

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

13 NOVEMBER 2024

STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR MANAGING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change

Since my last update, the Climate Change Delivery Pathway was approved in August demonstrating our continue progress and commitment to Climate Change. This document summarises how the Climate Change Strategy is being implemented across Directorates and embedded into our all our services and remains an iterative and dynamic document. Looking ahead work remains ongoing to develop our understanding of climate resilience (adaptation), as such the team are working to commission an adaptation assessment which will form the evidence base for the adaptation pillar in our Climate Change Strategy.

The team continues to work on several climate action projects and feasibility studies funded through the Net Zero Devolution Funding, with some projects being finalised. The outputs of these studies will enable us to bid for more devolution funding and secure a pathway to take projects forward through to Business Case development or delivery.

On the topic of funding, we are pleased to note the pending launch of the York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority Carbon Negative Challenge Fund, which will enable us and community organisations, to bid for valuable funding to support decarbonisation and climate action. Work is being undertaken internally across the Council to identify priority projects and ideas which could be put forward as a prospective funding bid to ensure we maximise the opportunity to secure funding for North Yorkshire.

I would also like to highlight the positive collaboration taking place between Climate Change leads from North Yorkshire Council, City of York Council and the Combined Authority on the Local Net Zero Accelerator Programme. Officers have secured £2million to consider whether the Bristol City Leap model can be replicated in our region, or to explore alternative private/public partnership or green finance models. Work remains ongoing on this collaborative programme and is testament to the regional challenge we face and how working together can achieve positive outcomes.

Natural Capital Service - following on from recent briefings, work continues on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), including identifying priorities and measures (actions) and working up draft mapping outputs. The LNRS team is now preparing for a series of in-person engagement sessions with landowners, land managers and farmers on the mapping outputs in addition to online webinar between now and December.

Many of you will also be aware that the proposed Yorkshire Wold's AONB designation, being led by Natural England with support from North Yorkshire Council officers is currently out for public and statutory consultation. The public consultation runs for 12 weeks from 8 October to 13 January 2025. Several in-person information events, online webinars and engagement forums are being held locally in the area. Officers, in consultation with Executive will be preparing a North Yorkshire Council response to the consultation, but local ward members are encouraged to provide their views and feedback on the proposals through the channels shared with you. You will have been emailed, but if you require more information, I'd be happy to signpost you to the lead officer.

Finally, across our existing National Landscapes (Nidderdale and Howardian Hills) work is underway to develop their new Management Plans. This includes targeted workshops and engagement sessions in addition to a public consultation. This is alongside existing grant funding programmes supporting farmers and supporting environmental improvement programmes within the National Landscape areas.

Waste

Harmonised Waste Collections – thank you to members for their constructive contributions to this work. Following a study looking into waste collection methods, a significant amount of engagement has taken place to make sure the views of residents, members and stakeholders help shape the future harmonised waste collection service. The Let's Talk Rubbish 10-week public consultation secured over 10,400 responses and provides invaluable insight into the existing services and the proposed harmonised service. This feedback is complimented by engagement with disability forums and social media comments, and a big thank you to members involved through the Waste Task and Finish Group, Members seminar, TEEEO&SC and the six Area Committees. A report seeking a decision on the proposed harmonised waste service is being considered at the Executive on 21 January 2025.

Fleet

The Council has a number of electric pool cars on fleet and arrangements have been made to allow for Members to have access to these vehicles when they are not being used by Officers. This will allow for Members try out electric vehicles to familiarise themselves with this alternative fuel technology.

Licensing

Taxis – in September, the General Licensing and Registration Committee considered two reports which shared close links. The first was the adoption of a brand-new Inclusive Service Plan (ISP) as detailed for the first time in the Department for Transport's most recent version of its Best Practice Guide for Local Licensing Authorities. The proposed ISP describes how the Council intends to promote better access and services in taxis for those with disabilities. There was a specific focus on increasing the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) where evidence has demonstrated a significant under-supply.

The second report asked the Committee to consider proposed changes to the existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy. This incorporated the proposals contained in the ISP seeking to increase the number of WAV and lower emission Hackney Carriage vehicles. It also proposed several changes contained in the latest version of the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guide.

Committee decided to form a quick Task and Finish Group to consider the detail in these reports before making recommendations to the Executive prior entering the consultation phase. The Task and Finish Group has concluded and will be reporting back to the General Licensing and Registration Committee in November. It is anticipated that consultation will be agreed by the Executive to commence in January.

Other Licences - in September the Council successfully defended an appeal in the Magistrates Courts after a Sub-Committee decision to revoke a taxi driver's licence. The Council were awarded £1,110 in costs.

We are now rapidly approaching delivery of 100 Licensing Sub-Committee hearings which have considered individual licence applications. These have mainly been taxi and alcohol licence applications and have been held in locations right across the county.

Full review and harmonisation of the Gambling and Licensing Act policies is due to conclude by 1 April 2025. Work has commenced to combine the seven former district council policies into one.

Regulatory Services

Farming, Food & Health - three cases of Bluetongue have been confirmed at North Yorkshire farms.

Bluetongue is a notifiable viral animal disease which affects sheep, cattle, goats and deer, llamas and alpacas. It is spread by adult-infected midges biting an animal susceptible to the disease. It does not affect humans.

The scale of the outbreak in the south east of the country has led to the government introducing a Restriction Zone that limits animal movements unless approved under license. Unfortunately, the infected animals at the three North Yorkshire farms were brought into the county prior to the introduction of those restrictions.

Under normal circumstances following positive test results the governments Animal Plant Health Agency would introduce movement restrictions in the locality by way of a Temporary Control Zone, ie an area around the infected premises in which surveillance and testing measures occur with additional bio-security requirements and robust animal movement restrictions. That has not happened in this instance for there is no evidence to suggest that the virus is in local circulation.

Instead, any potential spread is being mitigated by the Animal Plant Health Agency culling the infected animals and undertaking comprehensive and regular testing of the remaining animals at each infected premises. North Yorkshire Council Animal Health officers have increased attendance at the local markets to advise interested parties and monitor any movements coming in from outside of North Yorkshire.

Environmental Protection – a recent report by North Yorkshire Council’s Scientific team shows an improvement in the County’s air quality as key pollutant levels continue to fall. Upon the formation of North Yorkshire Council there were eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) within the County. All were for traffic related nitrogen dioxide apart from the village of Staithes which was declared for PM₁₀ particulates present in smoke from domestic solid fuel burning. We are now able to revoke the AQMAs below due to improvement in air quality.

AQMAs in North Yorkshire:

1. Knaresborough - Bond End,
2. Harrogate - Wetherby Road,
3. Selby - The Crescent / New Street,
4. Scarborough – The village of Staithes
5. Bedale - Town Centre – REVOKED,
6. Knaresborough – York Place - REVOKED,
7. Ripon - Low/High Skellgate - REVOKED,
8. Malton – Town Centre – REVOKED.

This is a good news story and demonstrates the continued improvement of air quality in the county and the success of the measures implemented after co-operation between Council departments such as Environmental Health, Public Health and Highways. Now we are one Council, the opportunities for further improvements are much greater.” The measures implemented ranged from “soft” measures such as anti-idling campaigns and signage to encourage walking and cycling to “hard” measures such as the construction of the Bedale bypass and the introduction of a weight restriction for HGVs in Malton. Monitoring will continue in these areas.

National Trading Standards eCrime Team - we are currently working on two national projects to tackle the sale of illicit tobacco and illicit vapes online. For illicit tobacco, we are working alongside HMRC and several Trading Standards teams to help them in assessing the range and volume of products being supplied via social media platforms. To support that work we are delivering an online training session to the HMRC and Trading Standards staff to assist them in identifying illicit tobacco products. Listings can be quite difficult to spot as they are often “hidden”, including amongst images of sweets or other legitimate products. It is intended that this intelligence gathering work will be followed up by targeted action against the sellers of illicit products.

For illicit vapes, a month of action is now underway. We have identified over 8,000 listings of potentially illicit products across a range of online platforms, many of them selling products targeted at children. These listings are now being assessed by Trading Standards teams across England and Wales with the intention of removing the illicit products from sale.

North Yorkshire Council has just completed its first inspection from IPCO (Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Office) into its use of covert surveillance and compliance with the various regulations that govern such activities. The Inspection went very well with officers from Trading Standards and Environmental Protection interviewed by the inspection team and the Councils Trading Standards Manager, Jo Bouflower was commended on her knowledge and understanding of the subject area.

Registration Service

Since early September the Registration Service has dealt with the implementation of the NHS led Medical Examiner rollout for all deaths. Attending practitioner proposed causes of all deaths are now scrutinised by independent medical examiners who then provide documentation to the Registration Service so that deaths can be registered. We regularly work with at least four NHS Medical Examiner Services each of whom has established different working models to make sure that documentation is provided to the Registration Service so that residents who suffer bereavement can register deaths in a timely manner.

Following the Council wide changes to terms and conditions for employees and workers, a review of the ceremonies side of the service, staffing and methods of operation will shortly commence.

The change in location of Richmond Registration Service has been made permanent with the interview room now located in the Richmond Hub at Mercury House. The civic meeting rooms are being licensed for ceremonies and weddings and civil partnerships will be able to be held here from the new year.

Coroners Service

The secondment of the Senior Coroner’s Office from North Yorkshire Police has been extended to the end of the financial year with the agreement of both parties. The technical operational changes to the service which have been carried out over the last six months because of this secondment have provided a positive impact in the closer working arrangements between the Police and Local Authority sides of the service and a seamless and trouble-free implementation of the Medical Examiner rollout.

Work has also begun with the Resilience and Emergency Team on a review of the ability of the Council and Coroner to be able to manage a mass fatality event.

Bereavement Service

Changes have taken place to distribute cemeteries more equitably between locality teams. A number of cemeteries in the Ripon area are now under the management of the team at Maple Park. Locality teams will continue to work closely together to manage both the day-to-day operations and also the historical records which date back several decades.

NY Highways continues to support the service with resilience in gravedigging and workshops and training sessions have been carried out with the Parks and Grounds team on future plans for the management of cemetery grounds.

The extension to Skipton Chapel will now commence in May 2025 following amendments to the plans identified as required by Align Property Partners. This extension will allow the venue to host larger ceremonies.

Planning permission for the extension to Pateley Bridge cemetery will go to committee for approval in November and capital plans on additional cemetery expansion requirements and cremator replacement will be finalised in Q3.

COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE