

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 February 2023

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

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE

Legal and Democratic Services

Work continues to bring 8 Democratic Services teams across 8 sites together as one service ahead of day 1. The emphasis has been upon co-ordination of effort, information sharing and standardisation of practice. There is also a strong focus upon operational issues, continuity of service and the council being Safe and Legal on Vesting Day. A core group of representatives from the 8 teams has been established to help ensure a smooth transition through March, April and May and thereafter the normalisation of services.

The school admissions appeals service hears around 400 school admission appeals per year. It is notable that over the past two to three years the complexity of the issues upon which the appeals are based has increased across the board as has the pressure on school places in some year groups and schools. The service continues to offer remote access to the appeals hearings, and this has proved popular with parents and carers.

An audit is underway of the facilities that are available at county council and district and borough council sites to enable broadcast and hybrid meetings to take place. Whilst councillors are required to be in attendance at a formal, public committee meeting in order to be able to vote at that meeting, there are opportunities for members of the public and officers to attend remotely using MS Teams. This then saves time, reduces mileage claims and reduces carbon dioxide emissions.

Performance Management (including Customer Contact & Customer Services)

Digital Workplace

The Digital Workplace (DWP) Team have continued to promote and enable colleagues to adopt a more hybrid working style through the release of more Microsoft 365 features as well as through sharing more support and guidance to move to a smarter way of working.

The rollout of the Microsoft Desktop client was completed successfully with minimal interruptions to colleague's working day. The team held webinars and provided additional support through guidance on Get IT Help and through discussions with teams to ensure the smooth transition across to M365. Throughout Q3, there were 10,000 unique views of product pages on Get IT Help as colleagues continue to self-serve for their IT guidance and support.

DWP colleagues are continuing to support LGR work streams including developing how we will manage our assets moving forwards, IT lifecycle processes and preparing for North Yorkshire Council to migrate to the new M365 domain. Q3 saw the commencement of district email migration to the new domain and further supporting guidance being created for LGR.

DWP supported colleagues in Northallerton to move into their new Winter Allocation offices alongside Property Services to enable energy saving preparation throughout the winter months. An additional 60 desks were created in the Brierley Building and White Rose House, to allow for the closing of Morgan House and South Block in County Hall.

A donation of another 50 laptops was shared with the North Yorkshire Reboot programme as we continue with refreshing aged devices across teams to provide a more consistent, reliable service.

Data Products

We're continuing our efforts to support a number of LGR work streams around their data requirements, as well as looking forwards to the data needs of the new council. We are involved in a number of projects and programmes ensuring data standards and best practise are employed and customer remains at the heart of our approach. We have worked closely with Districts on Household Support Funding, ensuring thousands of families have access to much needed support. "Internet of Things" (Things that connect through the internet i.e. parking Sensors) work continues with completion of the deployment of parking sensors in Northallerton. We are also breaking ground on several new projects including Microsoft Knowledge Mining to support better outcomes for young people, the use of Robotic Process Automation, Stronger Families and a Census Chatbot.

Customer

The North Yorkshire customer portal now has 161,726 live customer accounts. This is an increase of 8956 on the last quarter.

Increased use of the customer portal year on year

In 2022 customers saw an increase in on-line service requests through the customer portal of 10%. This equated to 56,000 on-line requests which would have previously been contact via alternative channels like over the phone, e-mail or post.

Public Right of Way Fault Reporting now On-line

In November the customer program launched Public Rights of way on-line. In the first month 83 on-line reports were received with the service receiving a 100% customer satisfaction rating from customers.

Increase in web chat activity in the Customer Service Centre offering customers more support on-line

In the 2022 calendar year web chat returned to the contact us pages and was added to the portal registrations and blue badge pages which resulted in more than double the number of web chats than in 2021, 12,208 chats in 2022 compared to 5,091 in 2021. In Q3 there were 3,306 chats, a 308% increase on the 824 chats for the same quarter last year.

The introduction of web chat in the customer portal has improved the services for customers who can get support when they need it, rather than having to wait for a portal support request to be responded to. This is also more efficient for the frontline team with portal support requests down 21% in Q3 2022 compared to the same quarter in 2021.

Using Telephone Messages to Help Customers get Information Quicker

Over the Christmas period the Customer Team added a message to the phone system with information about the Household Recycling Centre Opening times over the Christmas period.

Analysis of demand over previous Christmas periods showed that a high proportion of calls were requesting this information. We had worked in previous years to improve this information on the website with success but this year we wanted to try and see if we could make further improvements.

The message deflected 14% of calls between 28th and 30th December to the frontline customer team. This is the highest positive abandonment rates the customer team have seen on a telephone message

Cyber Security

The InfoSec Team is constantly on the lookout for and countering threats. The number of daily threats stopped is consistent with past quarters, and intelligence is shared with colleagues at the districts, NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre), and Yorkshire & Humber WARP (Warning Advice and Reporting Point).

While reiterating the threat presented by other countries and providing advice that the threat optics had not dramatically changed, NCSC raised concern about the effects of targeted attacks. They will continue to provide risk management guidance as required and believe that the local administration is doing a wonderful job of promoting peer collaboration.

Only 5% (4,048) of users who received phishing simulations from the Boxphish training programme were duped into clicking the links, out of a total of 79,422 sent. Additionally, the package has distributed over 74,248 training courses that offer guidance on what to look for and how to handle security issues. At the moment, we are seeing about 49% (36,091) of users complete the courses even though this training is not mandatory. According to our Boxphish training partner, these numbers compare favourably to those of other organisations they work with.

LEP Building Better Infrastructure Project

Working with NYnet, work is ongoing to complete connectivity installation work. Two additional masts have been installed in NY Highways depots in the last reporting period. Work is ongoing to progress the trial of "green columns", with alternative locations identified due to original locations not being deemed viable.

Trials using the Internet of Things (IoT) network continues with ongoing trials of public bin sensors, air quality across a number of market towns, internal air quality in County Hall, people counting, parking monitoring and Home Care. The outputs of these trials are being analysed to better understand the data, gain insight and build data products that can present data in a meaningful way.

An additional trial of bin sensors has commenced to provide additional data to support the analysis and evaluation of the technology and data. The objective is to continue to look at how IoT technology can be used to support the New North Yorkshire Council in future.

An IoT trial that counts traffic is in the final stages of planning. The objective of this trial is to evaluate the solution that aims to provide live information about traffic flow in key areas to support Highways teams in understanding how the traffic network works, and where key issues may arise.

The free Wi-Fi continues to deliver benefits to the market towns of North Yorkshire with approx. 40,000 unique users per week over the Christmas period which is around 10% higher than the weekly average.

E-Mail Addresses

The approach for emails will be that between now and vesting day each council will be moved to the new Northyorks.gov.uk email system but continue to use their existing Harrogate.gov.uk etc email until vesting day. At vesting day the system will automatically switch you over to using only Northyorks.gov.uk should anyone contact you on the old email address of Harrogate.gov.uk it will be automatically directed to the Northyorks.gov.uk address.

Historic emails will be available for all councils so nothing will be lost, however we will be moving to a new archive system over the longer term to fit with new policies.

Household Support Fund

Work commenced to distribute North Yorkshire County Council's third £3.5 million allocation of Household Support Fund in Q3. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme aims to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs between October 2022 and March 2023. In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework developed in partnership with the seven district and borough councils, circa 24,000 households across North Yorkshire will receive a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher in January 2023. This encompasses eligible families, pensioners and working age adult households, as well as those who missed out on other forms of national Cost of Living support. In addition to this, supplementary funding was awarded to North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF), Warm and Well, and 16 food providers across the county. Household Support Fund will continue from 1 April 2023 for a further 12 months; NYCC are currently awaiting guidance from DWP on the fourth phase of the scheme.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF)

Data for April – December 2022, shows that NYLAF has received 9,263 applications, and approved 8,486 (92%) of these. Roughly 60% of spend is going towards standard items awarded and 40% on emergency food / energy vouchers. Total NYLAF grant spend year to date (April – December 22) has been £1,073,000, £439,000 in quarter 3. Comparatively, this quarter, NYLAF has seen almost double the demand and spend that it had 12 months ago. (Quarter 3, 2021/22 spend was £279,000). The highest levels of demand are seen in Scarborough (40%) followed by Harrogate, with the least demand seen in Richmondshire. 44% of awards this financial year have gone to those encompassed within the three-core vulnerability groups; those with mental health conditions, those who are homeless and families under exceptional pressure.

Homes for Ukraine

The current number of Ukrainian guests residing in North Yorkshire, through the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship programme is approximately 838. In addition, 346 guests, who initially arrived in North Yorkshire, have either moved into private rental accommodation, to another Local Authority area, or returned to Ukraine, making a total of 1,184 arrivals since March 2022. Of the guests who have moved on from their sponsor, 78 groups, or 191 individuals are now living in rental properties within North Yorkshire.

In recognition of the rising cost of living, NYCC is topping up the thank you payment to sponsors over the winter months (October 2022 – March 2023). This means that sponsors will receive £500 per month, instead of £350. Other Local Authorities are taking a similar approach.

Two new Employability Advisors are now in post and are successfully supporting both potential employees and employers. Through attendance at drop in events, as well as one to one meetings a broad range of support is provided, which ultimately removes barriers to employment.

The government has recently announced a number of updates to the scheme, including an extension to the maximum sponsorship term from 12 months to 24 months, an increase to the thank you payment once guests have been in the UK for 12 months, additional funding to acquire housing and support for guests to move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness. Further details are expected imminently.

County Councillor Locality Budgets

The eighth year of the scheme started on 13 June 2022 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations was 31 January 2023. County Councillors were encouraged to focus on projects or activities that responded to local needs and community initiatives; the impact of climate change, and/or projects that promote the Council's Stronger Communities programme.

A total of 623 recommendations were submitted, amounting to £872,062 (96.89%) of this year's budget. A report on the expenditure and operation of Locality Budgets in the 2022/23 financial year will be presented to Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2023.

DAVID CHANCE