

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 FEBRUARY 2022

STATEMENT OF CLLR GREG WHITE

Libraries

Our libraries are still offering a Covid-safe place to visit and have (fingers crossed) all stayed open over the past couple of months. Total issues are holding at circa 82% and visits have increased reaching almost 65% against 2019. Opening hours are not yet fully back to pre-pandemic levels as probably expected with the most recent situation. It is hoped most will be as 'back to normal' as we can by the end of March. Similarly there is still reduced access to public PCs to ensure safe use, however larger libraries are seeing an increase in both use and capacity to support. This last quarter saw 20,289 sessions with 1,623 people given support. Libraries are reporting seeing an increase with families visiting which is great to see.

The Christmas Reading Challenge was very successful with around 1,500 children taking part an evaluation report will follow.

North Yorkshire's library service joined the national commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 with a series of events. This year's theme was "One Day" which encourages people to learn about the past in the hope that there will come a day with no genocide. A number of libraries displayed posters, books and educational materials; Skipton Library had a remembrance tree where visitors wrote their own commemorative messages on leaves and the Northallerton Library Poetry Group hosted an online event sharing readings on the Holocaust.

Self-Care Toolkits

I am pleased to tell you that we now have Self-Care Toolkits for young people available to borrow from all libraries. This follows the success of Wellbeing Bags for adults launched in 2018, and seed funded by Libraries Connected Yorkshire & Humber. Cllr Stuart Martin, Chair, did the honours in launching the Toolkits at Ripon Library on 20 January – unfortunately limited numbers to ensure Covid-safety. The Toolkits were developed in consultation with young people 11-25, as an easily portable collection of items designed to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, including books from the Reading Well Shelf Help collection, resources for colouring, journaling and origami, fidget toys and information on support organisations. The Self-Care toolkits for young people are a valuable addition to the wider Health and Wellbeing offer at your local library, including Wellbeing bags for adults, Reading Well books on prescription and events and activities to support social connectedness.

Public computers, printers and self service

We have recently extended our self service facilities so you can now book a library computer session online or via the North Yorkshire Libraries app. You can also send documents from your smartphone, tablet or from a home computer to print at your nearest library; staff or volunteers will print them for you when you call and collect them.

Supporting job seekers

The service has recently developed a new partnership with DWP Job Centres The Communities Strategy Group are working closely with Job Centres across the county and have successfully developed a leaflet which highlights the 'offer' that libraries are able to provide to those seeking work or looking to develop their careers. The leaflet is now in place at all Job Centres across North Yorkshire and work coaches have reported a positive response.

Libraries of Sanctuary

North Yorkshire's Libraries have signed up as a **City of Sanctuary** supporting organisation the aim being to nurture well-being, reduce isolation and to support wider community cohesion by helping local people to develop positive attitudes towards sanctuary seekers. Libraries offer a safe and welcoming space and are actively reaching out to sanctuary seekers to raise awareness of our services and resources. We have been visiting temporary accommodation to welcome and join people to the library, providing translated promotional materials, purchasing appropriate stock, providing free IT subscriptions, encouraging attendance at events such as story time and providing volunteering opportunities. We work with partners to provide ESOL classes and promote resources such as quick reads to support learners. We are in contact with the Refugee Council and local Friends of Refugees groups to connect with families and to determine how best we can support the needs of sanctuary seekers.

Local to Global Project

Members from the east coast will be interested in a collaborative project with Scarborough Museum Trust exploring the Harrison Collection held at both Woodend and Scarborough Libraries, the aim is to examine past and present attitudes towards Africa and the investigate the impact of colonialism on contemporary global issues. The project has recently launched but there are already plans to engage with partners such as the DWP to encourage new volunteers who are seeking work and support them to develop research and digital skills.

A couple of updates from previous statements.

Foodbank Project

Library information and joining packs and free books from the Reading Agency have now been distributed to 10 foodbanks across Hambleton, Richmondshire, Selby and Scarborough during December. By working in close partnership with local food banks and local Community Support Organisations the library service aim to support those in most need in terms of income, literacy and employability as well as reaching residents in very rural areas where loneliness and isolation are more prevalent and transport, digital skills and connectivity may be more limited.

Reboot

We are continuing to supply donated devices through this scheme to individuals in need, helping them to get online to complete learning or develop their IT skills. Currently we have supplied over 170 laptops, tablets and phones and regular referrals are coming in via partners such as Living Well, IDAS, Citizen's Online and via other NYCC departments such as the Mental Health and Early Help teams.

Coroners

The business case to amalgamate the existing three coroner areas was submitted to the Chief Coroner and Ministry of Justice in December 2021. Their formal consultation has closed and the matter will now to be submitted to ministers to make a decision. There is no date for when this approval will be obtained.

The holding of large inquests remains challenging due to the restricted ability (due to Covid) to hold inquests with juries and large number of attendees. This is a national challenge.

Registration service

Registrars have continued to deal with a higher than average number of deaths to register, which together with the Christmas close down, has meant the registrars still face challenges. It is anticipated that the current dispensation that allows the registration of a death by

telephone will cease at the end of March. This option has been much appreciated by relatives as it avoids the need to travel to a local office, especially if the relative is abroad. There are indications this may be brought back at some future date but there is no time scale for when this might be.

Contrary to expectations, the number of births to register has not altered significantly after the removal of the dispensation, from the Department of Works and Pensions, which allowed families to claim child benefit without registering baby first.

Ceremonies are continuing to be held, with an above average demand as couples make up for the postponed ceremonies from the last two years. This is welcome, especially for the many hospitality venues in the county who have been hard hit by the many postponements and restrictions imposed.

Archives

The Record Office is working in partnership with Ryedale Carers Resource to deliver an exciting programme of reminiscence-based workshops exploring a range of themes linked to the story of food and farming in Ryedale over the ages. The project builds upon collaboration between the two organisations developed as part of the Heritage Funded *Resilient Records* project led by the office between 2019 and 2021.

The programme of six sessions, delivered in two blocks in North and South Ryedale, will provide the opportunity for participants to explore the remarkable collection of historic photographs, recipes, maps, diaries and parish records held by the Record Office in a relaxed and informal setting, inspiring conversation and discussion and helping to combat social isolation. Participants will also be invited to bring along their own photographs, artefacts or other family items they would like to share with the group, linked to the story of farming and how food has been grown, reared and produced.

As part of its Unfolding Origins project, the office is also engaging with the other end of the age spectrum. Inspired by historic archives relating to the Selby toll bridge, a community artist has been working with two Selby primary schools to create celebratory textile banners to mark 30 years of toll free crossings. Alongside the schools, artist-in-residence Lynn Settrington has been creating work on the same theme, drawing on different aspects of the history of the bridge. All the work will be on display in an exhibition at Selby Library from mid-February to the end of March.

Climate Change

The Beyond Carbon officer board continues to develop our approach to climate change and deliver low carbon projects for our operational activity. To support co-ordination of this essential work, we have recently appointed a Climate Change Policy Officer.

Working with our partners is an essential part of the climate change agenda. We are actively engaged with the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership on activities such as the development of the York and North Yorkshire Route map to Carbon Negative and the Local Area Energy Plan. These documents will be instrumental in investment decisions for low carbon infrastructure.

We are also working closely with the seven district councils on ensuring that Local Government Reorganisation workstreams have climate change agenda considerations included in their 'business as usual' as well as transformational services plans.

Some particular highlights to report in this period:

- The Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Rollout Strategy is currently in development, working with partners across the county. It is expected to be completed in June 2022

and deliver a 10 year plan which will provide evidence, such as how many chargers, the mix of charger types and where they should go, to inform policy development. Additionally, we are undertaking a network planning exercise across North Yorkshire which is expected to lead to mass rollout of EV Charging Points. This will support a 'just transition', ensuring right assets are in the right location, particularly considering the needs of rural areas.

- Through the Government's Sustainable Warmth Programme we have been successful, with three of our district councils, Scarborough, Ryedale and Hambleton, in bidding for nearly £4m to support hundreds of low-income households heated by mains gas. This will provide measures such as solar PV, hybrid air source heat pumps, loft insulation, underfloor insulation and external wall insulation. We have also secured over £4.6m to support low-income households heated by other power sources through the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) scheme. This will provide measures such as solar PV, high retention storage heaters, air source heat pumps, loft insulation, underfloor insulation and external wall insulation..
- Our Property Service has successfully secured an additional £400,000 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, to which we will add a further £170,000, to install air source heat pumps to replace end of life gas boilers in Castle House, Malton library and the Children's Resource Centre at Killinghall.

