

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

13 November 2024

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, ARTS & HOUSING

Leisure and Culture

Culture and Archives

The North Yorkshire Cultural Strategy is now in its final stages. The team have managed to consult with over 800 people across North Yorkshire communities and sector, as well as connecting with City of York and the Mayoral Combined Authority, to ensure opportunities from devolution are maximised.

National interest in Craven Museum continues following reaching the finals of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2024. A digital tour of the museum along with curator Q&A will feature at the national Museums Association conference in November. The venue also hosted this year's Kids in Museum awards, after winning the overall Museum of the Year and Best Accessible Museum last year.

A partnership project with Opera North, Orchestras Live and AMP Music has been shortlisted for the "Outstanding Music Education Resource" prize at the Music and Drama Education Awards 2025.

Our Archives team have been successfully awarded funding for a collaborative doctoral award with co-supervisors University of Nottingham and West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds.

Almost 20,000 members of the public visited across our four museums and galleries in September, with some fantastic feedback. Knaresborough Castle achieved 198% of their annual admissions target for this year.

The New Light Art Prize exhibition opened at the Mercer Gallery on 12 October, one of the UK's largest and most talked about open exhibitions. The touring New Light Prize Exhibition is a celebration of Northern talent and was established 15 years ago to showcase both well-known and emerging artists.

In October half term all of our museums and galleries had a number of free events and activities, along with affordable theatre and immersive experiences, continuing to provide accessible cultural engagement opportunities to our communities.

Libraries

This summer all our libraries took part in the Summer Reading Challenge, a national initiative aimed at children aged 4-11 organised by The Reading Agency. The challenge aims to help maintain reading skills over the long break by encouraging children to read six books over the six weeks and to make reading fun by offering incentives along the way. This year the theme was creativity and we saw nearly 300 events take place in local libraries including craft, music making and creative writing. Nearly 8,000 children took part and 629 children joined the library to participate. We had 149 young volunteers supporting the challenge, many as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award.

During September 30 of our libraries took part in 'Know Your Numbers Week' in partnership with Public Health. Over 6 million people in the UK are unaware that they are living with high blood pressure and the campaign encourages people to check theirs and take action if they need to. We had blood pressure monitors available in libraries during the week and many are now available to borrow or to use when people visit.

North Yorkshire Libraries are now part of a national library twinning scheme with libraries in the Ukraine. This was launched in September, with Knaresborough Library being twinned with Volodymyr Library, tying in with links that already exist between the two towns. The twinning schemes will allow the libraries to exchange skills, develop joint initiatives, connect audiences and celebrate UK and Ukrainian literature and culture. Libraries in Ukraine have rapidly adapted to wartime conditions – with a focus on supporting their communities' mental health, countering misinformation and providing practical help such as first aid training and rest stations. We hope the twinning scheme will support mutual exchange and learning, as well as providing moral support to library staff working in incredibly challenging conditions.

We have recently awarded the contract for our new Library Management System to Civica. Work is now going on to transfer data from our existing supplier so that a test system can be created ready for the rollout of training to staff and volunteers in the new year. Civica already supply library systems to many other public library authorities and our new system is set to go live in late March 2025.

Sports & Leisure

Selby Transfer to Active North Yorkshire

On 1 September the sport and leisure facilities in the Selby area including Selby and Tadcaster Leisure Centre, Selby Park, and Town Centre football pitches transferred into North Yorkshire Council, the first to use the Council's new Active North Yorkshire brand.

The transfer saw over 4000 active Learn to Swim and Health & Fitness members transfer, alongside thousands of casual users. Support was provided to enable users to download and start using the brand new Active North Yorkshire app and services have continued to be delivered at all sites. Targeted programmes for specific health condition and for people who may need more support to be active are continuing, with programmes delivered within the leisure centres and in the community. Of particular success is the Wellbeing walks programme which continues to develop, with 27 walk leaders, many of which are volunteers, and over 140 people participating in the walk programme during September.

Water Wellbeing

Four of our leisure centres – Northallerton, Bedale, Thirsk & Sowerby and Stokesley – have achieved the Water Wellbeing accreditation mark after significant changes were made to each facility. Water Wellbeing has been developed with the aim of transforming existing swimming pool assets into places for health, wellbeing and rehabilitation and to improve outcomes for people with long-term health conditions.

Alterations to each of the facilities has made them more accessible and inclusive for people with long-term health conditions. More than 60 colleagues undertook training - a key element of the Water Wellbeing compliance - which has given them a greater knowledge of disabilities and taught them how to offer support to customers. This provides more opportunities for people to take part in aquatics in a way that suits them. Adult swim provision at all four sites has been enhanced to provide greater opportunities for members of the local communities to get active.

Improved Swimming Access at Bedale Leisure Centre

Poolpod® which provides dignified, independent access to swimming pools has been installed at Bedale Leisure Centre. The Poolpod will significantly improve the swimming experience for anyone with limited mobility and for anyone who might find it more difficult to access the pool using a ladder or steps.

Scarborough Extreme Event – Saturday 5 October 2024.

The first Scarborough Extreme event was held across multiple locations in Scarborough on Saturday 5 October. Part of Scarborough Fair, Extreme aims to highlight and promote both wet and dry sports which provide opportunities for people to push themselves and encourage them to step outside their comfort zone. Numerous local clubs and providers attended, bringing with them a host of interactive activities. On-the-day feedback from the public and local clubs was incredibly positive, with a genuine appreciation of something 'different' being held in Scarborough. National Governing Bodies are keen to be involved in the bigger Extreme Event proposed for next year.

Let's Talk Active

This community engagement survey was live until 4 November and had over 2500 responses. The survey will inform the Leisure Investment Strategy and increase our understanding about what residents need from their local leisure facilities and how we can help more people to be active at all stages of life.

Falls Prevention

Falls prevention activities (in some areas called Strong and Steady) are being delivered in leisure centres and other community settings across the County and are designed to help people to become more active. Sessions focus on exercise to improve strength and balance, to help participants gain more stability and confidence when walking, improving the ability to undertake everyday tasks and reduce the risk of trips and falls.

UK Active Awards

The work of the Brimham's Active team in delivering inclusive and targeted work to support improved health and well being was recognised at the recent UK Active Awards, with the Brimham's team winning both the Health and Community Award and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Award. This is a fantastic achievement and testimony to the contribution of the health and well being programmes that support individuals and communities to be more physically active.

Venues & Attractions

Scarborough Spa

The venue has been acknowledged for its work to develop and promote the wedding offer at the Spa, recently winning the North of England Wedding Awards in the category of Yorkshire & Lincolnshire 'Town & City Venue'. The Spa fought off strong competition from 6 other shortlisted venues, reflecting the work to develop as a popular wedding venue.

In addition both the Spa and Whitby Pavilion have hosted a busy few months of events. The pavilion is now developing its Christmas and cinema programme and the Spa recently hosted the successful Rotary Conference and Engineering week which was attended by over 3,000 school children.

Events

In September and October we had the following events:

- Goldwings Light Parade
- Filey Kite Festival
- Filey Track Rod Rally
- Filey Food Festival
- Moonlight on the Lake
- Autumn Daze event in Peasholm Park

A busy Autumn/Winter is also planned including:

- Scarborough Sparkle
- Spring Food and Drink Festival – a new event at the Open Air Theatre for 2025.

Open Air Theatre

The Tipi has now been installed and the first event (Oktoberfest) was held on 11 and 12 October. Following on from last year's record-breaking sales numbers, three shows are on sale with one already sold out and the other two selling really well with nearly 20,000 tickets sold already! A number of other acts have been confirmed, with more announcements planned before Christmas.

Housing

The Council has received a judgement by the Regulator of Social Housing as we are not compliant with the new consumer standards expected of all social housing landlords.

This judgement gives the Council a C3 Grading. This means we are not compliant with the consumer standards but are self-aware, engaging with the regulator and have a robust plan of action to become compliant.

The judgement was very much expected and follows our self-referral to the Regulator earlier this year.

It is important to note that this is not an enforcement notice. No action is being taken against the Council and the Regulator has confidence in our approach going forward.

None of the three former stock holding Councils were compliant with the Regulatory Standards. Whilst there is much to do, the new consumer standards provide a positive opportunity to drive forward a range of improvements for our social housing tenants. Progress against our improvement plan is being monitored through the new Housing and Leisure Scrutiny Committee and we are grateful for the member input received to date.

Housing Renewal

The Healthy and Sustainable Homes team have successfully delivered energy efficiency measures (including insulation, solar PV and renewable heating systems) to over 200 homes spending in the region of £3.6m in the private sector as part of the current HUG scheme and are looking at further opportunities due to arise from the launch of the Warm Homes Fund.

Homelessness

The Council continues to see increased demand from those at risk of becoming homeless. As at the end of September there were 254 households in temporary accommodation, with 117 of these in B&B and high cost holiday let accommodation. This is an increase on the previous quarter with 663 homelessness applications taken.

Tackling and preventing homelessness is a complex issue and requires the support of a whole host of organisations. We have thus created a new North Yorkshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper partnership, representing a wide range of internal NYC services, external partners from statutory services, voluntary and community groups, support organisations and social landlords. Through this new partnership work is underway to develop a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This is an important piece of work as it includes a review of existing provision and a gap analysis to help inform future strategic planning.

Our plans to develop additional temporary accommodation for the homeless are progressing well. We are in the process of acquiring a shared accommodation property as well as 11 homes to be used for family accommodation in Scarborough. Further schemes are in the pipeline.

Neville House

This year we secured £224k in Brownfield Housing Funding administered by the York and North Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. These funds are being used to support the redevelopment of Neville House in Gargrave. This project aims to deliver affordable homes as well as supported housing. It will be one of the first housing projects that will benefit from Local Government Reorganisation bringing together Housing and Adult Social Care, combining skills and experience to achieve the best outcomes for our customers. A pre-planning consultation will be undertaken prior to any formal planning application being submitted. This is likely to be early in 2025.

National Energy Efficiency Awards 2024

North Yorkshire Council was named Local Authority of the Year at the National Energy Efficiency Awards 2024 held at Birmingham Hilton on 11 October. Over the last 12 months the Council has fully engrained energy efficiency measures into its repairs strategy. Over 1000 retrofit, condition and occupancy surveys have been carried out, along with several pilot projects to find the best energy efficiency measures package. This data was used to develop a retrofit project on North Yorkshire Council's worst performing stock. This formed the basis of the bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2.2, which was awarded giving the Council £1.7 million in funding. We are now mobilising the installation of these measures and using data gathered to enhance our bid for further funding on a larger scale.

COUNCILLOR SIMON MYERS