

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 November 2023

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, ARTS & HOUSING
including Culture, Arts, Libraries, Museums, Archives, Key venues, Leisure, and Housing

Leisure Services

Take That Step – Adult Weight Management Service

Work is continuing on expanding the North Yorkshire Adult Weight Management Service in the former Hambleton area, with more residents now able to access and succeed in weight loss and health and wellbeing objectives. Over 100 clients are currently being supported on the Take That Step programme, with a further 15 people with more complex mental health challenges being supported on a one to one basis.

Outdoor Pitch

In partnership with Stokesley School, the outdoor pitch has been fully refurbished with a brand-new pitch carpet and fence to accommodate football and hockey. The facility successfully opened last month with bookings lined up from groups of all ages.

Scarborough Library (post refurbishment update)

Over the first four months since opening (June-September) there have been nearly 54,000 visits, a 29% increase on the same period last year. Those visits have generated over 46,000 issues, a 34% uplift. People are keen to use the new IT spaces, clocking up over 5,500 hours on the library personal computers, alongside people bringing in their own devices and plugging in. The reopening has attracted almost 1500 brand new library members including 530 children and teenagers. 170 separate events and activities have taken place in the library - supporting health and wellbeing, promoting reading and literacy, encouraging digital engagement, inspiring people to participate in cultural and creative activities and bringing communities together. So far this year almost 3,500 people have participated in a library event.

Summer Reading Challenge

The summer reading challenge was hugely successful this year with over 7000 young people completing the challenge. This year was themed around sport and games and titled 'Ready, Set, Read!'

The challenge kicked off in Scarborough Library with a visit from Dan Freedman, best known for his hugely popular series of Jamie Johnson football novels. Over 230 events were delivered across the county including Boccia and New Age Curling, and an exciting visit from two-time Paralympian gold medallist Danielle Brown to Skipton Library. Over 930 children joined the library for the first time to take part and 145 young people volunteered as helpers, supporting children's reading and helping out in activities and contributing over 2,340 hours of their time.

Craven Museum

Craven Museum in Skipton Town Hall has received national recognition for its work to welcome children and families. Run by the charity Kids in Museums, the national award is awarded annually to one museum, gallery or heritage site in the UK that provides a great visitor experience for families. Craven Museum was shortlisted in the Best Accessible Museum category, going onto win the category and the overall Family Friendly Museum Award 2023.

Skipton Town Hall

Skipton Town Hall, which includes Craven Museum, the Exhibition Gallery, Concert Hall and Visitor Information Centre has accessibility at its heart. It is a wheelchair accessible building with lifts, a changing places toilet, dementia friendly signage and audio-visual aids for museum displays. Staff have completed Autism Awareness training and offer sensory bags and monthly relaxed sessions for Autistic visitors.

The family judges who visited Craven Museum were impressed by the friendly staff, describing it as “one of the most accessible, family-friendly and welcoming museums I have visited across Britain. It is very inclusive and their website is a particularly strong point in terms of helping people to feel able and welcome”

Scarborough Open Air Theatre

This Yorkshire coast venue has received a coveted award for its work to improve access to live music events. The Attitude is Everything Silver Award recognises commitment to providing the best possible experience for disabled and neurodivergent people and those with long term physical and mental health conditions.

The Charter covers all aspects of shows, from ease of ticket buying, accessible information, on-site access, customer assistance and concert viewing. Scarborough Open Air Theatre passed with flying colours and received specific praise for having British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters at every performance and companion tickets at no additional cost for guests with accessible requirements.

This is the first time Scarborough Open Air Theatre has applied to be assessed by Attitude is Everything and they are one of only 30% of UK music festivals to be granted a Silver Award.

Filey Food Festival

This highly successful event ran again during 14 and 15 October, with extremely positive feedback from those attending as well as from traders. The family friendly nature of the festival was particularly praised with one trader describing it as “food festival perfection”.

Housing

Consultations

Housing has been very busy this last quarter in setting up a number of public consultations in relation to parts of its service. Firstly we are consulting on a new **Housing Allocations Policy** for the authority. The intention will be to have one allocations policy for all social housing lettings across North Yorkshire. Consultation is on-going until 27 November 2023 with the intention of having the new policy in place by April 2025.

Secondly, consultation started on 1 September 2023 for a new **Selective Licensing Scheme** for private rented properties in parts of Scarborough. Over 4,000 households and over 60 private landlords plus stakeholders are being consulted and there has already been a healthy response to the consultation. The closing date for responses was 10 November and, subject to the outcome of the consultation and approval by the Council, the new scheme will commence in June 2024.

Finally, approval has been given to go out to consultation on a new **Housing Strategy** for North Yorkshire. A draft strategy has been produced, which outlines our key themes and priorities for meeting the housing challenges and opportunities for North Yorkshire. The consultation, which commenced on 2 October and runs until 11 December 2023, will be with a wide range of key partners and stakeholders. The aim is to have the strategy adopted in May 2024.

Affordable Housing delivery

One of our Affordable Housing delivery partners, Karbon Homes, has developed a 100% affordable housing scheme in Thorpe Willoughby. The site will deliver 70 affordable homes and will offer 25 rented homes and homeownership options including 10 shared ownership and 35 rent to buy. The homes available to rent have been advertised and allocated through North Yorkshire Home Choice and will be managed by 54 North Home. Following negotiations with the local Rural Housing Enabler, a local lettings criteria was applied to the rented homes, giving priority to those with an immediate Parish connection on the first let.

Housing Ombudsman

In July the Housing Ombudsman service made a finding of 'severe maladministration' against the Council's handling of a wet room adaptation to a disabled Council tenant's bathroom. Amongst other failings the Ombudsman found that the landlord (the Council) failed to acknowledge or respond appropriately to the resident's reports that he was without facilities for a number of days and that the landlord's responses were in such a manner that it treated the resident personally in an unsympathetic manner.

Whilst these are legacy issues that occurred within the former Selby District Council area in 2022, the responsibility to put things right and ensure such failings are never repeated falls on the new Council. As such a full and comprehensive review of this issue has been undertaken. This included a visit to see the residents, the completion of whole house safety standard review and to cross reference our expected service standards as compared to what happened in that instance. That review revealed a number of system failures by the former Selby District Council and mirrored the key finding and recommendations highlighted in the Ombudsman report.

Whilst we do not believe the findings of the Ombudsman and the bad practice they revealed are the norm across other areas, as a newly formed Council we accept that the level of service provided in this legacy adaptation fell way short of expected standards going forward.

The level of service provided was poor and we believe reflected a two tier service in terms of adaptations works that have been undertaken in the Selby locality, with Council tenants receiving an inferior service as compared to private home owners via the wider Disabled Facilities Grants Process.

Key future changes and service improvements identified as an outcome of this complaint include:

- Our intention to adopt a new countywide policy and procedure in relation to all adaptations across all tenures
- The roll out of a standardised referral system and case tracking system for future referrals from Occupational Therapy
- The need for greater levels of customer care, communications and contractor management through introduction of competency framework for all staff involved in the adaptations process, including customer service standards linked to the Councils standards of behaviour.
- Changes to the Councils decorations and disturbance allowance and our approach to decanting tenants where extensive works are required
- The implementation of a new integrated workplace management system which will facilitate effect case management and record keeping for all stages of the process.
- The roll out of 100% post work inspections for all major adaptations including joint sign off of works by the Council and the tenant

- Complaints handling training for all staff
- The introduction of post works tenants satisfaction surveys for adaptations works across all tenures

Many of the above actions (for example post-work inspections) are standard practice and already happen in most parts of the county, however the creation of the new authority provides us with the opportunity to standardise practice and roll out 'what works well' countywide.

Housing Support Team

North Yorkshire are pleased to announce the appointment of four officers to work within the Council's Housing Support Team, specifically employed to support eligible refugee households. The officers have multi-disciplinary backgrounds and will work directly with households to support their integration into the community and ensure their ability to source and sustain appropriate accommodation to meet their household needs. This is a much needed resource and will provide support to the Housing Options, Homes for Ukraine and Asylum Seeker teams within North Yorkshire.

COUNCILLOR SIMON MYERS