

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 MAY 2022

THIS STATEMENT COVERS THE PERIOD FROM THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL ON 16 FEBRUARY 2022 TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS ON 5 MAY 2022

STATEMENT OF CLLR GREG WHITE

Libraries

Our libraries are gradually getting busier with book issues and visits increasing month on month. Most are now at full opening hours and holding regular events which are proving popular as life beyond the pandemic continues.

April 1 was an important date for our libraries. I want to start this statement with a big thank you to all 2,000 plus volunteers across our communities who have put so much time and passion into their local libraries over the past 10 years. We started our journey working in partnership with communities in 2012 with 7 community managed and now have 31 libraries operating this model with volunteers also helping to provide services at all 42. Thank you to both volunteers and the staff who support them for ensuring not only did our libraries stay open for their communities but have also increased use so that we are now in the top 10% of high performers nationally. We couldn't have achieved this without this amazing support.

Self-Care Toolkits

At last Council the launch of the Self-Care toolkits was announced, I am pleased to say that these are proving a success – with over 70 being issued to date. We have received some positive feedback and will order more of these once all feedback has been evaluated in case we need to change anything.

Mental Health Awareness Week

Libraries across North Yorkshire will next month highlight the support they give people to combat loneliness by offering places to meet and socialise as part of Mental Health Awareness Week from 9 to 15 May. The week, coordinated by the Mental Health Foundation, focuses this year on how loneliness is affecting more people in the UK and its huge impact on physical and mental health during the pandemic.

Events in libraries during Mental Health Awareness Week include Coffee, Cake and Chat drop-ins at which people can enjoy a cuppa and cake and meet new and old friends. In addition, regular library sessions that provide opportunities to meet people and to enjoy an activity will continue during Mental Health Awareness Week. Weekly story times take place in most libraries to bring together families with under-fives for a free, fun time. From jigsaws to Scrabble, knit and natter to poetry and book groups, most libraries in North Yorkshire have regular activities.

Local and Community History month

North Yorkshire Libraries and Two County Museums are joining forces to encourage residents to discover and enjoy their community heritage during Local History Month in May. In partnership with the Ryedale Folk Museum and the Dales Countryside Museum, events are being held in libraries across the county around the theme of dialect and language.

These events are part of a research project into the way we speak, led by the University of Leeds and last undertaken over half a century ago. The collaboration with North Yorkshire libraries will provide opportunities for the public to get involved in sharing their own dialect, so *Go along to one of the events and stick your nose in or should that be beak, conk, cronk, hud, immy, sneck, snitch, snitcher, snotter, snout or trunk?*

Pre-recorded online talks will be shared via the North Yorkshire libraries YouTube channel throughout May and a series of activities, including dialect crosswords, can be accessed at participating libraries.

To complement the Dialect and Heritage Project Dialect drop-ins, North Yorkshire libraries are hosting five pop-up archive events with the County Record Office and funding talks with speakers from the Yorkshire Dialect Society, celebrating Yorkshire dialect through stories, poems, history, and humour. Events run throughout March so please check with your local library - all are free, with the exception of the poetry event at Scarborough.

Slipper Socials

A visit to the library in April was good for your body as well as your mind as older people are invited to pick up a pair of slippers at some branches around North Yorkshire.

Malton, Selby and Starbeck libraries held Slipper Socials at which around 60 older people picked up anti-slip slippers. Many stayed on to chat and talk to the various supporting organisations at the event held in partnership with North Yorkshire Sport. The first of three pilot sessions it aims to support those living at home providing anti-slip slippers to prevent falls and potential for subsequent loss of independence. NY sport provided Get Moving exercises and information packs whilst other support organisations offered additional 'stay safe' advice

Libraries are working to obtain further funding to extend to other libraries over the next year.

BorrowBox

Readers of eBooks are in for an even better experience when they borrow from their North Yorkshire library following a new contract being signed with BorrowBox.

BorrowBox is the UK's most popular platform for eBooks and eAudiobooks, with the widest range of titles and the most intuitive interface. The BorrowBox app incorporates an eBook reader as well as an eAudiobook player and is available to download to mobile devices free from the App Store and Google Play.

The move to the new supplier took place at the end of April and the first week saw over 5,000 users and issued over 3,000 items with over 97% of titles transferred. Our libraries have offered eBooks since 2010 so have over 14,000 titles (18,000 items) so this has been a big job as the publishers have to authorise each transfer!! I would like to say thank you to all the staff involved as they have worked tirelessly to support customers with the changes as well as having to ensure all stock was transferred correctly. The move may not have been as smooth as was hoped for (our large collection and publishers don't work at weekends) but I am sure once used to the new App our customers will continue to enjoy this service. New titles are already on order.

Childrens space gets a new look

Members may have spotted a change in Northallerton Library following the recent refurbishment of the children's area. The new layout allows children to read in a hideaway under a large tree which is lined with brightly coloured comfortable seating for their families.

Mobile shelving has been added to enable flexible use of the space for events and activities, including the popular weekly story times and half-term craft and theatre sessions. The library has also benefitted from a £3,000 investment in reading material including picture books, board books and audio books, as well as popular junior fiction and non-fiction titles. I am pleased to say that the childrens area of Ripon Library will similarly benefit with work commencing later this month.

Accreditation for Northallerton Library

Alongside the refurbishment, Northallerton library has been accredited as a breastfeeding-friendly venue. It is promoting a welcoming and supportive environment for women to breastfeed; hoping to encourage more young families to visit and join the library.

Jubilee Plans

Plans are well underway for the Queens platinum jubilee, with Tea Parties at most libraries, competitions, trails to find The Queen's Knickers (a book!!) and Big Jubilee Read jigsaws to complete.

The Big Jubilee Read consists of 10 books from each decade of Her Majesty's reign, offering a selection of literature from the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries - available from your library.

Knaresborough and Newcastle Building Society

I am pleased to confirm negotiations to provide banking facilities via Knaresborough Library are progressing. A project supported by Harrogate Borough and North Yorkshire County council should see the Newcastle Building Society co-locate within the library later this year.

Scarborough LIF

Lastly but my no means least I am pleased to announce a successful Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports/Arts Council England Libraries Improvement Fund funding of £200k to go towards the refurbishment of Scarborough Library. The grant, backed by a further £250,000 investment from North Yorkshire County Council, will be spent on reconfiguring the ground floor to create a dedicated place for families, a bright, attractive space for children, and quieter areas for relaxation, study and to meet friends.

My colleagues in the Scarborough area may have seen social media posts asking what three things people wanted to see in their library; the service is now conducting a more formal follow up survey to understand people's priorities for how they want to use the space and layout of the library

Coroners

The business case to amalgamate the existing three coroner's areas has been accepted and the appropriate legislation was subsequently passed so that from the 1st April 2022, the new area officially became the coroner area of "North Yorkshire and York". The Chief Coroner has approved the appointment of Jon Heath, the interim Senior Coroner as the Senior Coroner for the new area.

Registrars

The ceremony market continues to recover with an above average number of ceremonies taking place in 2021-22. However, this still leaves a large number of couples who have yet to restart their ceremony planning, but doubtless many will be booked for the coming year of 2022-23. The demand for appointments to give Notice of Marriage/Civil Partnership continues to impact on the availability of appointments for other types of appointment. This particularly affects parents registering the birth of their baby. This is an issue in many other parts of England and Wales. It is likely to be many months yet before the backlog of birth registrations is reduced and the situation returns to normal.

As anticipated, the ability to register a death by telephone ceased at the end of March. There is no date yet proposed to re-instate this service.

The use of an outdoor area for a ceremony, introduced as a Covid measure, has now been made permanent. This enables the ceremony to be held either in a marquee or entirely in the open air. In practice this will always be dependent on the North Yorkshire weather! After a recent change in the law, the age at which a person can get married or form a civil partnership will rise from 16 to 18 years of age. There are few such ceremonies and the numbers have been falling for some years now. Indeed the average age to get married now is when you are in your thirties.

Archives

May is Local History Month and Record Office staff will be out and about around the county bringing pop-up archives to libraries in Great Ayton, Scarborough, Knaresborough, Malton and Northallerton. These events help to promote the work of the office and are an opportunity for people to access advice from archive staff and to view a range of records relating to the local area. Visitors to the Malton event will also have the opportunity to attend a talk exploring further the history of Malton through the archives.

Unfolding Origins project

An exhibition celebrating the conclusion of the Record Office's Unfolding Origins project, will be on display at the office until the end of July. The project, a collaboration with Chrysalis Arts of Gargrave, established three artist residencies to create work inspired by the archives and to develop new ways for people to engage with their heritage. The exhibition will bring together the new work created by the artists for the Ryedale, Selby and Richmondshire districts, which was previously displayed locally. The artists were inspired by a diverse range of records ranging from the First World War, to the Selby toll bridge and the natural environment of Swaledale. The exhibition will also include the work of school and youth groups who took part in the project and feature drawings, film, textile art and oral histories.

Climate Change

Embedding climate change activities throughout the Council's services is essential for us to meet our carbon reduction targets. We have instigated several projects in recent weeks, through our Beyond Carbon transformation program to support both carbon reduction and climate change activities within the Council and to support the wider community. We are also enabling residents and visitors to take low carbon travel choices with a number of schemes.

Within the Council:

Staff Travel: Four bids have been successful through our internal the Beyond Carbon pump-priming fund this quarter to:

- buy 10 battery-powered electric vehicles for the pool car fleet
- install 10 electric vehicle charging points at County Hall for our fleet
- buy a battery-powered electric van and car for services to trial
- pilot the installation of home electric vehicle chargers for Health and Adult Services care staff

'Returning to the Office' communications are being developed to encourage staff to consider reducing private car travel for commuting – including North Yorkshire Lift Share (a scheme sponsored by NYCC) and active travel and encouraging the uptake of efficient pool cars. We are working with the University of York to conduct research on how our staff can utilise our property more efficiently to reduce energy use.

Procurement – reducing our 'scope 3' emissions (generated through all the goods and services that we purchase) through using our buying power: A successful bid to the Beyond Carbon pump-priming fund was made this quarter to support research with our supply chain to understand their ability to deliver low carbon goods and services to NYCC and what impact this will have on our procurement emissions.

Training - We have introduced the Local Authority Climate Awareness training module this quarter. The one-hour module is available to all staff on the Learning Zone platform. The City of York Council, the seven District and Borough Councils and the National Parks Authorities have also deployed the training which has been developed jointly.

Planning for future Local Government decarbonisation:

We have led the development of the LGR Climate Change Working Group and are working closely with all LGR partners to ensure the Climate Change design principle is embedded into Workstream development.

The University of York have commenced research work on a range of studies in partnership with us. This includes a review of key strategic policies to identify the impact on and support for climate change, low carbon infrastructure and business growth. Studies will also review housing futures, technology change and digital infrastructure and skills and employment needs in the low carbon economy. The outcomes will inform policy development for the new Council.

We have provided information to **Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission** on our activities to support a gap analysis project which will support more collaborative working across the region.

We also supported **Yorkshire and Humber Local Government Leaders Net Zero** Workstream to develop their Circular Economy activity and Communications themes.

We responded to the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's '**Routemap to Carbon Negative**' consultation draft. This provides a pathway for public, private and voluntary sectors to work collaboratively with an ambition to be a net zero by 2034 and carbon negative by 2040. The ambition to be England's first carbon negative region underpins York and North Yorkshire's devolution proposals.

We continue to contribute to the **Local Area Energy Plan for North Yorkshire** which is currently in development - funded by the Community Renewal Fund. This is due to complete in July 2022. This will support long term spatial planning of energy investment, including housing and property decarbonisation, the role of green hydrogen and renewable energy and low carbon travel and transport. We are leading the development of a bid across North Yorkshire for the **Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure** pilot scheme to test the installation of EV charging points in deeply rural areas.

Decarbonising North Yorkshire:

We are developing our **community engagement** climate change theme through a successful bid to the Beyond Carbon Pump Priming Fund. This will enable the inception of an e newsletter to support partners to showcase their work and to share information, research the understanding of young people in the climate agenda and promote the Library Service as a conduit of trusted and reliable climate change information. This is due to complete in Summer 2022.

Enabling our residents, businesses and visitors to take **low carbon journeys** is an essential element in decarbonising North Yorkshire, as road transport is the highest greenhouse gas emitting sector. In recent weeks we have been awarded £7.8m by the Department for Transport's Zero Emissions Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme which will enable zero emissions buses, alongside supporting charging infrastructure in the Ripon and Harrogate area *over the next 3 years*. Working in partnership with our Districts, NYCC we are preparing applications to the Governments Levelling Up Fund for a multimillion £ bid for improvements to rail stations in North Yorkshire alongside work through the Transforming Cities Fund and the Governments Access for All funding. The programme will significantly improve access and 'usability' of rail travel both for local and longer distance journeys. *Our Public Health team have also taken part in the LGA Behavioural Insights programme research the barriers and facilitators to encouraging people to take a walk rather than the car for a short journeys.* Access to digital information reduces the need for travel and also connects us to real time public transport apps such as our pilot Yorbus service. This has been further enhanced recently with the Wifi in market towns programme extending to a further 8 towns, bringing the total to 20. The 'Reboot' programme (refurbishing IT devices) supports our digital inclusion work, with the added bonus of the 'circular economy' approach.

Carbon sequestration

In partnership with the University of Huddersfield and White Rose Forest, we have successfully bid for Net Zero Innovation funding worth £30K to study the tree planting supply chain. This will enable plans to be developed to ensure land, equipment and trees are available in the right place and time for planting projects, whilst also supporting local businesses and rural economy employment.

