

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

15 MAY 2024

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Legal and Democratic Services

The restructure of Democratic Services has been completed and the new structure was implemented as of 12 February 2024. The new structure has six teams, three of which are geographically focussed (East, Central and West) and three of which are providing more specialist functions: Local Area Support, Scrutiny and School Admission Appeals. The new structure has led to savings as staff numbers overall have reduced. The effectiveness of the new structure will be reviewed at 6 and 12 months of operation.

The migration of historical committee papers from the former district and borough council committee management systems to the NYC Modern Gov system, which is a sub-site of the main NYC website, is underway. This will lead to savings as number of committee management systems is reduced from eight to one and demands upon IT infrastructure and servers reduced. It will also make it easier for the public to find committee papers, as they will all be in one place.

The School Admission Appeals Service is administering the bulk admissions appeals for primary and secondary schools ahead of the start of the September school term. The work will continue through to the end of the summer school term in late July. Typically, 350 appeals are heard each year over this period in addition to the 'in-year' appeals. The appeals submitted are often complex and detailed. The independent appeals panels are made up of volunteers, who dedicate a lot of time to the work over the spring and summer. Their ongoing commitment to and support for the appeals process is much appreciated and valued.

Democratic Services continues to provide governance and clerical support to the mayoral combined authority for York and North Yorkshire, which generates an income to the Council. This arrangement will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and following the election of the Mayor.

Stronger Communities

Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)

The 24 place-based organisations from across the county continue to work with Stronger Communities to progress a Community Anchor model for North Yorkshire; in Quarter 4, this included the progression of organisational development action plans. A UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funded collaborative support programme for CAOs, delivered by Community First Yorkshire and Better Connect was also commissioned in Quarter 4; this will be tailored to meet the needs of each organisation and will broadly include the development and delivery of resources and training, one to one support meetings, partnership events and networking opportunities. For the nine localities where a suitable CAO has not been initially identified, development work continues to explore the potential for a local voluntary sector organisation to become a CAO, or to look at alternative models. Collaborative work with our key voluntary sector partners in our larger urban areas of Harrogate and Scarborough to explore options for CAOs also continues; following reporting back in Quarter 4, a further stage of work is being undertaken to explore how the model can be configured in urban areas.

The small scale Inspire grants scheme has continued to run, with 40 awarded in Quarter 4. The team have also continued to work alongside various voluntary and community groups to support organisational development and capacity building activity.

Community Partnerships

In Quarter 4, the team continued 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 working in five pilot areas: Easingwold, Leyburn and Middleham, Ripon, Sherburn-in-Elmet and Thornton-le-Dale and rural hinterland.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

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 and two allocations, as well as planning and development work taking place on year three allocations. In Quarter 4, notable progress was made in the following areas:

- The Community Grants and Village Halls and Community Buildings Grants schemes ran, with awards made throughout Quarter 4.
- The Physical Activity, Sport and Active Travel Fund continues to be successfully delivered by North Yorkshire Sport on behalf of NYC after its launch in autumn 2023.
- Development of the Digital Inclusion funding offer which will be available in Quarter 1 2024/25. This will be for organisations to access capital funding, development funding and training to build their capacity.

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.

Local Food Support

Following 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 in September 2023, three online Community of Practice sessions have taken place in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4, focussing on place based collaborative food access models, cash/income first approaches and more than food (wrap around support available for those accessing food provision). A number of dedicated key stakeholder conversations continue to take place in relation to this work, including with colleagues in Public Health as they continue to develop the North Yorkshire Food Strategy.

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.

Digital Inclusion Investment: In preparation for the UKSPF funding that will be available in Quarter 1 2024/25, the stakeholder co-design phase which the team accessed funding for from the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care System (ICS) is near completion. This research and development will inform the coordination of the UKSPF Digital Inclusion investment programme in 2024/25 encompassing £200,000 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, including from health partners, and NYC services. In Quarter 4, 79 devices have been gifted to socially isolated individuals or those in need of a device to access training or to continue their education. There has also been interest from several larger organisations who wish to donate their corporate devices to Reboot, including a Harrogate based firm who are looking to donate around 200 tablets.

Localities Restructure

As part of the Council wider service restructures the work to establish the new Localities Service structure has now completed. The new Localities Service went live on 1 May 2024 and is made up of three service teams:

- Communities (incorporating the work of the Stronger Communities Programme, voluntary and community sector funding, local partnerships, prevention and community resilience)
- Parish Liaison and Local Devolution (incorporating projects such as parish charter, parish liaison and engagement, service devolution pilots, community right to challenge and assets of community value)
- Migrant Programmes (bringing together a number of existing refugee and asylum seeker programmes, Homes for Ukraine programme and other community-based support initiatives into a single team)

Homes for Ukraine

North Yorkshire has continued to welcome a small number of arrivals through the Homes for Ukraine scheme during Quarter 4. Although some Ukrainian guests have chosen to move back to Ukraine or another country, many continue to be supported to move on from their sponsor into private rental or social housing accommodation.

In total, since the start of the scheme, 1,501 Ukrainian guests have moved to North Yorkshire and of those, 463 remain in sponsored accommodation.

Councillor Locality Budgets

The ninth year of the scheme started on 3 April 2023 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations was 31 January 2024. Councillors were 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 total of 782 recommendations were submitted, amounting to £874,066 (97.12%) of this year's budget. A report on the expenditure and operation of Locality Budgets in the 2023/24 financial year will be presented to Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 June 2024. The new 2024/25 scheme year will start on 13 May 2024 and the deadline for submissions will be 31 January 2025.

Customer

Household Support Fund (HSF) 4 – Quarter 4 Update

Quarter 4 saw the closure of NYC's fourth phase of HSF. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme aimed to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework, c24,600 households across North Yorkshire received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher across two live windows (September 2023 and January 2024); with an average 95% 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), the HSF Energy Support Scheme, Money and Benefits Advice Service, Care Leavers, and 18 free or low-cost food providers across the County. 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, 62,817 households in North Yorkshire received support through the fourth phase of HSF.

HSF will continue for a fifth phase between 1 April and 30 September 2024; work is now underway to develop the scheme, building on the learning from previous phases.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund

In Quarter 4, 3,347 applications were received^[1] with an 89% approval rate. A total of £336,807.13 was spent^[2], with 48% on food and energy vouchers, and 52% 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 (8%).

Quarterly data update:

- On average, NYLAF received 257 applications a week this quarter.
- There have been 360 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 (18%), those who are homeless (10%) and families under extreme pressure (7%) continuing to be the three highest vulnerability categories in Q4.

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 Q4, 247 were delivered.
- NYLAF has supported the Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with 23 awards going to refugees or host families this quarter to directly support those that have fled Ukraine.

^[1] Compared to 3,968 applications received and the 3,582 approved in Quarter 4 2022/23

^[2] Compared to £413,666.85 spent Quarter 4, 2022/23

Customer Programme

During Quarter 4 we have continued to develop our approach to customer excellence and bringing the Customer Programme together to support our ambition to be a customer focussed organisation putting our customers at the heart of every we do. Work is underway to develop our Customer Experience strategy and be ready for consultation with a focus to ensure services and projects align with emerging principles.

To improve our customers experience we need to have the capability to provide services accessible across all channels, with a seamless journey, listening to the voice of our customers, including real-time customer satisfaction feedback. Work has started to explore requirements to receive the real-time voice of the customer to allow us to deliver excellent customer focussed services.

Customer Services is currently being restructured, which includes resource to undertake the work involved to become a customer focussed organisation.

COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE