

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**26 February 2025**

## **STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Legal and Democratic Services**

Work is underway, through Scrutiny Board and the Area Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, to help ensure that the work of the committees is co-ordinated, lead committees identified, appropriate referrals between committees made and resources used efficiently. As the work of the Council becomes more complex, it is increasingly important that key issues, policies and practices are scrutinised both locally and at a county/strategic level.

The School Admissions Appeals Team is preparing for the bulk admissions appeals for primary and secondary school places, which will see around 350 appeals heard over the period April to July. The appeals are heard by an independent panel of volunteers, who are supported by the Appeals Team.

The new structure for Democratic Services at the Council was implemented just over a year ago (12 February 2024). The service works across seven sites in the county and supports over 200 committee meetings a year as well as a number of standing and time/task limited member working groups. The focus remains upon supporting members and officers, engaging the public in our committee meetings and decision/making processes and ensuring openness and transparency.

### **Communities**

#### **Community Anchor Organisations**

The 25 place-based organisations from across the county continue to work with the Localities and other service teams to progress a Community Anchor Model (CAO) for North Yorkshire. For the eight localities where a suitable CAO has not been identified, development work continues to explore the potential for a local voluntary sector organisation to become a CAO.

In November 2024, we invited applications for two 'Community Anchor Collectives' – one for each of our larger urban settlements of Harrogate and Scarborough towns. This was seeking single coordinating organisations on behalf of a 'collective' of locally empowered organisations who are proactive and who have a track record of anticipating and responding to the needs of their communities, work on finalising arrangements for each town is continuing with those organisations interested in being part of a collective.

#### **Grants**

The small grass roots 'Inspire Grants' scheme continues to attract significant interest, bringing the total investment to date this year to £106,355 supporting 111 projects.

In addition to the grant support, the voluntary and community sector can also access assistance 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 was launched in autumn 2024, and developmental work continues on this, ready for a start date on 1 April 2025.

#### **Community Partnerships**

The 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.

An update on Community Partnerships was included in the report taken to the Council Executive on 17 September where Members agreed that there was no longer the requirement for community partnerships to be informal partnerships. It was also agreed to open up the Community Partnerships programme to all Members who wish to bring forward the development of a partnership in their area to get in touch with Area Managers/Locality Leads from the Communities team.

## **Digital Inclusion**

The NYC Digital Leads Strategic Group continues to collaborate across services steering innovation and developing an internal network of 'digital champions'.

The 2024/25 UK Shared Prosperity Funded investment of £586,000 into Digital Inclusion programmes across North Yorkshire managed by the Localities Team is now fully delivered with an aligned wrap-around training package, supporting the successful programme partners. This has already surpassed all targets with 234 new digital champions supported through 41 grant awards across voluntary and health and care sectors; and the creation of nearly 100 new access points – or hubs - across the county. Work is now underway to review learning and explore opportunities to build on this beyond the SPF funded programme.

Reboot North Yorkshire (the Council digital devices re-use scheme) has provided 124 pieces of equipment to help people get connected including 114 laptops in Quarter 3, supporting individuals to improve social connectedness or to promote access to training and/or continue their education.

## **Financial Inclusion**

### *Local Food Support*

Work continues to further develop the findings of the collaborative food insecurity insight study undertaken in conjunction with City of York Council - four online Community of Practice sessions have taken place with local free or low-cost food providers, and a number of dedicated partner conversations continue in relation to this work, including with colleagues in Public Health as they develop the North Yorkshire Food Strategy. The team also coordinated the Household Support Fund 6 Food Support Grants scheme, awarding 27 grants to free or low-cost community food providers across the county to support their winter provision.

### *Cost of Living Communications Campaign*

Led by the Localities Team in conjunction with Communications, and Customer, Revenues and Benefits, NYC launched the annual Cost-of-Living Communications campaign in November 2023. This has encompassed the review and reconfiguration of the cost-of-living web page ([www.northyorks.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/costofliving)), and a six month rolling campaign linking to key themes that people are concerned about including money and debt, staying warm, food, and housing and transport. The launch of the campaign had a particular focus on Winter Fuel and Pension Credit uptake, ensuring use of all channels and networks to support the national Pension Credit campaign messaging, but also raising awareness of eligibility/applying for pension credit, and where people can get support, if needed, in order to apply.

For North Yorkshire residents who are less confident with technology, we have produced a printed leaflet and poster which sets out alternative options to seek out help and support available. Leaflets have been distributed to a wide range of outlets, including over 100 community venues.

## **Community Resilience**

In December 2024, Kirkbymoorside and the surrounding villages experienced local flooding events and significant power outages across a number of sites, as a result of Storm Darragh. The Communities Team worked in partnership with the Resilience and Emergencies Team, Kirkbymoorside Town Council, and a local Veterans Group to provide a Local Assistance Centre, and community-based support. The

Communities Team also led the development and delivery of the Storm Darragh Recovery Assistance Fund in conjunction with Two Ridings Community Foundation.

## **PARISH LIAISON, LOCAL DEVOLUTION & COMMUNITY RIGHTS**

### **Parish Liaison/Consultation**

The Parish Liaison drop-in and formal in person meetings have taken place in Harrogate and Knaresborough Area, Richmond Area, Scarborough and Whitby Area and Selby and Ainsty Area with representation from around 100 Parish Councils and presentations from Localities, Highways and Planning teams. Meetings for the two remaining Area Committee areas will be completed in March after which time, there will be a review of format and content, and a regular programme of further meetings will be organised, to commence in the summer.

The representative group of Parish/Town/City Councils and Parish Meetings that has been established (Parish Consultation Panel) provides regular informal dialogue with the Parish Sector. This panel has been consulted monthly on a range of issues with the latest being content and format for a dedicated Parish Council web site as well as broader Parish Liaison activities. A regular, coordinated update to all Parish Council commenced in August and will continue monthly, and the single Parish Liaison contact e-mail address for Parish Liaison and Democratic Services introduced in August has been extremely successful with over 400 emails received to date by the Parish Team.

### **Parish Charter**

Work has progressed on the commitment to review the Parish Charter and a meeting of the working group took place in November 2024, focussing on embedding the commitments in the Charter within NYC and the establishment of baseline information for performance and service monitoring.

### **Local Devolution**

The work to progress local devolution has focused on the agreed double devolution pilot proposals. Following more detailed operational discussions between services and Parishes, revised and in some cases reduced proposals are emerging, which are at varying levels of development. A review of the approved Expressions of Interest by the Assistant Chief Executive – Local Engagement will be undertaken in February 2025 with a further report to the Executive thereafter.

### **Community Rights**

Transitional arrangements to fulfil the Council's statutory responsibilities for community rights were put in place from April 2023. Coordinated support for community rights is now in place, and work has commenced to develop new structures, policies, procedures and changes to delegation.

## **MIGRANT PROGRAMMES**

### **Resettlement**

As of 31 December 2024, North Yorkshire has resettled 445 persons (87 households) under the Afghan resettlement schemes (since August 2021).

The United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme 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.

The Ministry of Defence transitional facility at Catterick Garrison, to house Afghan families after arrival in the UK, prior to settled accommodation being identified for them, remains in place, and is expected to continue until at least May 2025. Up to 44 families could be accommodated at any one time, before moving on to other parts of the UK after a short period of time.

## **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 is provided by Migrant Help, a Home Office contracted provider via a telephone helpline.

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.

## **Homes for Ukraine**

Between 1 October and 31 December 2024 there were 44 new arrivals through the Homes for Ukraine programme. The number of individual Ukrainians arriving in North Yorkshire, since March 2022 (as their first point of arrival), through the HFU visa route is 1,559.

New visas are now granted for an 18-month period, whereas earlier arrivals were granted three years. The government has now announced an 18-month Ukraine Permission Extension, which will extend the initial visa term. Ukrainians can apply for this extension prior to their existing visa expiring and it is possible for guests to remain living with sponsors during this time.

## **Swift**

During the last quarter, in partnership with a range of voluntary sector organisations, work has continued around the Swift initiative, which aims to welcome and empower migrant communities across North Yorkshire. Lottery funding has now been secured and place-based partnerships are underway in Scarborough, Selby, and Harrogate/Knaresborough, in preparation for a launch next financial year.

## **Councillor Locality Budgets**

The tenth year of the scheme started on 13 May 2024 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations was 31 January 2025 (although this has now been extended to 31 March 2025). 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 739 recommendations were submitted, amounting to £874,830 (97.20%) of this year's budget. A report on the expenditure and operation of Locality Budgets in the 2024/25 financial year will be presented to Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2025.

## **Customer**

Customer service have seen a decrease in demand in Quarter 3 by 17.3% compared to Quarter 2. This was expected given that Quarter 3 is always the quietest quarter within customer services, this is a trend seen not only last year but also in the legacy areas. This decline in demand pattern every Quarter 3 is due to the Christmas period falling within this quarter and no seasonal planned large-scale communications typically scheduled to be issued in this quarter other than business as usual communications from Revenues.

The top five demands for the customer service function in Quarter 3 by service area are:

- Social Care
- Revenues
- Bins, Recycling and Waste
- Housing and Homelessness
- Roads, Parking and Travel

## Performance

The telephone calls answered in 4 mins (KPI) in Quarter 3 2024/25 has seen an improvement in telephone performance for all three months compared to Quarter 3 2023/24 in the front-line teams.

Month	Q3 2024/25 % of calls answered in 4 minutes	Q3 2023/24 % of calls answered in 4 minutes	% difference in 2024/25 to 2023/24
October	87.42%	84.18%	+ 3.24%
November	91.78%	87.71%	+ 4.07%
December	90.52%	88.07%	+ 2.45%

Work that customer service have supported in Quarter 3:

The service has supported the elections team in delivering their annual canvass by handling phone calls at the first point of contact. In Quarter 3, the Customer Services Team received 1,455 calls for elections and assisted 149 customers with election-related inquiries.