We continue to seek Government funding as opportunities arise to support our Carbon Neutral ambitions. NYCC is in the final bid stage for £30K for Treeplanting Supply Chain study which will look at the all the elements required to reach carbon sequestration targets (land, tree supply, forest management) and how these can benefit the NY economy.

Digital Workplace

We are supporting our colleagues to find new and innovative ways to deliver their services using the latest features of **Microsoft 365** (M'365). As well as providing access to the technology, we recognise the importance of helping employees develop digital skills and realise the full benefit from using these tools. Yammer is an important application that is enabling colleagues to ask questions and share great ideas on any topic; sharing real-life user stories is a great way to seed ideas and maximise the benefits of this technology. A growing community of over 115 colleagues are already participating in the conversations and offering support through their experience of new ways of working.

There have been eighteen M'365 webinars held, with over 1500 views to share the latest updates; these includes guidance on the up and coming migration of data to SharePoint Online, as well as tips and tricks to get more familiar with M'365 features. Alongside these webinars, there are 150 guidance resources available on the Get IT Help portal.

Security continues to be a priority and this quarter saw the launch of a new feature called Microsoft Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), it is now much easier to remotely access eMail and Citrix securely. This has enabled us to provide a much better experience for our users and reduce calls for help to our Service Desk

Customer

The North Yorkshire customer portal has now *124,869 customer accounts*.

December saw the first renewal period for Residential Parking Permits on-line. We saw 83% take up with 339 customer renewing their Residential Parking permit for the following year.

November we launched the Household Support Fund in Customer. Letters were sent to eligible customers inviting them to apply for shopping vouchers. There has been an 93.4% uptake of people applying for the vouchers with 98% applying online. 8,370 applications had been made by 22/12/21, 8,096 vouchers had been redeemed by 29/12/21 a 97.8% success rate.

The scheme created additional demand on the Customer Service Centre with 1,369 telephone contacts and 321 contact us queries via the website.

The Customer service centre joined forces with HAS and Emergency Planning Teams to provide support to vulnerable customers in the aftermath of storm Arwen at the end of November. This campaign continued over the weekend of the storm and into the following week.

Covid number in North Yorkshire continue to fluctuate with the new variant towards the end of the quarter. Test and Trace figure in the customer service centre increased significantly towards the end of the quarter. In the last 3 months the Customer Service Team have attempted to contact over 7760 customers with an overall success rate of 52%.

The Customer Service Centre continues to support customers who are self-isolating and require support. In the last 3 months the CSC has received 442 calls and provided information and support to 115.

LEP Building Better Infrastructure project

NYCC working with NYnet continues to build out the free wi-fi programme to 16 market town across North Yorkshire. Through the second quarter, the team working with BES Highways have delivered services to Malton and Skipton.

The Internet of the Things network has moved into the pilot stage, trials focussed on Bins, Air Quality, and Home Care are in the process of being deployed across the Harrogate, Selby, and Richmond area.

We are working up a “smart bin” solution that is beginning roll out now in a target area across Harrogate. This will allow the local authority to understand when a bin needs emptying (as well as when it has been knocked over, or damaged) potentially enabling smarter collection cycles and saved costs. This is the leading proof of concept of a technology called IOT within which we are also trialling air quality technology, AI traffic management cameras, people counting through areas of local interest and others.

Cyber Security

We continue to proactively monitor for cyber threats through the use of security software and acting on intelligence received from trusted partner organisations e.g. National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), Yorkshire & Humber Warning, Advice & Reporting Point (YHWARP) and Regional Organised Crime Unit (YHROCU). This monitoring has proved most successful with the Information Security Team successfully identifying and blocking threat activity from various international locations.

At the beginning of December a number of vulnerabilities were disclosed worldwide that affect multiple versions of a Java logging library named Apache Log4j. This vulnerability was one of the most serious security flaws in the past decade as it is widely used in many applications and is present in many services as a dependency. Once notified of the

vulnerability T&C implemented measures, including pro-active monitoring, patch updates and implementing guidance provided from NCSC and service providers, to mitigate the risk to the council network and applications.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE