

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 NOVEMBER 2023

STATEMENT OF COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Legal and Democratic Services

Democratic Services continues to work as one service from eight sites across the county, pending a restructure later this year. The focus has been upon aligning practice, particularly with regard to Planning, Licensing and the Area Constituency Committees (ACCs). In addition, work is underway in a number of areas to ensure that best practice from all eight former Democratic Services Teams is captured and applied.

Work is underway to develop a comprehensive system for the recording and broadcasting of all Council committee meetings. There are significant variations in equipment and practice across the eight different sites, and so some investment will be required. There is an expectation, post-covid, that local authority meetings will be recorded and broadcast, and this also supports the Council's ongoing commitment to openness and transparency.

The ACCs have now completed their third round of public meetings in the new council, with a number of informal briefings also having taken place. There has been a strong focus upon the role that the committees have to play in place-shaping, particularly in the area of economic development and how the £50,000 seed funding can best be used. This funding is not intended to replace or replicate the existing system of member locality budgets, but to enable economic development and regeneration projects to be supported in the area. The workload taken on by the ACCs is increasing as is public interest and engagement in them.

The School Admission Appeals Service provides a statutory service and works to the Department of Education School Admissions Appeals code. The number and complexity of appeals heard is increasing with a high number of 'in year' appeals being heard as parents and carers seek to change schools for their children during the academic year, as opposed to appealing against the allocated places ahead of the start of the first year at primary or secondary school.

Stronger Communities

Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)

Following a competitive application and evaluation process, 23 place-based organisations from across the county advanced to the next stage of development work to progress a Community Anchor model for North Yorkshire. This included a Collective Assessment and Learning Workshop (July 2023) and the subsequent development of organisational action plans, which is ongoing. For the ten localities where a suitable CAO has not been initially identified, development work will continue to explore the potential for a local voluntary sector organisation to become a CAO, or to look at alternative models.

Recognising that in our larger urban areas where there are a number of distinctive neighbourhoods, the model of a single place-based community anchor may not work, work continued in Quarter Two to explore options for investing in Community Anchors in Harrogate and Scarborough, working with key local voluntary sector partners.

The small scale Inspire grants scheme has continued to run, with 21 awarded last quarter and the team also continue to work alongside various voluntary and community groups to support organisational development and capacity building activity.

Community Partnerships

In Quarter Two, the team have started to develop the ambition of supporting local partnership and multi-agency working through the establishment of local Community Partnerships, focussing on principal towns and surrounding areas, and reflecting natural communities. This is taking a phased approach, with the team commencing work in five pilot areas: Easingwold, Leyburn and Middleham, Ripon, Sherburn and Thornton-le-Dale and rural hinterland.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

The HAF programme continues to develop and improve its reach in all areas of North Yorkshire with additional providers getting involved in the scheme, allowing for a more diverse programme to be delivered at a local level for children and young people. This is particularly evident in Selby where we had eight providers last summer to 20 this summer. The Summer programme delivered 18,713 free HAF sessions enjoyed by 3,493 children who met the Department of Education criteria, and an additional 3,308 children and young people who didn't qualify but also took part in the activities using paid for places.

This was the first holiday period that the new online FEAST booking system was in place. Whilst there was a telephone alternative, most families and providers were comfortable using the new system and feedback was positive around ease of use and accessibility. It has made end of delivery monitoring requirements more efficient for providers, and for the Feast team, highlighted the degree to which non-attendance and cancellations impacts on booking numbers. While 18,713 free sessions were enjoyed, there was an additional 5,893 places that were booked but not used due to last minute cancellations or non-attendance. This is a challenge that is experienced by all HAF schemes across the country but for those delivering in predominantly non-urban areas it can be harder for providers to find last minute stand-ins on the day. Work is underway to look at ways to tackle this, including how messaging to parents and carers might be used to reduce the issue.

Homes for Ukraine

Between 1 July and the end of September 2023, 56 additional Ukrainian guests arrived in North Yorkshire, making a total of 1,400 arrivals since the start of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. During this quarter we have seen a continued rise in the number of single guests joining family members in North Yorkshire.

The number of guests still living with a sponsor is 512, which has reduced from 624 in Quarter One 2023/24. During the past quarter an increased number of Ukrainian families have moved into, or been offered social housing with Broadacres, following investment through the Local Authority Housing Fund.

Since the start of the scheme 910 guests, who initially arrived in North Yorkshire, have moved on from their sponsor's accommodation. Further detail relating to those guests is detailed in the table below:

	Households	Individuals
Re-matched to sponsor outside of North Yorkshire	26	50
Returned to Ukraine	120	213
Moved to another country	25	44

	Households	Individuals
University	8	8
Private rental – in North Yorkshire	199	434
Social housing – in North Yorkshire	29	68
Private rental – outside of North Yorkshire	49	93
TOTAL	456	910

** Please note there may be a small amount of time between guests moving and informing NYC, so above figures could vary slightly*

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

Stronger Communities continue to take the lead role in the delivery of the Communities and Place strand of the Council’s UKSPF programme. An Advisory Group is in place made up of public and voluntary sector partners, who are overseeing the work being progressed on the year one allocations, as well as planning and development work taking place on year two and three allocations. In Quarter Two, notable progress was made in the following areas:

- Webinar for partners outlining the Community Grants and Village Halls and Community Buildings Grants schemes that will go live in Quarter Three
- Launch of the Physical Activity, Sport and Active Travel Programme, being delivered by North Yorkshire Sport on behalf of North Yorkshire Council (NYC)

Health and Wellbeing

Stronger Communities continue to work in partnership with the NHS for a third year 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. Focus in Quarter Two has been the development of the Hub model.

Local Food Support

The ‘Food Summit’, a partnership and engagement event to launch the findings of the collaborative food insecurity insight work undertaken in conjunction with City of York Council, took place in Quarter Two. Over 80 people attended, including food access model providers, policy makers and developers, and Elected Members from across the region. The event findings have now been collated, and work is underway to develop follow up online Communities of Practice sessions focussing on the key recommendations outlined in the report; the first of these will take place at the end of Quarter Three. The findings are already being used to inform other related work areas both internally across the Council and externally with partners, with a number of dedicated key stakeholder conversations planned for the coming quarter.

Digital Inclusion

There is continued momentum on the strategic development of digital inclusion across North Yorkshire encompassing the three key strands of access, skills, and equipment. This includes establishing a new Digital Inclusion leads steering group for North Yorkshire, new investment into digital inclusion in the region, and the continued development of existing digital inclusion assets such as Reboot North Yorkshire, North Yorkshire Libraries Service and Adult Learning.

Digital Inclusion Investment: Stronger Communities in collaboration with the UKSPF have been successful in accessing funding from the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Case System (ICS) Digital Inclusion Steering Group. This will contribute to the preparatory co-production stage and ongoing coordination of the UKSPF digital inclusion investment programme and represents an important collaboration between the ICS and NYC in this field. The aligned UKSPF digital inclusion programme will be rolled out in 2024/25 and will include £480,000 capital infrastructure and £336,000 revenue for digital learning and skills. The ambition for the investment is to stimulate digital inclusion activity through learning, skills, resources and volunteering, in a range of existing and new settings targeting digital and health inequalities.

Reboot North Yorkshire has continued to support digital inclusion with regular referrals into the scheme from a broad range of organisations, health, and NYC services. In Quarter Two, 57 devices have been gifted to socially isolated individuals or those in need of a device to access training or to continue their education. Our community partner Craven Reboot have similarly been active in gifting devices, supporting people with IT needs, and encouraging donations within their communities.

Get Online Week: In preparation for Get Online week taking place in Quarter Three, Stronger Communities have been working with the Communications Team to promote opportunities and to highlight the investment coming on stream. Furthermore, this communications driver has provided an opportunity to refresh the digital support offers detailed on the community directory North Yorkshire Connect and promote the digital unite champion training and resources available through the Stronger Communities Team.

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. Members will be able to make recommendations totalling £10,000, and the arrangements are as in previous years. Members are asked to submit their recommendations as soon as possible, in order to avoid a surge in last minute applications. Any recommendations not received by the deadline date will not be processed and any money not spent will be returned to the general working balance.

417 recommendations have been made to date: amounting to £423,042 (47%) of the allocated funding. Eight members have fully spent their budget and nine members are yet to submit any recommendations, with just over two months remaining of the scheme year.

Customer

Household Support Fund (HSF)

Work continued on the deployment of the fourth phase of HSF Quarter Two. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme aims to support those most in need or crisis with significantly rising living costs in 2023/24.

In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework and delivery plan, c22,500 households across North Yorkshire received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher to support them over the autumn and winter months in Quarter Two¹. 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. A second phase

¹ At the time of writing, redemption level on the direct award stood at 94.4%

of the direct award, focussing solely on those who are in receipt of Housing Benefit, but who have not received a Cost-of-Living payment, will be delivered early in Quarter Four.

