

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

13 November 2024

STATEMENT OF COUNCILLOR HEATHER PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Legal and Democratic Services

Democratic Services continues to explore opportunities for income generation through the School Admission Appeals Service. Further work is required with North Yorkshire Education Services to determine the delivery model and charging framework. We continue to provide governance and clerical support to the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) for York and North Yorkshire, which also generates an income to the Council.

The work of the Area Committees is evolving with a strong focus upon economic development and regeneration, in part due to the £50,000 seed funding that has been allocated to help ensure that key economic development project proposals are fully costed and ready to progress once central government funding is made available. The Mayor and representatives of the MCA are due to attend the committees on an annual basis, commencing in March 2025, to provide an overview of their work on economic development and regeneration and key local projects.

The Area Committees are also seeing a significant number of petitions being referred to them (where there are over 500 signatories who live, work or study in the county), with six to date this year and six in 2023. The Council's petitions scheme provides another route by which members of the public can engage with the Council and raise issues of local concern.

Stronger Communities

Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)

The 25 place based CAOs across the county continue to work with the Localities and other service teams, developing and delivering a range of services and strengthening their capacity to respond to local challenges. Future discussions with the network of Anchors will have a focus on their potential role in enhanced prevention and responding to and recovering from emergency events.

The work to identify an anchor model in our larger urban areas of Harrogate and Scarborough has concluded and invitations to the voluntary sector to apply for funding to create a collaborative model that involves a range of groups supporting both the town centres and neighbourhoods has been issued this month. For the eight localities where a suitable Anchor has not been identified, development work continues to explore the potential for a local voluntary sector organisation to become a CAO, or to look at alternative models.

Grants

The small grass roots 'Inspire Grants' scheme continues to attract significant interest, with 53 grants worth £46,576 awarded in the last quarter bringing the total to date this year to £79,571 supporting 91 projects. This is higher than at the same point last year when £48,895 had been awarded to 57 projects. The team has also continued to work alongside various voluntary and community groups to support organisational development and capacity building activity.

In addition to the grant support, the voluntary and community sector can also access support from the local Infrastructure service funded jointly by the Council and the NHS. A competitive grant process for the re-procurement of this Infrastructure Support Grant will take place in Quarter three.

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. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Digital Inclusion Programme funding has supported 41 organisations across the county to become 'digital hubs' with both capital grants and training for volunteer 'digital champions'. The range of organisations benefitting include care homes, libraries, Village Halls, GP surgeries, social prescribers and mobile buses, creating a significant reach and step change in the availability of digital skills support for residents of North Yorkshire.

Reboot North Yorkshire has continued to support digital inclusion with regular referrals into the scheme from a broad range of organisations across the County, including from health partners, and North Yorkshire Council services. In Quarter two, 76 devices have been gifted to individuals either to improve social connectedness and enhance health and wellbeing of those socially isolated or to support those in need of a device to access training or to continue their education.

Community Partnerships

The Localities team continues 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 Forest and Dale (Thornton-le-Dale and rural hinterland). The team are also involved with and support, in a less formal way, the work of three other local community partnerships that were already in existence in Malton, Filey and Knaresborough. An update on Community Partnerships was included in the report taken to the North Yorkshire Council Executive on 17 September where it was agreed to roll out this initiative wider to all Members who wish to bring forward the development of a partnership in their area. This opportunity will be presented in a future Member briefing.

Financial Inclusion

The Council is running a Cost of Living Communications campaign again this winter, starting in Quarter three. Preparatory work is underway, encompassing the following:

- Cost-of-living web page (www.northyorks.gov.uk/costofliving), which is a one stop shop of information about a wide range of local schemes and organisations offering support
- A focus on Winter Fuel and Pension Credit uptake in November 2024
- Sharing a communications pack with partner organisations including community libraries, voluntary and community sector organisations, health settings, schools, parish councils and others including services like adult learning with content and assets that are easy for people to share via their own digital channels.

PARISH LIAISON, LOCAL DEVOLUTION AND COMMUNITY RIGHTS

Parish Liaison/Consultation

Work has progressed to introduce formal Parish Liaison meetings and area-based meetings are taking place over the next six months. The first drop-in session took place in Knaresborough on 25 September and the first formal Parish Liaison meeting took place on 23 October for the Harrogate and Knaresborough area parishes.

A voluntary representative group of Parish/Town/City Councils and Parish Meetings has also been established. This provides a valuable opportunity for regular informal dialogue with the Parish Sector to inform the on-going development of initiatives such as the single 'front door', liaison meetings, dedicated web pages etc. as well as broader Parish Liaison activities. Present areas of consideration include the review of the commitments within the Parish Charter.

Local Devolution

The work to progress local devolution has focused on the agreed double devolution pilot proposals. Progress on these has been dependent on the availability of information due to restructures and the capacity of Parish Councils to develop and submit full business cases. Following more detailed operational discussions between services and Parishes, revised and in some cases reduced proposals are emerging. A review to simplify the local devolution scheme is underway and consideration of a 'whole service' approach is being considered with the smaller requests being managed as business as usual.

MIGRANT PROGRAMMES

Homes for Ukraine

Between 1 July and 30 September 2024 there were 41 new arrivals in North Yorkshire through the Homes for Ukraine programme, an increase of three compared to last quarter.

Visas are now granted for an 18-month period, whereas earlier arrivals were granted three years. The government has now announced an 18-month visa extension possibility, which Ukrainians can apply for three months before their current visa expires. As the first North Yorkshire arrivals were in March 2022, the government is expecting the first extension applications in January 2025.

Wrap around support including a dedicated information telephone line, financial packages to support with moves to social housing and or private rental, employability support, adult learning and community integration continues to be provided.

Economic Migrants

During the last quarter, work has continued around the development of an initiative to support economic migrants, as well as other migrant groups in North Yorkshire, with a bid to the National Lottery being considered at the end of November 2024.

Resettlement

As of 30 September 2024, North Yorkshire has resettled 397 persons (80 households) under the Afghan resettlement schemes (since August 2021). From that figure, 36 persons (seven households) have moved out of county. It has been announced by the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) that a further 14 Afghan households will resettle in North Yorkshire, but arrivals will start next quarter.

The United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) is a scheme that can be used for the UK to respond to refugee crises anywhere in the globe and has been operational locally since February 2021. To date 175 people (45 households) have been resettled in North Yorkshire. There were no arrivals through this scheme during Quarter one 2024/25, although nationally the pipeline has re-opened for applications meaning new cases can now be brought forward by the Home Office.

Integration support for the resettlement schemes arrivals continues to be provided in partnership with the Refugee Council with initial tenancy support being provided by North Yorkshire Council's dedicated refugee housing officers.

At the beginning of September 2024, the MoD launched a transitional facility at Catterick Garrison, to house Afghan families after arrival in the UK, prior to settled accommodation being identified for them. Up to 50 families could be accommodated at any one time, before moving on to other parts of the UK after a short period of time. North Yorkshire Council, in partnership with the Refugee Council, is supporting families during this time. 21 Families were staying within the transitional facility by the end of Quarter two.

Asylum

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide school places for school-aged children and to carry out age-related assessments for those claiming to be below the age of 18. Other support and signposting help are provided by Migrant Help, a Home Office contracted provider via a telephone helpline.

When asylum seekers are granted a decision, they have either 28 days to leave the Mears accommodation (if the decision is positive), or 21 days where they have had a negative decision (unless they choose to appeal, in which case they are eligible to stay in the accommodation during this time). The Migrant Programmes team is developing move-on support options and other services to help with their long-term integration, where a positive decision is granted. Along with Housing Options staff a monthly meeting is now in place with Mears, the Home Office commissioned provider for accommodation, to discuss support requirements for individuals and families that have recently received a positive decision.

Councillor Locality Budgets

The tenth year of the scheme started on 13 May 2024 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations is 31 January 2025. Members are able to make recommendations totalling £10,000 and the arrangements are as in previous years with the addition that funding will not be awarded for 100% of the cost of a project or activity undertaken or managed by an external organisation. External organisations are expected to meet a proportion of the cost of projects or activities from their own funds or from a funder other than North Yorkshire Council. Councillors are also required to round down their awarded funding to the nearest £10.

425 recommendations have been made to date: amounting to £462,990 (51.44%) of the allocated funding. Nine members have fully spent their budget and seven members are yet to submit any recommendations, with just over two months remaining of the scheme year. Members are asked to submit their recommendations as soon as possible, in order to avoid a surge in last minute applications. Any recommendations not received by the deadline date will not be processed and any money not spent will be returned to the general working balance.

Customer

Household Support Fund (HSF) 5 – Quarter Two Update

Quarter two saw the closure of North Yorkshire Council's fifth phase of Household Support Fund (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 and 30 September 2024.

In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework, 20,000 households across North Yorkshire received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher with an 94% redemption rate. This encompassed eligible families, pensioners and working age adult households.

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, 46,254 households in North Yorkshire received support through the fifth phase of HSF.

HSF will continue for a sixth phase between 1 October 2024 and 31 March 2025; work is now underway to develop the scheme, building on the learning from previous phases.

As with previous schemes will also be promoting pension credit take up across the county through the Cost of Living campaign.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund

In Quarter two, 2024/25, 3,105 applications were received¹ with an 90% approval rate. A total of £386,447.65 was spent², with 38% on food and energy vouchers, and 62% on standard awards. In keeping with previous years, the highest levels of demand are seen in Scarborough (38%), followed by Harrogate, with lowest levels of demand in Richmondshire (4%).

Quarterly data update:

- On average, NYLAF received 234 applications a week this quarter.
- There have been 324 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 experiencing mental health challenges (18%) and those homeless (15%) coming through the Fund more than anyone else. However, compared to last quarter, data highlights that applicants from those with alcohol / drug dependencies, with learning disabilities, fleeing domestic abuse, or who are homeless have increased.

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 Q2, 231 were delivered.
- NYLAF has supported the Governments Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with 21 awards going to refugees or host families this quarter to directly support those that have fled Ukraine.

Customer Excellence

The Council's Customer Experience Programme was first set up in 2024 to advance the approach to customer experience across the Council. The programme and emerging customer experience strategy will create a culture of outstanding customer excellence across the Council, with a drive to improve the quality of customer experience and overall standard of service.

Our vision is to be 'an organisation which puts the customer at the heart of everything we do to continuously improve their experience'. Across the whole Council the customer needs to be seen as everyone's responsibility and not just as the remit of customer service teams.

Through our outcome-based customer programme, we will create a one Council culture putting the customer first. By using data and listening to customer feedback to understand their needs and behaviours, we will design customer focussed services, meeting our customers' needs. By improving and enhancing our digital and technology offer, we aim to create a positive digital experience and drive our ambition to continuously improve the customer experience.

During September we have appointed Customer Experience Business Relationship Managers, who will work with Corporate Directorates to deliver the programme outcomes. Work is also underway on activities under the programme, including procurement of a new customer relationship management system and a real-time customer satisfaction platform

Customer Service

Customer service have seen a decrease in demand in Quarter two by 7.8% compared to Quarter one. This is understandable given that Quarter one encompassed the Revenues annual billing and changes to fees and charges for the new financial year.

The top five demands for the customer service function in Quarter two by service area are:

- Social Care
- Revenues
- Bins, Recycling and Waste

- Roads, Parking and Travel
- Housing and homelessness

Elections

In Quarter two the Customer Services Team have assisted the elections team to deliver the general election and the annual canvass. The team supported elections through handling their phone calls at first point of contact, providing face to face resource to help elections check ID for both residents and staff, and released resource to help deliver the election on both polling day and the count. Overall, in Quarter two the Customer Services Team received 3,341 calls for Elections and saw 297 customers for election related enquiries. For the footfall demand, 169 customers for election related enquiries were in the first week of July. Elections were the fourteenth highest service for phone calls across Quarter two, but the highest call queue in the first week of July.

Performance

The Customer Service Team is showing an improvement in performance year on year. Below you can see a comparison of 23/24 Quarter two against 24/25 Quarter two.

Month	Q2 2024/25 % of calls answered in 4 mins	Q2 2023/24 % of calls answered in 4 mins	% Difference in 2024/25 to 2023/24
July	90.30%	88.60%	+1.7%
August	90.00%	87.60%	+2.4%
September	92.60%	81.20%	+11.4%

Elected members dedicated number

Performance on the dedicated members number remained high for this Quarter. Average speed of answer was eight seconds and 100% of calls were answered.

The dedicated members number is 01609 797263.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCEMENT

- From 1 April 2024 until the end of September the service had dealt with 83 major, 745 minor and 1,602 other and 8 County matter applications
- Between 1 April 2024 and the end of September Constituency Area Planning and Strategic Committees have met 32 times
- In terms of Planning Enforcement, since 1 April 2024, we have closed approximately 793 causes

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