Council in our decision-making processes. Initial data on views of the meetings on the Council's YouTube site show viewing figures in excess of 300 for some meetings, albeit that most are in the 40 to 50 range. Finally, I would like to note the huge progress that we have all made as a Council in embracing this new way of working and the move from meetings in person to remote meetings using different software and platforms.

The Council's six Area Constituency Committees have restarted their formal meetings with them being held remotely using Microsoft Teams. Since their inception, there has been a drive to support our MPs to attend the meetings, so that there can be regular dialogue between local members and their MP. When we met in person, it was often difficult to secure the attendance of the MP. Now we are meeting remotely, this has been much easier, raising the profile of our local areas and our county with the MPs and, as a consequence, Westminster.

The Council's five thematic overview and scrutiny committees have restarted formal, public meetings. The scrutiny programmes that they work to have been reviewed to reflect the changing priorities and pressures for the Council and key partners. Scrutiny Board will be co-ordinating a review of the local response to the pandemic and what this means for the Council going forward. Scrutiny Board has also been consulted on the unitary proposal for North Yorkshire. Whilst this has not been formal scrutiny, as Scrutiny Board is held in private and the papers are not published, it has been an opportunity for the Chairs, Vice Chairs and Older People's and Young People's champions to offer their views and perspectives.

Refugee Resettlement

Good progress continues to be made with the refugee resettlement in terms of the existing families that have been resettled in North Yorkshire. There is no information yet from the Home Office as to when the refugee resettlement can recommence. Meanwhile, conditions for refugees are getting worse in the countries of first asylum that they are living in, especially in Lebanon.

Since my previous statement, more of the adults resettled to date in North Yorkshire have been able to get into employment despite the difficult economic backdrop. There are now 22 adults in employment (13 in part-time and nine in full-time roles) out of a total of about 80 working-aged adults, but that total includes adults with caring responsibilities and with very young-children. Some of those in existing employment lost their jobs, as a result of the economic situation related to COVID-19, and other roles were under threat. On a positive note, most of the pre-existing part-time roles have been retained and an additional four part-time roles have been secured recently. Just before lockdown two clients set up their own businesses – a barber's shop in Harrogate and a food shop in Scarborough. These continue to be in business. During the covid 'lockdown' period, six clients were volunteering but this has now reduced to two due to the other positions ceasing. In light of the rise in infection rates and the number of people isolating in the county, there could be increasing opportunities for volunteering once again. Four of the younger adults are doing apprenticeships (hairdressing and motor mechanics) including, most recently, the take-up of a 15 month apprenticeship with North Yorkshire County Council, specialising in recruitment. The person concerned has ambitions to pursue a career in Human Resource Management – not bad for someone who nearly lost her life in the war in Syria as a young child.

The English language classes being delivered to the adults continue to be delivered remotely using zoom and are unlikely to be face-to-face again until spring next year.

Parents were pleased to see their children back in school in September although some had concerns like everyone else about the risk of infection. Correspondence, co-ordinated by the County Council, continues to be sent out regularly to the families, explaining about the coronavirus rules in respect of social distancing and more recently about the introduction of the three-tier system. The use of "WhatsApp" has been used as well to get messages out quickly to families alongside information sent in the post. There is a balance to be had, as there is for us all, to ensuring that the families are kept well informed about the coronavirus situation and to protect their physical health, whilst at the same time not causing them to put their lives on hold and not going out of their houses

Support for families to access Emergency Food and assistance

There are number of options available across North Yorkshire to people and families who are struggling financially and need support to access food and essential supplies including

access to volunteers if people are also self-isolating. Council funding of £2,663k has been provided for the measures below in 2020/21 and it has been supplemented by funding from DEFRA of £530k (from the national fund of £63m).

Anyone seeking assistance should call the NYCC Customer Services Centre: 01609 780780 – open 7 days a week. The NYCC Customer Services Centre can then signpost to all the support detailed below.

1. Community Support Organisations (CSOs)

There are 23 CSOs across the county who can advise people on what local support is available for people who are self-isolating and can arrange for volunteers to help them access food and essential items. The CSOs can also refer people to long-term help around financial planning and advice. Details available here: <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/help-you-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

CSOs can also be contacted directly in most cases.

2. North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF)

Food and energy top up vouchers have been available from NYLAF since April specifically for people who were shielding or self-isolating. This is still in place and can be accessed from the CSO network.

Since September support has also been made available for people and families experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic, but not necessarily self-isolating. Those eligible can receive up to 3 sets of vouchers to help them with food and energy costs. Emergency food vouchers of £25 to cover a 5-7 day period are available for individuals, £35 for couples and a further £15 for each additional family member. In addition, applicants can apply for energy top-up vouchers of £28 for an individual and £45 for a family for the same period. Details available here: <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/local-assistance-fund>

3. Food Banks and Delivery Services

There are a number of local food banks, emergency food suppliers and hot meal delivery services operating across the county. In September, £175k of additional funding was made available to 24 charities to help them continue this provision. The support includes things such as Meals on Wheels, Food Banks and Community Fridges. Information on what is offered in each locality is available from the Customer Services Centre or by contacting the local Community Support Organisations directly. In addition, some members have elected to make donations to Food Banks through their Locality Budgets.

4. Financial Advice and Support

A grant of £80k has been awarded to the network of Citizens' Advice Bureaux in North Yorkshire (CANY) to provide additional capacity for them to offer advice and support to people who may need help managing their finances or access benefits. CANY work alongside NYCC's Income Maximisation team. People can also access this support by contacting their CAB directly.

5. Online directories

- Local community and commercial food delivery services are also listed on the Buy Local directory here: <https://buylocal.northyorks.gov.uk/>

- General support organisations can be found on North Yorkshire Connect:
<https://northyorkshireconnect.org.uk/>

County Councillor Locality Budgets

The sixth year of the scheme started on 3 April 2020 and the **last date for the receipt of recommendations will be 31 January 2021**. County Councillors are encouraged to focus on projects or activities that respond to local needs and community initiatives; particularly this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of climate change, and/or projects 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.

Currently 301 projects have been supported amounting to £343,414 (47.70%) of this year's budget. 6 members have spent all of their budget allocation and 9 members are yet to submit any recommendations.

DAVID CHANCE