In addition to this, funding has been awarded to:

- North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF), enabling the maximum number of awards for emergency food and utilities to remain at four over a 12-month rolling period
- The provision of energy support delivered by North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre which was launched in Quarter Two on 1 September 2023
- Food Support: a grants scheme for voluntary sector providers of free or low-cost food, which saw 18 awards made in Quarter Two
- An HSF Exceptional Circumstances Fund has been put in place, to support those who may have missed out on support due to circumstances beyond their control throughout the time period the direct award is live

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund

Caveat: data between 1 July and 30 September 2023

In Quarter Two, 3,225 applications were received² with a 92% approval rate. A total of £370,705.71 was spent³, with 40% on food and energy vouchers, and 60% on standard awards. In keeping with previous years, the highest levels of demand are seen in Scarborough (40%), followed by Harrogate, with lowest levels of demand in Richmondshire (6%).

Table 1 highlights that this quarter has seen an increase against both time period comparisons used in this table (aside from a slight decrease in white goods and furniture from last quarter), last quarter and the same Quarter Two, but 12 months previously

	Q1 2023/24 (last quarter)	Q2 2022/23 (Q2, 12 months ago)	Q2 2023/24 (current)
Food voucher	2,041	1,826	2,266
Clothing voucher	78	114	112
Energy voucher	1,428	1,245	1,441
White goods	311	286	273
Cash awards	0	0	1
Other household items	174	207	208
Furniture	411	263	308

Quarterly data update

- On average, NYLAF received 248 applications a week this quarter.
- There have been 335 first time applicants to the Fund this quarter.
- Vulnerability category data is also monitored monthly. It shows no significant change in who we are supporting through the scheme and in which geographical areas, with those with experiencing mental health challenges (21%), those who are homeless (14%) and families under extreme pressure (12%) continuing to be the three highest vulnerability categories in Quarter Two.
- The number of food and energy applications decreased by 3% between August and September. This could potentially be due to the NYC HSF supermarket vouchers being issued in the September period.
- The number of standard applications decreased by 13% between August and September.
- Phone calls have seen an increase of 7% between August and September.

² Compared to 2,793 applications received and the 2,562 approved in A2 22/23 (last year comparison)

³ Compared to £330,790 spend Q2, 22/23

Other key areas of note this quarter include:

- As well as the reported figures above, further food parcels were delivered across the Scarborough town area through our ongoing partnership with the Rainbow Centre. In Quarter Two, 281 were delivered.
- NYLAF has supported the Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with 40 awards going to refugees or host families this quarter to directly support those that have fled Ukraine.
- An extension to the HSF 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 12-month period until the end of March 2024.
- The HSF Exceptions Scheme is being delivered by Family Fund Business Services (FFBS) with a budget of £50,000 available for the periods that the direct award scheme is live (September/October 2023 and January/February 2024).
- A meeting was held between NYC and FFBS to discuss increased demand on the scheme and a trend analysis report has been prepared and sent to NYC with ideas on how to profile budget and expenditure for the rest of the year.

Refugee resettlement (Afghan Relocations & Assistance Policy (ARAP)/ United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS))

North Yorkshire has resettled 223 persons (46 households) under the Afghan resettlement schemes up to 31 October 2023, and 175 persons (45 families) – mainly Syrian refugees – under the UKRS between February 2021 to 30 September 2023.

In relation to the UKRS scheme, Ministerial sign-off has been waited for some months now to allow new family cases to be provided. Linked to this, however, the government is now consulting local authorities on the number of people that should be allowed to enter the UK each year using safe and legal routes for humanitarian purposes. A cap on numbers will be set following the consultation.

In relation to the Afghan resettlement schemes, the bridging hotels in the UK have closed. North Yorkshire Council (NYC) accepted three households for homelessness relief duties from the bridging hotel in North Yorkshire. Some of the other households from that hotel were accepted for homeless support in various parts of the UK or found private rented property in their 'preferred areas'. Other households were moved into 'interim accommodation' by the Home Office if a property had been assigned to the household but had not been made ready at the time that the bridging hotel closed. Households with complex medical needs with no housing offer were also moved into interim accommodation. Nationally, as of 26 October 2023 there was a total of 1496 persons (315 households) in interim accommodation.

A second round of the Local Authority Housing Fund has been implemented and housing officers are in the process of procuring suitable properties in the county. This second funding round is principally intended for Afghan households in temporary homeless accommodation or interim accommodation in the UK. However, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLHUC) is now allowing the properties to be matched to Afghan households currently residing overseas if after all reasonable endeavours to identify an Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)/ARAP household in the UK have been made.

The situation that Afghan households face in third countries that they have fled to – notably Pakistan and Iran – are increasingly precarious. The Pakistan authorities set a deadline of 1 November 2023 for all undocumented Afghans to leave Pakistan or face deportation. Potentially this includes Afghans eligible to come to the UK if their visas have now expired

and they are unable to obtain exit permits to leave Pakistan. However, the UK government has received assurances from the Pakistan government that any Afghans eligible for UK relocation will be protected on the understanding that they are relocated quickly out of Pakistan. At present, approximately 2,000 Afghan persons in Pakistan are eligible to come to the UK under the ARAP scheme and approximately 3000 persons are in other countries including Afghanistan.

A further 25 surplus Ministry of Defence properties (Service Family Accommodation (SFA)) will be used this year for Afghan ARAP households currently stranded in Pakistan. Unlike for the previous 19 SFA properties used to date, the Ministry of Defence will have a direct leasing arrangement with the families rather than leasing the properties to NYC. NYC has been consulted on the appropriate locations for the properties based upon access to services and existing integration support.

Asylum seeker dispersal and contingency hotel accommodation

Since April 2022 the government has required all local authorities in Great Britain to take part in asylum dispersal. The national shortage of bedspaces in dispersal accommodation (long-term temporary accommodation) has required the government to use contingency hotels as a stop-gap measure. There remain three contingency hotels in the county– two accommodating single adult males and one hotel accommodating families. Demands continue to be placed upon local services. Mears Housing Group – the Home Office’s accommodation provider for the region – continues to manage the hotels on behalf of the Home Office.

Dispersal accommodation in the county is also being procured by Mears. The chief area of focus is Scarborough due to its relative housing affordability, but Mears is widening out its property search to other parts of the county. Mears is required to consult with North Yorkshire on all properties it intends to use and through this process the local authority can raise any concerns we have with regards to the suitability of the local postcode area to house asylum seekers. Mears can escalate the post code check to the Home Office to adjudicate if Mears does not consider the advice from the local authority provides sufficient grounds to preclude the use of the property for asylum seekers. There has however been a high attrition rate in terms of the number of properties put forward but not then purchased by Mears. Only two properties to date are being used in North Yorkshire as dispersal accommodation but this number will need to rise significantly if Mears is to meet the Home Office’s target figure for the number of asylum dispersal bedspaces in the county.

Customer

Customer Service has been front and centre in the last six months ensuring we provided good customer service as we made the transition to one Council. We are now moving forward to ensure that North Yorkshire is a customer centric organisation, placing customers at the heart of the organisation. That we strive to empower our staff to provide their very best customer experience in a way that customers tell us that they want to.

In Quarter Two Customer Services had 246,568 customer interactions. The top five demands for the Customer Service function by service area were:

- Council Tax
- Bins, recycling and waste
- Roads, parking and travel
- Housing and homelessness
- Social Care

The demands on Customer Services have increased over Quarter Two. As children returned to school in September 2023 there was an increase in demand for home to school transport and Children's social care. An additional demand was also placed on Customer Services with the By Elections and Annual Canvass Communication Campaign, as well as HSF at a time when there were staffing pressures, resulting in a slight decrease in performance in September. As we start to look at customer insight and data analysis, we will better understand trends and be able to position resources to meet seasonal demands in services. We continue to recruit through our county wide recruitment campaign to address staffing capacity gaps.

Through Quarter Two we have continued to build on the customer 'one front door' approach so when new initiatives have launched, we have been in a better place to improve the customer experience. In July 2023, the launch of Selby Garden waste subscriptions showed the benefits of working together as one customer service function and with the service to provide an improved customer experience. This resulted in 86% of customers choosing online channel to complete and pay for their annual subscription, allowing the Customer Service Team over multiple sites to support over 3,000 customers via the phone to either subscribe or to provide information, advice, and guidance.

Overall, 83% of telephone calls to Customer Services were answered within four minutes. Performance on telephone answering improved compared to the previous (Quarter One – 78%). In July 85% were answered in four minutes; in August 84%, with a slight drop to 79% in September, which was due to seasonal demands. We are committed to ensuring great customer experience and will use our customer insight to continually improve.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE