

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

26 February 2025

STATEMENT OF CLLR CARL LES

Budget

After a long day`s debating on Friday 14th February, we were able to set a balanced and lawful budget, and also approve the Council Plan. I think this proved that it was right to decouple these two items from the rest of business and this will be the model in the calendar for future years.

The budget is not without its challenges, notably the sudden withdrawal of rural services support grant. We recognise the government`s right to make fiscal decisions, which may be unpopular, but these must be made on sound reasoning. In this case we don`t think they are hence the consideration of a judicial review. So far we have sent the protocol letter before action, and at the time of writing I am not aware of any response as yet. It is ironic that it was a Labour government that introduced the “rural proofing” of policies. This has not been repealed, perhaps just quietly dropped. Rurality and deprivation should not be in competition. Both are valid.

Spending Review and Fairer Funding Review

More worrying is the impending Spending Review if the government`s rhetoric of affluent areas, lack of evidence of rural costs, unnecessary reserves etc continues to influence fiscal planning. Increasingly we should be concerned that new priorities, however understandable such as increased defence spending, will impact on the other priorities that remain. Local government funding is often the orphan.

We have participated in the County Council Network`s submission as part of the call for evidence. The CCN evidence has weight as the councils that make up the cross party network represent over half the population of England.

We have also contributed to the CCN`s submission to the Fairer Funding Review, first promised some time ago by the Conservative government but understandably blown off course by firstly Covid then the invasion of Ukraine.

I have arranged for these submissions to be circulated to all Members.

Battery Storage and other green issues

I think we all agree on both energy security and food security. These should be complementary wherever possible. I have been approached by a number of residents of our county and some Members too for more information. I think at present count there are more than 22 live or completed planning applications in train. I have asked the Chief Executive to facilitate an all-Member seminar about the topic so we can all – not just planning committee members who will have to determine some of these – so we can all better understand the opportunities, the need for certain locations to be necessary for grid connections, the size and scale of projects, the benefits and the risks involved in the technology. And “the new planning arrangements designed to sweep away archaic constraints” so we can better inform our constituents.

New Year`s Honours

The Chairman mentioned this in her remarks last Friday, but 2 colleagues should be congratulated on receiving honours in the New Year`s Honours List. Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director received a knighthood, and Wendy Nichols, having already received an OBE for political services, was elevated to the House of Lords. She will take the title Baroness Nichols of Selby in the County of North Yorkshire, and will be able to continue her political activity – as long as the Lords exists.

COUNCILLOR CARL LES