

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 July 2022

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GARETH DADD

Inflation

Members will be well aware of the impact of inflation across the country but I thought it was useful just to highlight a number of areas which are having particular impact upon the councils operations. In February earlier this year we approved a budget with just over £20m for inflation including pay and prices. This is now going to be exceeded by a significant margin and, of course, we cannot be precise at this stage about the quantum. We do know, however, that some areas have risen in an unprecedented way so, for example, in February we assumed that gas was going to increase by 55% but it now looks like it is closer to 338%. Our energy bills alone are estimated to cost at least an additional £4m through the remainder of this year but it may get worst yet.

We are also aware that the current circumstances are difficult for our supply chain and we will need to work very closely with suppliers across the county to ensure that we can continue to deliver the level of services that we all expect. The council is currently out to market on residential social care; discussions are ongoing with transport operators; are we have a number of sizable capital projects being progressed where we can probably expect significant increases in expectations when funding levels and initial business cases were prepared in previous years.

The quarter one revenue and capital reports will shortly come to the Executive to give some update on the position but it will be fluid. I am pleased to report that we are probably as well placed as any council to whether these storms but we will have to be prepared for further difficulties.

Local Government Reorganisation

I am pleased to report that the Executive considered its first report on behalf of the new council relating to financial matters when it approved the council tax premiums and discounts policy and the discretionary business rates and hardship policy. As a new council we are now clearly picking up pace on a whole host of areas and I was heartened to see the quality of work that had been produced by revenue and benefits managers alongside finance colleagues from across the county coming together to produce such quality reports.

This is, of course, just the start of the work ahead as we will be considering approval of a council tax reduction scheme to consult with the public and a policy relating to second homes should the Government proceed with its planned legislation. Work is also progressing on a whole range of issues, not least bringing together a draft budget and medium term financial plan for the new council. This is a significant amount of work as we bring eight into one and work through a whole range of new and exciting areas.

I am also pleased to report that the approach to the granting of specific consents under Section 24 appears to be progressing well with good collaborative working on the part of all eight councils. Members will also be aware that a Members Working Group has also been agreed in order to review the position on council tax harmonisation and I look forward to working with Members on the working group in the very near future.

Property

I would like to address comments that were made at the last Council meeting regarding the recent refurbishment project that was undertaken within this building and, specifically, the environmental impact of the project.

Members will be aware that the Brierley Building dates from 1906 and has Grade 2* listed status. In planning the refurbishment project, therefore, the County Council were required to take account of the limitations arising from the listed status and the impact that this would have upon the ability for us to incorporate sustainable elements to the project.

I can confirm, however, that the project did incorporate improvements designed to improve the performance of the building. These included the provision of more efficient LED lighting and the zoning of the heating system. Both of these elements will assist in improving the energy efficiency of the building and reducing both cost and carbon emissions.

This work forms part of a broader programme that is being undertaken to address carbon emissions arising from the County Council's property portfolio. That work has included investment in measures such as LED lighting and improved heating controls in properties across the estate. Work is also ongoing to review how and where new technologies can be used to replace gas heating infrastructure or to generate electricity on site.

Workforce

The county council's recruitment and retention challenges continue with the majority of posts now difficult to appoint to.

This is a well published national problem, however in North Yorkshire unemployment is around half the historically low national figure of 3.7%, so in reality there is full employment with demand for staff outstripping supply in all sectors. So we have to compete for every application. Many of our jobs including professional, technical and frontline delivery e.g. care, drivers, planners, engineers, social workers, educational psychologists etc. are nationally in short supply with some being on the national skill shortage register, and there are acute national challenges for some roles such as care.

We are working hard at recruitment with our recent campaign for care workers for the sector reaching over 2 million people and over 8000 views of MakeCareMatter website, but even with this demand, because of turnover, across the care sector is out stripping supply. We have a dedicated recruitment team which pull out all the stops, we advertise multiple times, use social media and a headhunting approach and we're looking at recruiting some professionals, such as social workers and occupational therapists, from abroad due to the lack of available candidates nationally.

For the same reason, retention continues to be an issue with 16% turnover in the last year and for some services much higher. This higher than usual turnover level is due to staff being able to move to other organisations for often significantly higher levels of pay. This is seen across all sectors with salaries being increased locally and nationally by employers to attract candidates. For example we have lost 25% of our procurement team who have left to go to the new government office in Darlington.

The county council continues to provide a good overall pay package when including features such as pension, annual and other leave, and allowances, and we pride ourselves on being a good employer which develops, values and supports staff and provides excellent job and career opportunities. However the current cost of living increases means pay is much more of a focus and the delay in national pay award, now 4 months late, continues to exacerbate the situation of non-competitive pay especially for entry level and frontline posts such as care roles, drivers, cleaning and catering. We continue to raise this with the national employers side.

LGR is an uncertain time for staff, so we are focusing with staff across all councils on the new council providing more opportunities for career progression and professional and personal development, more varied jobs being available, more choice, job security, greater ability to work locally and the opportunity to support their communities. We are looking at expanding graduate and apprentice schemes for new and existing staff whereby staff can, while at work, get a professional qualification and move into a professional role such as social work, planning or IT.

We're looking at more career paths and grades so people can join the council and see a clear way forward in terms of development and progression. We can't win on pay but we can on being a good employer; great staff development and opportunities for change and progression, involving and listening to our staff, being strong on diversity and inclusion, good staff health wellbeing and support and flexible and hybrid working.

The new council will be a great place to work and I ask all councillors to promote this message to their local communities and to support recruitment initiatives.

GARETH DADD