In Quarter 3, Customer Services supported customers with initial inquiries regarding the Household Support Fund (HSF) Phase 6. The service handled 444 calls related to the HSF during this period. This number is expected to increase next quarter as Phase 6 of the scheme commences on 8 January 2025 and concludes on 13 February 2025. This initiative will involve collaborative efforts with the Welfare and Benefits service. In Quarter 3, the Customer Services Team continued to assist Revenues with their reminder cycles. This quarter included issuing revenue reminders, revenue summons, and a revenue soft reminder, as well as additional letters to residents of second homes informing them of a premium on their council tax bill for the next financial year. The Customer Services Teams in the former localities of Craven, Hambleton, Richmondshire, and Selby handled these calls at the first point of contact, resulting in an increase in contact centre calls for revenues in Quarter 3.

To enhance our out-of-hours customer access, we have collaborated with key services to streamline our approach, creating a single point of contact. In Quarter 3, this resulted in Customer Services handling calls for flooding/sandbags and homelessness through the 0300 number. During this period, advisors received 79 homelessness calls and 170 flooding calls. The service also went live, taking out-of-hours housing repair calls, which went live on 27 January 2025. This is in addition to the social care out-of-hours calls managed by the same advisors.

In addition, over the weekend of the 7-8 December 2024 additional staff from frontline services were asked to help cover the out of hours phones on Sunday for help with flooding and sandbag calls because of Storm Darragh. This was a great example of collaboration across the customer service centre in supporting each other to deliver help to residents.

## Customer Excellence

The Council's Customer Experience Programme aims to enhance the approach to customer experience across the Council. This programme, along with the new customer experience strategy, seeks to foster a culture of exceptional customer excellence throughout the Council, with a focus on improving the quality of customer interactions and overall service standards.

Our vision is to be "an organisation that places the customer at the heart of everything we do to continuously improve their experience". It is essential that the responsibility for customer satisfaction is shared across the entire Council, not just within Customer Service Teams.

The programme has initiated cross-service outcome working groups that concentrate on our customer-first culture, customer insight (data and customer feedback), service design to meet customer needs, enhancing our digital and technological capabilities, and continuous improvement. These efforts aim to ensure that customer journeys are easy, accessible, consistent, responsive, respectful and well-informed.

**HSF** in Quarter 3, North Yorkshire Council commenced the sixth phase of the HSF, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. This program aims to support those most in need with rising living costs between 1 October and 31 March 2025.

Following the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework, 19,000 households across North Yorkshire have been identified to receive a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher. This includes eligible families, pensioners, and working-age adult households. The direct award opened on 8 January, with the last date to redeem vouchers being 13 February 2025.

Additionally, supplementary funding was awarded to the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF), the HSF Energy Support Scheme, the 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 established to support those who may have missed out on assistance due to circumstances beyond their control.

**NYLAF** in Quarter 3 of 2024/25, 3,299 applications were received with a 90% approval rate. A total of £372,105.93 was spent, with 43% allocated to food and energy vouchers, and 57% to standard awards. Consistent with previous years, the highest levels of demand were in Scarborough (38%), followed by Harrogate (25%), and the lowest in Craven (4%).

### **Building Control**

The first Building Safety Regulator building control Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data collection will take place in April for the first quarter of 2025. The KPIs amount to approximately 35 individual measures covering the six separate areas of the Building Control function, Enforcement and Interventions, Risk Management, Competence (expertise and knowledge), Systems and Controls and Complaints handling and appeals. This is a national requirement and applies to both Local Authority Building Control Departments as well as Registered Building Control Approvers (private section). The Building Control service is prepared for this and has arranged updates to their Uniform systems to allow such data to be extracted from the database system.

### **Development Management and Enforcement**

From 1 April until the end of December 2024 the service dealt with the following applications:

- 126 major
- 1,169 minor
- 2,339 other
- 14 County Matter

In addition, we have also dealt with a considerable number of other types of applications including prior approvals, screening options scoping reports, trees, hedgerows, discharge of conditions, telecommunications, etc.

Performance across all application types exceeds statutory targets.

Between 1 April and the end of December 2024 Constituency Area Planning and Strategic Committees have now met 45 times.

In terms of Planning Enforcement from 1 April to the end of December 2024, we have closed approximately 1,117 cases.

### **Planning Operations Team**

Work is well underway to introduce a single planning system (OneUniform) across the whole of North Yorkshire. This will be introduced in phases from April until the back end of the year. In the meantime, we have introduced Windows 11 to priority users. Although this doesn't allow comprehensive coverage

for all to access the existing multiple systems, it has allowed us some flexibility to share resources in a more meaningful way and start to stand up teams aligned to the restructure.

COUNCILLOR HEATHER PHILLIPS