

## NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 May 2024

### STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR MANAGING OUR ENVIRONMENT

#### **Climate Change**

A recent stakeholder engagement workshop for the Council's Climate Change Delivery Pathway saw members of the North Yorkshire Climate Coalition contribute to the development of the Delivery Pathway. The feedback provided will contribute to the Delivery Pathway development, demonstrating our eagerness to continue to work with partners and stakeholders on what is an issue for all communities, businesses and residents.

I am pleased to confirm the allocation of just under £500K of Shared Prosperity Funding through the Council's SPF Decarbonisation Programme. This continues to promote visible climate actions with funding being given for community and business projects including energy efficiency, solar and PV, circular economy and community energy.

Since my last update, we have made further progress on the Net Zero Devolution Deal funding and have finalised the funding agreements, enabling projects to progress to the commencement phase. This will further support the climate action activity overseen by North Yorkshire Council.

**Natural Capital Service** - recently Defra announced a further round of consultation on proposals for 27 sites to be designated as Bathing Waters. This includes a site on the River Nidd at Knaresborough Lido. As you will be aware, in July last year NYC passed a formal Motion supporting the proposed designation of the Knaresborough Lido site as a Bathing Water and, in August the Leader wrote to the then DEFRA Secretary of State confirming the Council's support. We are in the process of responding to the consultation and remain broadly supportive of the proposal and how it continues to align with the Motion.

Work also continues to develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) with a recent public consultation online survey, which received 550 responses. Further engagement webinars are scheduled for interested parties and Town and Parish Councils respectively, including additional workshops and engagement sessions to seek feedback from farmers and landowners.

Across both our National Landscapes (Nidderdale and Howardian Hills), we are continuing to see support being provided to farmers, through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) grant programme. This has supported projects which deliver across the nature, climate, people and place themes. The programme is also delivering large-scale strategic projects to help achieve the National Landscapes Management Plan objectives.

Speaking of which, the development of the new National Landscape Management Plan for our two national landscapes (which were formally known as AONBs) are currently underway and will be coming forward to Council for adoption later this year. We will continue to support the positive nature recovery and protection work, being delivered across both Nidderdale and the Howardian Hills

#### **Waste**

**Selby locality services** - on 1 April a significant step forward for Environmental Services took place, Selby's Waste, Street Cleansing and Grounds maintenance teams transferred into North Yorkshire Council from the previous operator, Urbaser. The service had been out-

sourced since 1999, all 90 staff chose to TUPE across to the new organisation. The successful project was delivered by many staff across the Council and with support from Urbaser. Work now continues to integrate the teams into the wider service and help build on the excellent level of service delivered in this locality.

**Member Working Group** - the cross-party Task and Finish Group set up to help shape future waste services has continued to meet monthly, reviewing service policies and options for future service delivery. The group is also involved in the development of the Let's Talk Rubbish public engagement exercise that will run over the summer. This engagement exercise will gather views on existing services as well as the councils' proposals for future harmonisation of collection schemes. I am grateful to the group's members for their constructive contributions to this work.

**Garden Waste Collection Service** - harmonisation for all North Yorkshire residents to renew or opt into the garden waste collection service launched in January. Over 110,000 licences have been purchased so far for the 2024 season with almost 87% of these being online signups. Households can continue to sign up throughout the year although we recommend early signup to get the best value for money from the service.

### Licensing

The Licensing restructure is now complete with service delivery operating through the three new geographical areas that are based on current Parliamentary constituency boundaries, being Eastern, Central and Western. We are currently recruiting for one vacancy of Technical Licensing Officer in the Central area to achieve full staffing.

**Taxis** – work on the Inclusive Service Plan and Taxi Policy review are underway. Meetings with local Access Group members have led to exploration of wider options and more effective. A full Taxi Policy review will be commencing soon. I am very keen that this work properly addresses the need for more wheelchair accessible taxis, availability of taxis in rural areas and taxi capacity at key times of the day.

We are currently undertaking a full review of the maximum Hackney Carriage fares (the charges made to customers travelling in Hackney Carriages). An increase of around 5% is proposed for tariff one and some of the additional charges are also proposed to increase in line with requests for from the trade. A new section is also proposed to incorporate charges for Home to School contracts which the Council relies on to get many children to school.

**Other Licences** - Sub-Committee hearings continue routinely dealing with individual licence applications, having delivered over 50 in the last year all around the county. These largely relate to taxi and alcohol licences and are taking place in the locality offices overseen by three Licensing Committee Members.

Licensing Act (alcohol and entertainment) and Gambling Policy review is about to commence with new policies being implemented by the end of the year. We are seeking greater input from Public Health colleagues to help understand the harms caused locally by drinking and gambling.

An unlicensed dog boarding and breeding business located near Richmond was prosecuted by the Council after reports from customers that animals were being kept in unacceptable conditions. We await sentencing in July. We continue to secure high welfare standards for animals and to support legitimate business by taking such actions.

We continue to review the Licensing areas on the Council's website to improve the customer experience. Adjustments are being made weekly to improve access to information and to licence applications and payments online 24hrs.

**Harmonised working** – detailed and complex work has commenced on the harmonisation of former district council licensing software, bring all processes together and migrating all data into one system so that all staff can operate across the whole county without barriers.

**Licence fees** - a review and further harmonisation of licence fees was implemented on 1 April to ensure consistency and that the cost of these services are not borne by the Council, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

### **Regulatory Services**

The Regulatory Services restructure, for existing staff, has been successfully completed and the new service comprising Farming, Food and Health and Environmental Protection formally commenced 15 April 2024. This has brought together functions previously delivered by eight Councils (NYCC Food Standards and Animal Health and District and Boroughs Environmental Health).

**Farming, Food & Health** - the Animal Health team is seeing a significant increase in the number of farmers who are facing extreme difficulties due to financial pressures. The recent bad weather has been a serious challenge for many and the increased cost of living has meant that farmers must now pay significantly more for animal feed and veterinary care. The combined impact of these factors inevitably affects the ability of some farmers to maintain the required standard of welfare for their farmed animals.

Our Animal Health Officers, alongside the investigation of potential animal welfare criminal offences, will now regularly engage with the farmer alongside partners, such as the Farming Community Network who can provide emotional support, or the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution who can assist with financial planning. Together we endeavour to create a credible action plan, to try and ensure that the farmer gets the help he or she needs, to prevent further welfare issues.

**Environmental Protection** - the Council is required by DEFRA to produce an Air Quality Action Plan setting out the actions required to address air quality in the Air Quality Management Areas across the county. A draft plan has been submitted to DEFRA (at the end of April 2024) and the final plan must be submitted by 30 September 2024.

This plan is not a policy decision as the Council is directed by DEFRA to carry out this work and, as such, the submission of the Action Plan is more like a statutory return.

The draft Action Plan was presented to the Environment Leadership Team in March and the Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 April who endorsed the draft. The final Plan will be shared in an Executive Member Report (on 06 September 2024) and regular updates with progress via my monthly Executive Member Briefings. The Director of Public Health, Louise Wallace and the Director of Environment, Karl Battersby must also approve the final Plan.

Between now and September comments will be received from DEFRA which will be acted upon, and work will be carried out through the Officer Steering Group. The membership of the group includes representatives from Highways, Planning, Public Health and Trading Standards. Various other stakeholders will be consulted on the plan, for example neighbouring local authorities and the Environment Agency.

**Trading Standards & National Trading Standards eCrime Team and NYtech** - another major trial has begun at Leeds Crown Court concerning a number of companies that were set up in the UK on behalf of overseas scam call centres.

The scam would target predominantly elderly and vulnerable consumers on the premise they were being called from Microsoft and other well-known high-street computer brands to help the consumer “fix their technical problem”.

Payments were then taken fraudulently from the customers which were then sent to various UK companies so as not to arouse the consumers’ suspicions. The operators of the UK companies would then take a commission, sending the balance of the payment to the scam overseas call centre. The trial is expected to last four to six weeks.

### **Registration Service**

The reforms to death registration due to commence in April have been delayed by central government until September 2024. The service is preparing for these significant changes which will require all causes of death to be scrutinised by an NHS Medical Examiner. A registrar triage team is in place to ensure that there is no delay in death registrations and that families will be able to continue arrange funerals in a timely manner.

The Ceremonies team has been working with the Communications Team to publicise our ceremony offer within and beyond North Yorkshire. This has resulted in a significant and sustained increase in interest in relevant pages on the Council website and an increase in bookings which will be realised over the next two to three years.

### **Coroners Service**

The Senior Coroner’s Officer employed by the Police has been seconded on a part time basis to the Council. This provides the service with additional capacity to reform and modernise the Coroner Support Service and to bridge the gap between the Police and Local Authority sides of the service, ensuring that the public experience a seamless service. A further fee-paid assistant coroner has been recruited for succession planning as current assistants near compulsory coroner retirement age.

### **Bereavement Service**

The harmonisation of roles and changes to structure have been implemented across the service and vacant roles have now been filled. Further work is underway to harmonise contracts with suppliers where this is possible.

A work group is auditing the condition of all our cemeteries and is working with the Parks and Grounds Service and NY Highways to ensure that cemetery upkeep is of the highest standard and that an ongoing programme is in place across the Council.

Training of additional staff is underway to ensure that there is capacity and resilience to carry out the memorial safety inspection programme over a rolling five year period.

Transition (LGR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report in March to inform members of the transformation work associated with the Bereavement Service and also the capital plans relating to cemetery expansion and capital cremator replacement programme.

COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE