

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 FEBRUARY 2021

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER CLLR CARL LES

Richard Welch

The Chairman will have led silences earlier in this meeting. Fortunately deaths in service are very rare events. Richard was a very engaged and well-respected local councillor at many levels, parish, district, National Park and County and he will be missed greatly. Our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.

COVID

One year on from the first 2 cases of Covid 19 being reported in York, we are once again in a national lock-down. Compared to last March we face this situation with the confidence of knowing what works, and that with the undoubted success of the mass vaccination programme there is light at the end of the tunnel, and we have an idea of how long the tunnel might be. The Prime Minister has said that he will announce a road map out of lockdown, possibly next week, so we await that announcement with interest, and the effect this will have on schools, the economy, care homes and life in general. However this confidence must be tempered by the virulence of the new strains, and that we still need to keep contacts to a minimum to protect our severely tested care system. North Yorkshire Police are still having to issue more FPN's than they should have to, to protect us all.

The Council and its partners continue to provide essential services and much needed support in a variety of ways. It is now eleven months since the first lockdown started and no one's working day or personal life has been untouched. All frontline services throughout the county are being delivered in different and often very difficult circumstances.

We are encouraging, wherever possible, people who are self-isolating to ask for help from family, friends, and neighbours. Nevertheless, that isn't always possible and we continue to support financially and practically the 23 key local Community Support Organisations (CSOs). CSOs and their volunteers help with shopping, prescription collection, food parcels, telephone befriending, dog walking and other acts of kindness in every part of the county every day. In a typical week in January, nearly 2,500 people received help from over 1,000 volunteers coordinated by the CSOs.

This is a challenging time for all of us and I cannot thank all our staff, partners, volunteers and CSOs enough.

I continue to be humbled by the partnership working in our County between our staff, other local government colleagues, the blue light services, the NHS, the Army, the business community and above all our volunteers in larger Community Support Organisations and smaller informal groups. I'm really pleased to live in North Yorkshire.

Particular congratulations go to Sam Clayton, OBE and Janine Nicholson MBE on their awards in the New Year's Honours list, Sam for services to social work with children, and Janine for her work with No Wrong Door, a flagship policy for NYCC. Both will be the first to agree that the awards reflect the strength and commitment of the teams around them.

Climate change

I have committed to give a statement to each quarterly Council meeting, and to achieve success it is a Council wide issue but Greg is our lead Member for climate change on the Executive and may wish to add detail at his turn to my broad brush statement.

Officers have started work on a draft carbon reduction plan for the Council, to be agreed by the Executive. This will be framed in the context of our 2030 aspiration, with an annual update on progress and more detailed actions for the next year.

I am pleased that the budget proposals to be considered by the County Council include a one-off sum of £1m to assist in determining plans for our aspiration. This sum alone will be insufficient to fund delivery of all actions, but it will enable us to progress plans to the essential and detailed business case stage. I envisage that the initial focus will be on our buildings and our fleet, with an emphasis on maximising the tonnes of carbon saved per £ invested.

The carbon reduction plan will need to include addressing carbon reduction through procurement as part of new overall procurement strategy and working to engage and encourage suppliers to reduce their carbon footprints. We will need to take our suppliers, particularly small local suppliers, with us on the journey and not unnecessarily increase contract costs, or burdens on them so reducing their inclination to tender. We will need to ensure that Brierley Group companies play their part, again without unnecessarily increasing contract costs. In addition, we will need to continue to encourage our officers and ourselves as Members to take steps in the everyday ways to reduce our carbon footprint.

Winter weather

Once again our staff have been going the extra mile to keep the highway network running in the face of severe weather across the period leading up to and throughout the Christmas holidays and for most of January. The combination of snow, ice and then flooding from Storm Christoph, all with the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, has posed a significant challenge but I am pleased to say that the teams have risen to that challenge and ensured that deliveries have continued, people have been able attend medical appointments and make other essential trips. We went into the winter season as well prepared as ever with our salt barns fully stocked and continue to receive deliveries to replenish them and ensure that we can continue to deliver our comprehensive winter service for the rest of the winter season. The winter services provided through the highways team have also helped support the roll out of testing sites and vaccination centres working closely with colleagues in public health to ensure that the impact of the winter weather on the output of these facilities is minimised.

Don will have more direct knowledge of all this than I do, including the effects of flooding on the A 19 reconstruction, but I thought it important that at the first real bite of winter as Leader of the Council I recognised the efforts our teams make on behalf of our residents throughout the County.

Devolution & LGR

The devolution asks were submitted finally to government just before Christmas, sadly without the agreement and support of Hambleton District Council, although any benefits

negotiated with government will benefit all the residents of York and North Yorkshire. We await news of when those negotiations will commence.

David Kerfoot will retire as Chair of the LEP before our next meeting, so I want to thank him at this opportunity for his considerable efforts and hard work both as Deputy Chair, and then his leadership as Chair. I will say more about the Chair Elect, Helen Simpson, at the next Council meeting

Our proposal for LGR was also submitted by the due date, and we await the Minister`s announcement as to when, and how, he will consult on proposals received. That is expected any day now.

Budget and Council Tax

The main part of today`s agenda is always the budget for the forthcoming year, our priorities as set out in the Council Plan, and the level of Council tax we believe is needed to support government grant to deliver those priorities.

We need to reflect on the added costs we have had to bear, quite rightly to protect and support our communities.

I think this is the most difficult decision any of us have had to make at this council. Never has the local economy been so hard hit by this dreadful pandemic, but equally never has our community been so tested, and our services so needed.

We must strike that difficult balance between what we need to do the job, and what our residents can afford to pay. That is for discussion later, but I am grateful that Ministers in MHCLG, and Treasury, have listened to our concerns, expressed through our membership of the County Council Network, and direct from ourselves, and through the regular meetings with our 6 NY MP`s, who have been assiduous in taking up our issues. Did “shoulder to shoulder” mean 100% reimbursement? I don`t believe so, although more funding would be good, but we have had huge support from government who have had many other massive issues to deal with, and I think the Chancellor, Secretary of State Jenrick, and Ministers Luke Hall and Simon Clarke have stood with us.

Kex Gill

I will close with some very good news. Again Don will have more detail, but the Minister for Roads, Baroness Vere, has confirmed that the DfT will back our proposal to realign the A 59 at Kex Gill. Again thanks to Julian Smith MP and Andrew Jones MP for their continual support for this vital piece of infrastructure improvement delivering one of our priorities for East – West connectivity, and thanks to Dft for putting their trust in us as a partner to deliver. Our planning committee has approved the scheme, there will be no environmental call-in, so we can get on and award the tender, and in the words of another “Get it done!”

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES