

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

17 MAY 2023

STATEMENT OF COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Legal & Democratic Services

The February 2023 County Council meeting was the last Full Council meeting of North Yorkshire County Council. The agenda for the meeting was large with a number of key issues for the new North Yorkshire Council being debated, including: the annual budget; the Council Plan; the Constitution; the next steps with regard to the York & North Yorkshire Devolution Deal; and member allowances. The Constitution is a living document that is routinely reviewed every six months by the Member Working Group on the Constitution to check whether any amendments or updates are required.

The School Admissions Appeals Team is managing the bulk school admissions appeals, which follow the National Offer Day for secondary school places on 1 March 2023, and that for primary school places on 17 April 2023. In addition to the bulk appeals, there are a large number of in-year appeals. These in-year appeals have increased over the past two to three years as more schools in the county, particularly secondary schools, have no places available but families are moving into the area and expecting to be able to access a school place of their choice for their child or children.

Post day one, there were eight Democratic Services Teams working across eight sites. The work of the teams was co-ordinated via a core group of Democratic Services Managers and leads. The focus has been upon the effective delivery of the Council's planning and licensing functions and the continued support for Parish and Town Councils.

Stronger Communities

Community Support – Covid19 Response to Recovery

Stronger Communities continued to work with the network of 23 Community Support Organisations (CSOs), to act as a place based single point of contact for locally based support, in collaboration with their volunteers, partners and networks.

Although this arrangement ended on 31 March 2023, Stronger Communities has continued to work alongside the CSOs to identify elements of the model that could be retained and developed further to support the wider health, well-being and prevention, and community resilience agenda. In February, as part of the long established 'Achieve Together' Investment Programme, Stronger Communities opened a new opportunity to establish a Community Anchor model for North Yorkshire. Grants of £15,000 a year (for up to 3 years) will be made available for place-rooted organisations, based in principal service towns or centres, who are able to serve a wider hinterland. Initial stages of development work will take place to progress the model in Q1 of 23/24.

Household Support Fund (HSF)

Q4 saw the closure of North Yorkshire County Council's third phase of Household Support Fund (HSF). The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) funded programme aimed 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, c24,000 households across North Yorkshire received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher in January 2023: with a 93% redemption rate. This encompassed 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, and an HSF Exceptional Circumstances Fund was also delivered, to support those who may have missed out on support due to circumstances beyond their control. In total, 45,236 households in North Yorkshire received support through the third phase of HSF.

HSF will continue for a fourth phase in 23/24; work is now underway to develop the scheme, building on the learning from previous phases.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF)

In 2022/23:

- £1.4m was invested in the Local Assistance Fund Scheme, which is unprecedented.
- 11,947 application forms were approved, directly supporting those deemed most vulnerable across the County.
- 20,032 individual awards were approved including essential furniture, white goods, food and energy vouchers for those fleeing domestic abuse, those with complex mental health needs, those homeless, families under exceptional pressure, etc.
- Approximately 60% of spend went towards standard items awarded and 40% on emergency food/energy vouchers.
- 69% of awards have gone to those under the three-core vulnerability groups supported by NYLAF historically: those with mental health issues, those homeless and families under exceptional pressure.
- NYLAF has also supported the Governments Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with around 50 awards going to refugees or host families to support those that have fled Ukraine directly.

In Q4, 3,968 applications were received, with a 90% approval rate. A total of £413,666.85 was spent, with 47% on food and energy vouchers, and 53% on standard awards. Highest levels of demand are seen in Scarborough (42%), followed by Harrogate, with lowest levels of demand in Richmondshire.

Other key areas of note this quarter include:

- The number of food and energy applications increased by 16% between February and March.
- The number of standard applications increased by 41% between February and March.

- Phone calls have seen an increase of 14% between February and March.
- 604 first time applicants have been supported.
- A new HSF Exceptions scheme has been administered by FFBS from January for people who are not eligible for the Household Support Fund. This was open between 9 January and 15 February 2023.
- An extension to the Household Support Fund was announced in the Spring Budget so the food and energy award levels are staying at the increased limit of four awards in a rolling twelve-month period until the end of March 2024.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

The HAF programme continues to develop and improve its reach in all areas of North Yorkshire. The recently appointed Holiday Activities & Food Coordinator has been working with North Yorkshire Together partners, and colleagues in CYPS, Stronger Communities and Public Health to develop the programme further with a particular emphasis on providing a wraparound service for families, its nutrition and healthy food offer. They have also been reinforcing the importance of the programme to schools and encouraging schools to explore how they could be involved in hosting sessions and promoting to their children and young people.

The Easter programme has just finished, and monitoring will be collected and collated in the next few weeks, but indications are good. There were 52 providers who ran 77 different programmes across North Yorkshire offering 17,582 free places to children eligible for free school meals as well as other vulnerable children.

Homes for Ukraine

At the end of March 2023, the number of Ukrainian guests residing in North Yorkshire through the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship programme was approximately 733. In addition, 554 guests, who initially arrived in North Yorkshire, have either moved on to live in independent accommodation, or another Local Authority area, or returned to Ukraine or another country, making 1,287 arrivals since March 2022.

North Yorkshire Council's two dedicated Employability Advisors continue to work to support guests and potential employers. Support is delivered online and in person and to date has included:

- Preparation for interviews
- General advice and signposting
- Job searches and applications
- New businesses and self-employment set up
- Online training
- College and university applications

As reported last quarter, a local decision was taken in North Yorkshire to increase the thank you payments for sponsors during the winter months, from £350 per month to £500 per month. This arrangement has now been extended until October 2023 when it will again be reviewed.

Health and Wellbeing

Stronger Communities continue to work in partnership with the NHS to transform mental health services for people with a serious mental illness through building capacity within communities and the voluntary sector. The approach includes financial investment, managed by Stronger Communities, working with four place based multi-agency partnerships to develop and/or pilot new community-based services and projects through grant funding to voluntary organisations and community groups with the over-arching aim of enabling people with a serious mental illness to live well in their communities.

Local Food Support

Work continues on the collaborative insight work with City of York Council to better understand the food and fuel insecurity landscape in the region. The work evaluates the range of support services that were established during the pandemic and explores potential opportunities for future service provision. Initial findings have been made available, with the Steering Group meeting in Q1 to discuss how the recommendations will be progressed, and to start planning a partnership event to launch the findings/carry out some further engagement work in summer 2023.

Reboot North Yorkshire

Work on Reboot North Yorkshire continues to progress with an increase in awareness around the programme. A variety of organisations and services refer their clients into the scheme with 57 devices being gifted to socially isolated individuals or those in need of a device to access training or continuing education. Our community partner Craven Reboot have also been very active in gifting devices, supporting people with IT needs, and encouraging donations within their communities.

Councillor Locality Budgets

The ninth year of the scheme started on 3 April 2023 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations will be 31 January 2024. Councillors are 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 report on the operation of Locality Budgets in 2022/23 will be presented to the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 June 2023.

Customer

Over the last six weeks of the launch of the new council the customer service team have come together to work as one team. This has been in conjunction with the busiest time of the year for all contact centres. The teams have work really hard successfully working together across North Yorkshire as one team in dealing with contact about Council tax billing, garden waste, enquiries about the new council as well as business as usual.

We have recognised that from a customer perspective a new website and new telephone number has been a huge change and we have worked to ensure that services are accessible, local and inclusive.

This has not come without its challenges due to some technical telephony issues which have now been resolved. The council is committed to delivering customer excellence and will be promoting and implementing this across the whole council. We will continue to look at improving our services.

COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE