

## NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

24 JULY 2024

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

#### **Climate Change**

The Climate Change Delivery Pathway is in the process of being finalised to be brought forward for approval in August this year. This document outlines how the Climate Change Strategy is being implemented across Directorates and embedded into our all our services. This will remain an interactive and dynamic document which will be supported by the development of a monitoring and evaluation programme in addition to strengthening our focus on Climate Adaptation and to support our communities and businesses to do likewise.

Following my last update, I am happy to announce that the team with support of Council colleagues have secured an additional allocation of £550,000 which has gone toward the Business Sustainability grants in the Shared Prosperity Fund. This, coupled with the Community Climate Action fund continues to promote visible climate actions with funding being given for community and business projects to decarbonise. More recently you may have seen HECK! – a local business which has been able to install solar panels to help save them 55 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. Also, 13 independent care homes have been approved for decarbonisation audits to review how they can reduce energy costs and improve business resilience.

Work is continuing on our Devolution Deal Net Zero Fund projects, with grants being made for community buildings decarbonisation, electric Vehicles for community transport and feasibility projects for decarbonising harbours and waste services underway.

**Natural Capital Service** – since my last update, the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has now formally designated the River Nidd at Knaresborough Lido with formal bathing water status. Whilst this is good news and brings with it greater opportunities for water quality interventions, we note the challenges that exist with water quality generally across our region and continue to work with internal and external partners and government departments to improve the situation. More recently a River Catchment Partnerships forum was held on 24 June which sees North Yorkshire taking a leadership role to bring together key stakeholders in support of better water quality.

Along with four local authorities in Teesside, NYC is a member for the Crustacean Deaths Working Group that has been investigating the cause and impacts of the major die off of crabs and lobsters that affected the Cleveland and North Yorkshire coast in the Autumn of 2021. The Working Group will be meeting through the autumn of 2024. A 'holding statement' published by the Working Group in May included a call for the establishment of a formal public inquiry into this matter.

Work continues on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and you may recall the Head of Environment and Sustainability attending the members' seminar during early June to give a presentation and progress update on the LNRS. I'd like to thank all members who contributed to the discussion and gave positive feedback which is now being incorporated or actioned. The LNRS project team is currently reviewing DEFRA's advice on mapping opportunities for nature recovery and the implication for the overall map that will cover all North Yorkshire and York. They are devising an approach that will need to be agreed with DEFRA and this may result in a delay to the programme that was shared at the members' seminar.

Across both our National Landscapes (Nidderdale and Howardian Hills), we have recently had the 2024/2025 funding confirmations allocated which has seen an increase in grant funding provided which enables continued support being provided to farmers and landowners across these locations. Progress also remains ongoing for the development of the new National Landscape Management Plans for our two national landscapes and for their Nature Recovery Plans, which will complement the North Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

A recent presentation from the Howardian Hills National Landscape manager at the Thirsk and Malton Area Constituency Committee also resulted in a comprehensive overview of their work across the National Landscape. It was interesting also, to hear the progress in relation to the Yorkshire Wolds designation and cross-party support generally. Whilst this was paused during the general election, work will now continue, including a public consultation for local communities and stakeholders in the area. I would welcome the support of relevant local members in promoting the consultation.

## **Waste**

**Member Working Group** – Members will be aware that a cross-party Task and Finish Group was set up to help shape future waste services. I am grateful to the group's members for their constructive contributions to this work.

The group has been involved in the development of the Let's Talk Rubbish public engagement exercise, which started earlier this month and will run until September. Its purpose is to gather views on both existing collection arrangements and the councils' proposals for future harmonisation. I hope that Members will both submit their own views and also encourage their residents and parish councils to respond.

**Improved Collection Services** – the harmonised garden waste service goes from strength to strength. Over 122,000 licences have been purchased so far for the 2024 season with almost 87% of these being online signups. Building on the strength of the garden waste service, from June the bulky waste collection service has been provided in house across the North Yorkshire area with consistent fees and charges and improved customer journey.

**Bulky Waste** - as part of our ongoing efforts to align service provision across North Yorkshire, the bulky waste collection service that was outsourced to Yorwaste in Scarborough and Harrogate has now been brought back in-house. Customers have seen no change, but we have been able to deliver the service more cost-effectively by using North Yorkshire Council staff. We are keen to deliver what is a popular service in the most efficient way across North Yorkshire.

## **Licensing**

**Taxis** – a draft Inclusive Service Plan is now progressing through internal processes and is expected to go out to full formal consultation in September. This will have a particular focus on access to wheelchair accessible Hackney Carriages. We believe that this will be the first Inclusive Service Plan in the country following on from updated Government guidance. Linked to the Inclusive Service Plan, we will also be undertaking the first full review of our Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy which will take account of comments made by the trade and our own team throughout the last year. It will also reflect the updated Government guidance.

**Other Licences** - since 1 April 2023 we have now delivered just over fifty Licensing Sub-Committee hearings dealing with individual licence applications. These largely relate to taxi and alcohol licences and are taking place in the locality offices overseen by three Licensing Committee Members. Animal Welfare Licensing work, such as dog boarding and breeding, horse riding and animal exhibition, continues to be an area of continuing harmonisation and significant workload. The Licensing Act and Gambling Act policies will commence review over

summer. The summer season sees a general increase in activity for the Licensing Team with caravan parks, holiday destinations and the European football championships bringing people together in licensed premises. This is particularly evident on the East coast.

**Systems** - with Regulatory and Housing Enforcement Services colleagues, work is underway to bring together the digital management systems formerly used by the seven district councils. This is a significant piece of work which will take an anticipated 18 months to complete. It will bring efficiencies and improved customer experience as well as allowing us to fully deliver our restructured services.

### **Regulatory Services**

**Farming, Food & Health** - the Animal Health team continues to regulate disease risk amongst North Yorkshire farmed animals, by ensuring a robust response to the commission of animal health and animal by-product criminal offences.

A current case involves a North Yorkshire farmer who is the subject of investigation of serious allegations which could carry a custodial sentence. This is an indication of how seriously the Council and the Courts take the welfare of farmed animals and the importance of protecting the food chain and integrity of the industry.

In terms of supporting our farmers the Animal Health team continue to associate a proportion of the offending witnessed within the industry with the emotional and financial pressures currently being felt by the farming community. As a result, the team continue to forge links with partners such as the Farming Community Network and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution in order that vulnerable farmers can get the assistance they require to maintain appropriate standards, prevent the risk of disease and protect the welfare of their animals.

In addition to farmed animal disease risk, the team also continues to monitor instances of infectious disease, working closely with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to respond to outbreaks in local manufacturing premises and viral outbreaks emanating from events held at North Yorkshire entertainment venues.

As well as the reactive work, the team also contributes to proactive partner projects with one such example being the UKHSA's ongoing Mosquito Surveillance programme. In an effort to track the migration of the Tiger Mosquito from mainland Europe, the team is working over the summer months with Coneygarth Services Lorry Park at Leeming Bar, placing mosquito traps at 10 locations around the site to check for the presence of this particular species.

With a mixture of Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers, the recently restructured team also monitor the local food environment on a risk-based intelligence led basis. In delivering statutory functions, imposed by the government by way of the Food Standards Agency, the team undertake inspections at the majority of North Yorkshire's 6000+ food retailers, producers and manufacturers. Inspection criteria include standards of hygiene, identification of the presence of allergens and compliance with labelling and compositional standards.

Our Regulatory Services Officers give advice to businesses and individuals to help them comply with regulations. Enforcement action will take place, across all the functions, when criminal offences are identified, or where further action is considered necessary and proportionate when a business owner has failed to heed the advice given, in order to bring their premises and operations up to the required standard.

This principle also applies to the enforcement of Health and Safety at Work Act offences that may occur across North Yorkshire businesses. Unfortunately, incidents do occur as a result of personal negligence and/or businesses failing to demonstrate their acceptance and mitigation of risk.

With a joint enforcement role alongside the Health and Safety Executive, the team is currently investigating one fatality and several instances of serious personal injury which have resulted from North Yorkshire businesses failing to introduce appropriate risk assessment and safety procedures, both of which being a legal requirement to protect staff from injury or death.

**Environmental Protection** - the first North Yorkshire Council Air Quality Annual Status Report (2024) has been submitted to DEFRA in compliance with its end of June deadline; this is an annual statutory return.

This document combines and updates air quality monitoring data and ongoing improvement measures from across all seven previous District and Borough Council localities. It will form the basis of future reports and gives us a framework to build upon as an organisation to further improve the air quality of the county for the benefit of all its residents, businesses, and visitors.

We shall continue to work with partners in the Council's Steering Group to further improve air quality and this will be included in our Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), due for submission on 30 September. A draft AQAP was produced and submitted to DEFRA in March.

**National Trading Standards eCrime Team and NYtech** - the trial relating to overseas call centres targeting elderly and vulnerable UK consumers concluded at Leeds Crown. Five people were convicted of operating UK companies that acted as fronts for the call centres, transferring over £1.2m defrauded from UK victims to the fraudsters running the call centres. They were given a total of 11½ years in prison.

The group convicted at an earlier trial of running a fraudulent online ticketing business have now been sentenced. The business sold tickets that had been acquired fraudulently for many high-profile music and cultural events. Four defendants were sentenced to 9½ years in prison.

The team has been tackling the issue of illicit vapes, particularly those targeted at children, being sold online and via social media. Since April we have removed over 500 listings and 15 web sites that relate to thousands of illicit and potentially harmful products.

### **Registration Service**

Reforms to death registration are due to be implemented in early September. This change requires the new NHS Medical Examiner service to scrutinise the cause of all deaths, expanding from their current remit of deaths occurring in hospital. This additional step for community deaths will increase the time period until a death can be registered but will decrease the administrative burden on the service in quality assuring causes of deaths with GP surgeries.

The Registration Service has enhanced its death registration appointments by the addition of the full "Tell Us Once" Service when the informant is the next of kin and can provide additional evidence of identification. This reduces the additional administrative burden on the bereaved without impacting on service delivery as the full Tell Us Once process, which informs all central and local government departments of a death, can be completed in a single appointment. For informants who are not the next of kin then the Tell Us Once Service is still activated, however additional steps are required to be completed after the registration and this allows for the same system of informing central and local government departments.

### **Coroners Service**

The Coroner's Service continues to support the work of HM Senior Coroner. Changes in processes are being undertaken to ensure that the changes to death registration can be managed effectively. Further changes are being made by the seconded Senior Coroner's Officer to improve the case management processes undertaken in preparing inquest files for the Coroner. Standardised service level agreements with hospital trusts for mortuary provision are being implemented to harmonise longstanding agreements made prior to the three jurisdictions being merged in 2020.

### **Bereavement Service**

Training in memorial safety testing has taken place for additional staff to increase the pool of officers who can carry out this tasking across all cemeteries and churchyards. Policies and procedures are being harmonised and procurement of a recording and monitoring system is being integrated into the crematoria management system.

The Bereavement Service is working with Parks and Grounds to devise a new harmonised long-term strategy for the upkeep of cemeteries and churchyards across North Yorkshire ensuring that high standards are in place and consistent across the whole Council.

Additional staff have been recruited in the Harrogate area to ensure that there is enough local capacity at our busiest crematorium and to ensure progress can be made on cemetery maintenance.

COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE