

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**12 November 2025**

## **STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, ARTS & HOUSING**

### **CULTURE**

Transition of Scarborough Art Gallery, Rotunda Museum and Woodend Creative completed on 1 July and a new exhibition and activity programme is underway, which included a full summer holiday of hands-on activities for children and families, and the launch of Christopher P. Wood's "Red Riding and The Brothers Grimm" exhibition from September 2025.

The Archives and Records service offer was successful in achieving reaccreditation this July, a UK-wide benchmark that recognises archive services which meet national standards for managing and providing access to their collections.

The Creative & Cultural Communities Team have continued to deliver the hugely successful Now Then! Project in Selby, Sherburn and Tadcaster throughout summer, offering a number of creative and cultural sector development events and opportunities alongside three free community-led arts festivals – one in each locality.

Across other cultural venues we have seen fantastic public engagement with our events and exhibitions programmes – at Mercer Gallery Liz West's "H.A.P.P.Y" exhibition ran until October, featuring immersive light and colour installations. This made way for "Vision & Labour: Making Comics" in collaboration with Avery Hill Publishing and the Thought Bubble Comic Art Festival.

In Skipton, "Shelfies" exhibition opened in September - the Yorkshire-based collective explores the creative potential of everyday objects.

The venue also recently hosted the UK's first International Puppetry Symposium, with press coverage describing it as a landmark event for sector development, noting its funding by Arts Council England and leadership by North Yorkshire Council.

With funding sourced from the Arts Council England/Victoria & Albert Purchase Grant and the Art Fund, Craven Museum has recently acquired a rare bronze age gold lunula, found by a metal detectorist in a stream near Grassington in 2023. The lunula is now the centre piece of the museum's Bronze Age collection.

### **LIBRARIES**

A major focus for Libraries this quarter has been the Summer Reading Challenge, the national initiative aimed at children aged 4-11.

This year's theme of "Story Garden: adventures in nature and the great outdoors" was an opportunity to work with internal and external partners such as the National Parks and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. Active North Yorkshire provided free family swim vouchers as an incentive to the children taking part in the challenge. A children's nature photography competition was held, which resulted in six new library card designs featuring the flora and fauna of North Yorkshire.

Almost 8,500 children took part in the challenge, an increase on last year, and over 2,000 children joined the library, borrowing over 138,000 books. We recruited 129 young volunteers aged 12-24 to help deliver the challenge across 23 libraries.

July saw the launch of the powerful Ukrainian photographic exhibition in Northallerton. The display details Ukraine before and during the war and shows how refugees from the country

have adapted to their new lives in North Yorkshire. The touring exhibition will visit Catterick, Ripon, Stokesley, Skipton and Knaresborough libraries.

Work is continuing to fit out the new Mobile Library with delivery expected in the next few weeks. An extended mobile library service will start in the new year, with around 20 new stops added around the county. The team are busy liaising with parish councils to promote the service and recruiting volunteers to offer digital support with nine new IT buddies recruited so far.

## **Scarborough Fair**

Scarborough Fair saw a successful and varied programme over the summer season, which saw over 260 events in 74 locations across 5 festivals over 3 months. The Autumn/Winter season for 2025 has now launched with a further 100 events and installations. This included the new Scarborough Streets Autumn Edition in October, supported by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority's Vibrant & Sustainable High Streets Fund. The Autumn/Winter Edition of Scarborough Art runs from 10 October-21 December and a Winter Fringe between 4-7 December.

The third edition of Scarborough Lights will take place from 14 November- 21 December, with headline events including a drone display at Scarborough Castle, celebrating the start of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Scarborough as the UK's first seaside resort town. The festival will also feature 'Scarborough Histories & Mysteries', a joint exhibition by Animated Objects, Photo Scarborough and Dromer, the creators of Grue, which has just featured at this year's Bradford City of Culture celebrations.

As the Scarborough Fair comes to the end of its initial period of funding in March, work is underway to secure the long-term future viability of the festival.

## **VENUES & ATTRACTIONS**

Both Scarborough Spa and Whitby Pavilion have delivered a wide variety of busy and well-received shows and events including Northern Soul, Whitby Steampunk Weekend, Scarborough STEM Week, Comedy Store and Vernon Kay. Scarborough Spa has been listed as a finalist in the Wedding Industry Awards and Yorkshire Wedding Awards.

Four incredible acts have been announced at the Open-Air Theatre for 2026 so far, with Teddy Swims already selling out two nights. To date the confirmed line-up includes David Gray, Teddy Swims, Billy Ocean with special guest Marti Pellow and Pete Tong's Ibiza Classics.

Scarborough Sparkle will return again on 28-30 November, with the lantern parade confirmed for 28 November. The popular Moonlight on the Lake returned to Peasholm Park on 24–25 October and was well received.

## **ACTIVE NORTH YORKSHIRE**

### **Richmond Swimming Pool**

Following approval by the Executive to carry out essential building works to get the swimming pool re-opened at Richmond, officers are working to finalise the programme of works and confirm timescales, with ongoing liaison and communication with customers and local residents.

## **HOUSING**

### **Housing Regulator**

Earlier this year myself and the Chief Executive met with representatives from the Regulator of Social Housing. It was very interesting to hear from them about their approach to regulation and also reassuring to hear their feedback on some of the positive changes we are making on our journey towards compliance with the new consumer standards for social housing.

They understand the scale of the challenge faced by the Council and provided some very positive feedback in recognition of the changes that have been introduced to date, including the work undertaken to improve our governance arrangements, the emphasis we are placing on compliance with health and safety requirements, our improved understanding of data on the stock we manage and the new arrangements and structure we have put in place around tenant involvement.

Whilst there is still much to do, feedback on the changes made to date and the pace of those changes was very welcome.

Following my previous update the Housing Management team have been preparing a new model introductory and secure tenancy agreement for NYC and will be consulting with our tenants on the proposed amendments in the coming weeks. In addition, they will also be consulting on proposed changes to our Tenancy Policy as we are seeking to harmonise our approach to rent collection across the three former locality areas.

Our Tenancy Involvement team have been busy across our communities through a series of community action days in which we aim to encourage all stakeholders to come together and help to improve a particular area. In addition, they have been working with our tenants through a range of events to ensure that their voice continues to be heard in shaping our services, including some joint visits with members from the Overview & Scrutiny group who are currently reviewing the grounds maintenance service.

### **Housing Renewal**

We continue to deliver key initiatives across North Yorkshire. The Warm Homes Local Grant programme is progressing well, with retrofit surveys complete and installations due to begin shortly. A marketing campaign is planned for the new year to boost participation in this three-year scheme.

In preparation for the Renters Rights Act, we are upskilling staff - three officers have started Environmental Health Degree apprenticeships, and others are undertaking the Housing Regulation University Diploma.

To strengthen our Lifeline service, we've secured a new emergency call handling contract with Tunstall, enhancing resilience and continuity. We're also accelerating the digital rollout of Lifeline equipment ahead of the national analogue switch-off.

For Council homes, at the beginning of this month there were 343 'void' properties in total undergoing improvement and repair works, and 153 of these were in the Selby area. Our overall void rate is around 4% of our total holding, with a target to reduce that to 2% of homes either being improved or repaired at any given time.

Of the 'voids' in the Selby area, 126 require significant work in order to be of a lettable standard, which is almost the same as those in Richmondshire and the Harrogate area combined.

We are committed to turning this situation around. A key priority for us is to improve the safety and quality of Council homes and provide a lasting legacy for future generations of tenants. Our Housing Revenue Account Business Plan commits us to invest over £500 million over the next 30 years to improve the quality of the Council's housing stock and includes around £40 million in funding to improve energy efficiency through the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Programme and through substantial match funding from our own resources. This programme, being delivered over the next 3 years in partnership with Align Property Services, aims to improve the energy efficiency of Council homes going forward, ensuring that they met future legal requirements in terms of their Energy Performance Ratings. There is no point in letting properties at Social rent if residents can't afford to heat them.

In addition to those homes requiring high levels of capital works to bring them up to decent homes standard, we are also committed to uplifting the standard of all homes when they are relet more generally. Earlier this year the Council introduced its new lettable standard which is very much aimed at improving the quality of homes allocated to tenants, including the removal of all asbestos in homes and ensuring that homes are decorated to a minimum standard before keys are handed over.

We are closely monitoring the impact of these improvements. We accept that in the short to medium term the emphasis we are placing on the need to uplift the stock shall inevitably mean slower turnover times when homes become vacant, however we are also putting in place new arrangements to mitigate the impact of this, including the appointment of additional contractors to undertake the extra works needed. To date an additional seven contractors have been appointed along with plans developed to reduce the backlog of voids. We are also taking forward options to bolster the capacity of our own in-house teams to support this work and through our scrutiny arrangements, shall be monitoring the impact of these changes on void numbers overall and anticipate a gradual reduction in numbers over the next 12 months.

### **Community Led Housing, Rural Housing and Affordable Housing Fund**

The Housing team is working with community groups and housing associations to bring forward affordable housing schemes. The funds are open for applications and we are looking forward to help unlock delivery of sites and ensure we can help increase overall delivery of affordable homes. The funds are made possible through the Second Homes Council Tax framework. In August 2025 we also agreed to provide funding of £840,000 to Lealholm Community Land Trust, ensuring that the development for 12 affordable rented homes can progress. It is exciting to see this scheme progressing which has received strong community support and we are grateful for the dedication shown by all involved.

### **Homelessness**

Homelessness and housing advice approaches remain at a similar level to the same period last year, with 1,351 households seeking advice and assistance. Of these, 644 households have made a formal homelessness application. Among the 707 households who received housing advice, many were supported before reaching the point of homelessness. This early intervention often involves signposting to appropriate support to save the current accommodation or offering alternative housing options, enabling planned moves that benefit the customer, their housing provider and local authority resources.

Last month saw an increase in the number of households residing within emergency temporary accommodation, following a gradual decline over the last six months. A plan is in place to look at all aspects to reduce this, including around the use of our general temporary accommodation stock and the processes to reduce the barriers for people to move on.

We have obtained an additional four units of NYC temporary accommodation in Scarborough for families, improving the offer so families are not required to enter emergency placements and, if so, they are for short periods.

In addition to our usual partnership working, NYC are increasing collaboration with the voluntary, community and faith sectors in addition to our partners in the combined authority and city of York council, to improve the offer available to rough sleepers in the county.

COUNCILLOR SIMON MYERS