

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 July 2022

Executive Member for Corporate Services

(Including Legal & Democratic Services, Overview & Scrutiny, Performance Management, IT, Customer Contact, Customer Services [inc. the Council's Contact Centre], Refugee and Evacuee Reception and Support, Corporate Development, Member Support and Locality Budgets)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE

Legal and Democratic Services

At the Annual General Meeting of the County Council on 18 May 2022, Council resolved to return to committee meetings in person. Committee Chairs have the option of holding a non-decision making committee meeting in remotely, where there is a clear rationale for doing so and where this has been agreed with the Chief Executive Officer and Leader. The vast majority of the June round of committee meetings were held in person at county hall. The meetings of the Area Constituency Committees have been held in their local area. Informal meetings and briefings continue to be held remotely, using MS Teams as appropriate and where this makes sense, helping to reduce travel times, travel expenses and carbon dioxide emissions.

A number of meetings continue to be live broadcast and recorded, such as the Executive. Work is underway to review the technology that is needed to support the ongoing use of broadcast, recorded and hybrid meetings as it is recognised that this promotes openness and transparency of decision making, increases public engagement and promotes more flexible ways of working for members and officers.

The bulk secondary school admissions appeals are near completion and the focus now moves to hearing those for primary school places. DFE guidance is awaited, due in September, regarding how the appeals will be held going forwards and the options for holding them remotely or on a hybrid basis.

Following the May 2022 elections, the eight democratic services teams across North Yorkshire continue to work closely together on LGR related working groups and on practical, day to day operational matters.

Performance Management (including Customer Contact & Customer Services)

Digital Workplace

The Digital Work-Place (DWP) Team have been busy migrating the workforce from office phones on their physical desktop to Microsoft Teams on their Windows desktop; as each member of staff is migrated it enables the adoption of a more hybrid working style by providing the ability to make and receive external calls to their existing extension number.

In the region of 1400 staff make use of Thin Client Technology for their work, this is a cost effective way of providing a Windows Desktop experience when based in an office. To enable a more hybrid working-style and at the same time contribute to a reduction in our

carbon footprint, DWP have started recycling Laptops as mobile Thin Clients using Stratodesk; now staff can work either in the office or at home, using a Wi-Fi connection.

The DWP Team have developed their skills in producing and broadcasting meetings publically from the Council Chamber. As well as ensuring the quality of the video and sound are excellent for those watching remotely, the team work closely with the service to prepare and produce a professional looking event. Having the right person or content in the frame at the right time takes some careful planning. The feedback has been very positive and doing this in-house avoids the need to buy the service in. The team are continuing to develop the service offering with options for a mobile solution in the pipeline.

When holding meetings in the office it is not always possible for every attendee to meet in-person; long distances or unforeseen circumstances can result in the need for someone to attend remotely. For this to work successfully, the solution has to be; easy to use, provide a great customer experience and 'just work'. The DWP team in conjunction with the Property and Organisational Development teams, have introduced Microsoft Teams Meeting Rooms. Located in Northallerton, Harrogate, Selby, Scarborough and Skipton; the rooms have either one or two large monitors linked to motion sensing cameras and microphones. Having the same user experience in every room will enable staff to make the most of these facilities wherever they are located. The DWP team are listening closely to feedback from staff and managers to refine and help shape further investment.

Customer

The North Yorkshire customer portal has now *142,702* customer accounts

Lagan upgrade

Throughout May and June the customer work stream has been upgrading its Customer Relationship Management System (CRM - Lagan). This has paused progress on the customer work stream while this work was undertaken.

The new system is now live and the feedback from our frontline teams has been positive. We hope to see improvements in the coming months to agent experience and speed and service design.

Free School Meals

This month has seen the launch of a new on-line application process for Free School Meals ready for the uplift in demand expected in September.

The new form meets all accessibility standards unlike the old downloadable form and has been built in our parent on-line portal alongside other on-line services for parents.

Data Products

We're working on a new data strategy, to help steer the new council on how it makes best use of the data it creates about the county and its residents. We're focussing on providing data support to the leading adult social care trailblazer by ensuring leading data standards and best practise is employed to support a customer focussed solution.

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're 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's knocked over, or damaged) potentially enabling smarter collection cycles and saved costs.

We're rolling out internal sensors fitted into council rooms and offices that measure a number of environmental aspects including co2, as a means of identifying occupancy and health of a space.

Cyber Security

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, our team have been on high alert to detect and disrupt threats. We've shared our findings with our peers at the districts, NCSC, and Yorkshire & Humber WARP. Quarter one has seen a reduction of average firewall threats to around 80,000 blocked per day, this follows the increases at the start of the war in Ukraine.

NCSC have advised that an increasing reliance on third party software means that supply chain attacks, as seen in the SolarWinds, Kaseya and Log4j attacks, are likely to grow over time. As we rely more on third-party software, cyber criminals benefit, as they can find unpatched vulnerabilities and exploit them. We have reviewed and revised our Vulnerability Management processes to help reduce the overall cyber risk.

The Boxphish training package, which was rolled out in February, has sent out over 29,740 phishing simulations with as little as 5% of users being caught out and clicking the links. The package has also sent out over 24,535 training videos (with quizzes) which provide further information on what to look for and how to deal with security threats.

Household Support Fund

Work continues to distribute North Yorkshire County Council's second £3.5 million allocation of Household Support Fund. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme aims to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs between April and September 2022.

In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework developed in partnership with the seven District and Borough Councils, around 25,000 households across North Yorkshire will receive a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher in July 2022. This are families with children in receipt of means tested council tax support, households with a pensioner in receipt of maximum means tested council tax support, and other households in receipt of maximum means tested council tax support.

For this second allocation we have been able to make improvements to the scheme by the introduction of an on-line eligibility checker. In the first allocation we received a high volume of applications from non- North Yorkshire residents and non-eligible customers which utilised capacity in the Customer Service Centre unnecessarily.

In addition to the direct awards, funding has been awarded to North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF), Warm and Well, and 14 food providers across the County. The Government has announced that there will be a third allocation for October 2022 and March 2023; Officers are awaiting guidance from DWP on how this further phase of the scheme will be delivered.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and UK Resettlement Scheme

The two bridging accommodation hotels in North Yorkshire for Afghan refugees awaiting housing elsewhere in the UK remain in place but the Home Office has decided to close one of them by the end of July 2022. In reaching this decision the Home Office has belatedly taken on board the County Council's concerns about the remote location of that hotel and the demands it has placed upon our home to school transport service. Unfortunately following an approach made by the hotel, the Home Office is, as of June 2022, intending to now use the hotel for asylum seeker clients. This seems to show a lack of consultation between departments within the home office. The fact that this will be a different client group does not get over the problem of the hotel's location. The continuing demands that will be placed upon the local rural GP practice is also of concern to health colleagues. Such hotels should be in towns and cities where access to services is far better.

June 2022 saw the UK government announce further details of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) – a more general Afghan refugee resettlement scheme that was formally launched in January 2022. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme> currently the local authorities in North Yorkshire are not taking part in the ACRS as they still have commitments to fulfil under the UK Resettlement Scheme, which operates in a very similar way to the ACRS in relation to the use of the UNHCR's selection procedure. The announcement of the separate ACRS complicates matters. The UKRS was already intended to be a global refugee resettlement scheme but with the introduction of the ACRS it places local authorities in a difficult position of having to consider choosing between the two schemes due to the limited housing supply.

Asylum seeker dispersal and asylum seeker contingency accommodation

Discussions with the Home Office on asylum seeker dispersal in the county will be underway shortly. This follows on from the UK government's announcement in April that all regions of Great Britain will be expected to take a share of asylum seekers to be placed in temporary housing whilst their applications are assessed.

At the time of writing this report, the Home Office has paused discussions on the use of the former RAF site in Linton-on-Ouse as an asylum seeker accommodation and processing centre. The reason given is that the department is awaiting internal advice.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme in North Yorkshire continues to resettle a significant number of individuals and families with 440 sponsor households accommodating 681 Ukrainian guests, 216 being children (to 29th June). The first guest arrivals were at the end of March 2022.

North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) continues to work with district and borough councils to visit sponsors, inspect properties and carry out safeguarding and welfare checks.

Our communities have responded by setting up extensive networks to support both sponsors and guests, with regular drop-in and social events, as well as language support sessions. Although the Harrogate district currently has the highest number of Ukrainian guests, there is a significant amount in each district area, meaning local support and peer networks are available to all. Citizens Advice North Yorkshire, a key partner, is offering invaluable support through a dedicated phone line, as well as attendance at local events.

NYCC's Early Help and Living Well teams, along with the district's housing officers, are supporting the essential signposting function by ensuring guests and sponsors can access information and guidance to apply for benefits, schools, GP registration and other appropriate referrals.

The commitment, expertise and kindness of all our sponsors is vital to the success of this scheme. They are opening up their homes and helping guests adjust to their new lives, while themselves having to manage and navigate the language and cultural differences. It is hoped that sponsors will provide this support for between six and 12 months.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund

2022/23 is the 10th year of NYLAF's operation.

Last year, 2021/22, NYLAF (North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund) received 8,343 applications. 89% of these applications were approved, with 13,370 individual items provided to individuals deemed most vulnerable in our County.

In October 2021, NYLAF received a £350,000 'top up' from the Government's Household Support Scheme (HSF). This allowed for up to four awards for food and energy per household in a 12 month rolling period to be supported for the first time through the Scheme. An extension to the HSF was announced in the Spring Budget so emergency food and energy award levels will continue at this increased limit of four awards (normal limit is two) through NYLAF until the end of September 2022. The Government has subsequently extended the HSF from 1 October 2022 for a further six months, so continuation of four awards to March 2023 may be possible subject to this being allowed by Government.

Total NYLAF grant spend year to date (April – June 2022) has been £303,816. 43% of the spend has been on the provision of food and energy vouchers, compared to 57% on standard items such as white good items, furniture and clothing vouchers. Comparatively, this quarter NYLAF has seen almost double the demand for food and energy it had in the same period 12 months ago.

This year's Annual Stakeholders Event for NYLAF will be October 14th, which preparations are underway for currently.

County Councillor Locality Budgets

The eighth year of the scheme started on 13 June 2022 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations will be 31 January 2023. Members will be able to make recommendations totalling £10,000 and the arrangements are as in previous years.

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.

38 recommendations have been made to date, amounting to £45,066 (5.01%) of the allocated funding.

DAVID CHANCE