The North Yorkshire and York Local Nature Partnership, managed by NYCC, is working with the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre, Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership and Natural England to develop a North Yorkshire and York Natural Capital Asset Register. This will help with future ambitions to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which will include opportunities for carbon sequestration and flood alleviation measures whilst enhancing biodiversity. Funding for this was received from Natural England. This is due for completion in May 2022

Digital Workplace

The Digital Workplace are continuing to support colleagues to deliver their services in innovative ways by utilising the latest features of Microsoft 365 (M365) and have developed further support guidance and webinars which are available on Get IT Help. We continue to collaborate with the Ways of Working group to ensure we can all work where it is best for the service, the individual and most importantly our customers.

Corporate workspaces have been designed to provide a consistent and easy to use experience. Each workstation has a standard 27" monitor capable of dual display, keyboard and mouse with some VPC thin clients available in designated spaces. Alongside preparing workspaces for increased use, MS Teams meeting rooms are being introduced to enable services to explore the best way for them to work in a more hybrid way. These MS Teams meeting rooms have a video conference unit with built in speakers that link with MS Teams meeting; with improved lighting, sounds and displays, they will provide a much better experience for everyone in the room and those attending remotely.

To help enable a productive flexible workforce, the MS Teams phone rollout has also commenced to replace the traditional Mitel phone hand set, this will utilise existing extension numbers to enable staff to make and receive calls on their device using MS Team from virtually anywhere thus enabling a hybrid working style when required. Further engagement is taking place in the next quarter to discuss options for colleagues who are using sophisticated ring groups or call centre functions such as the customer service centre.

Customer

The North Yorkshire customer portal has now *134,160 customer accounts*.

Test and Trace ceased in the Customer Service Centre on the 24th February 2022. Collectively, with the support of the national team 88.5% of customer who contracted covid were contacted and a test and trace conversation completed and support offered for their isolation period.

In March the Customer Service Team launched a new on-line form for professionals wishing to make a referral for a customer to access adult social care services. The new on-line form guides a professional through the information required for the referral and allows the professional to submit the request without the need to attach a document to an e-mail. Once submitted the professional receives a copy of the referral for their records.

The new form removes the risk of a professional e-mailing sensitive information to the wrong e-mail address and it helps improve the quality of data collected speeding up the processing time.

The Customer Service Team have now launched web chat as part of the customer portal. Customers have been able to chat on-line to an advisor in the customer service centre from the website for a many years. This new development means that a customer can now chat to an advisor on-line while completing an application for a Blue Badge. We are currently piloting this for Blue Badge but the plan will be to implement this across all service available in our customer portal offering customer more support to stay on-line.

November we launched the Household Support Fund in Customer. The initial fund concluded in March. For the duration of the fund the Customer Service Centre managed 5000 enquiries from customers. 98% of customer applied for the fund on-line and 9346 customer benefited from the scheme.

Data Products

We've developed a number of analytic product over the last quarter to help us design an effective solution to the household support fund; combining data from all 8 councils so that we might best understand those whom are in the most need for financial support. Additionally, we are enhancing our datanorthyorkshire.org site, to bring it up-to-date functionality wise and allow greater transparency around activity and performance data.

LEP Building Better Infrastructure Project

NYCC working with NYnet completed its build of the free wi-fi programme to more than 17 market towns across North Yorkshire. The project has successfully delivered over 37 terabytes of data since it started to those accessing the Wi-Fi service, for free.

The Internet of the Things network continues its work in 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 continuing to develop the "smart bin" solution that is expanding across Harrogate after the initial Valley Gardens testbed. The scheme will see over 250 sensors be fitted to on-street bins across Harrogate. This technology 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. We are readying for a smart parking trial in Northallerton that will see around 230 sensors fitted to the high street spaces, initially to gather data around how patrons are using the parking. The solution will allow us to provide smart parking services too, although that is not planned as part of the initial rollout.

Cyber Security

Intelligence from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) states that 'although there is no current direct threat to the UK, there is a realistic possibility Russia will seek to respond to the severe sanctions that have been put in place by the West.' Through protective monitoring the InfoSec Team are seeing a sharp increase in continuous unsolicited traffic from Russia since the latter part of January.

Changes are made to the perimeter firewalls to block this traffic and have been doing so since last summer when we experienced similar threat traffic. Whilst this could be nation-state, it is more likely to be organised crime or other groups with ethical or political motives against western countries, taking the opportunity whilst attention is focussed elsewhere on the emerging political situation. In quarter three, we averaged around 100,000 threats block per day, which doubled in both February and March.

The Boxphish training package, which was rolled out in February, has sent out over 17,000 phishing simulations with as little as 6% of users being caught out and clicking the links. The package has also sent out over 12,000 training videos (with quizzes) which provide further information on what to look for and how to deal with security threats.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE