

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

18 MARCH 2026

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, ARTS & HOUSING

CULTURE

We are currently completing Year 1 of our Creative Health training programme in Skipton/ Ripon/Harrogate/Knaresborough - a collaboration between Culture, Public Health and Localities, and delivered in partnership with Pioneer Projects. Year 2 will focus on Selby and Scarborough. The recently opened 'Belonging' Creative Health exhibition at Skipton Town Hall has been well received with excellent feedback and engagement. It includes content generated by participants of a social prescribing project funded through BD25 City of Culture, with the Council's Head of Culture and Archives and Pioneer Projects invited to speak at the Bradford Creative Health Conference on the North Yorkshire approach.

The new streamlined retail platform aimed at increasing income was trialled for the first time to facilitate pre-show online sales at Skipton Town Hall, significantly reducing queues, enhancing customer satisfaction and driving additional secondary spend. Online sales in December 2025 increased by 3,000% compared to December 2024.

The Vision & Labour Satellite exhibition that was developed from the Mercer Harrogate and toured to Northallerton library for December, is estimated to have reached around 2000 people – this has increased the potential audience reach from the main Mercer Art Gallery exhibition by 37%.

The exhibition 'Of Land & Sea' opened at Scarborough Art Gallery at the end of February; visitors are invited to pause, reflect and recharge as they discover artworks from Scarborough's collections that explore the shifting boundaries between coast and land. The exhibition features historic maritime objects on loan from Scarborough's Maritime Heritage Centre.

The second year of Selby Light launched on 27 February with a spectacular group of installations at Selby Abbey featuring the new works *Homeward* by Imitating the Dog, *Through the Liquid Crystal Display* by Jazmin Morris and new lightworks by students from Selby College. Selby Light has brought partners and communities together to create an ambitious cultural programme that brings world-class, inclusive and accessible arts, all completely free to audiences and participants, with core priorities including co-creation and collaboration, equity, diversity and inclusion across the programme, and a sustainable and ecologically responsive approach, and is a wonderful example of the Now Then! Programme in action, incorporating local residents and partner organisations forming part of the artist selection panel, to a wonderful group of residents working with the artists to create the stories of *Homeward*, which quite literally shines a light on Selby people and their voices. Now Then! Is a Place Partnership project funded by Arts Council England, North Yorkshire Council and the UK shared prosperity fund.

The UK Town of Culture competition has generated significant interest locally. The Council is currently supporting the following towns as they develop their expressions of interest, with discussions also taking place with a number of other towns who are considering the opportunity:

- Scarborough, Selby, Harrogate, Richmond, Malton & Norton, Whitby, Settle and Knaresborough

LIBRARIES

Libraries play a key role in digital inclusion, highlighted during Get Online Week in October 2025. Working with the national digital inclusion organisation, the Good Things Foundation, 76 library events were held attended by 471 people, including surgeries with IT Buddies, sessions on family history resources and mastering your mobile phone, coffee and digital conversation, STEM workshops for families and adult coding sessions. Twenty-two libraries joined our very first “Appy Day”, a day dedicated to actively promoting the Library app, supporting customers to download and use the tool.

In November, Libraries participated in Self-Care Week, promoting health messages, offering resources and organizing activities to help people take better care of themselves. Over 700 people attended 84 events in our libraries during the week. Libraries continue to host and promote many regular groups including breastfeeding support, knit and natter sessions, stay and play groups, reading groups, craft sessions, dementia cafés and chess groups to support health and wellbeing.

In a National Lottery Heritage Fund project, we worked with Oxygen Arts to bring to life the untold stories of Britain’s black ballet dancers in a touring exhibition: Into the Light: Pioneers of Black British Ballet. The exhibition brought together archive photography, film, newspaper articles and posters, and was held in Scarborough Library during November. As part of this project 10 libraries across the county welcomed over 350 primary school children through their doors to take part in creative writing workshops and interactive events.

As part of our commitment to the National Year of Reading 2026, a series of library events and activities are being planned to support reading for pleasure, with an emphasis on under-fives, disadvantaged families and boys aged 10-16: the target audiences that have been identified by the Department of Education, National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency, who are national partners.

VENUES & ATTRACTIONS

Improvement works at the Promenade Lounge (Scarborough Spa) are scheduled for completion in March. Marketing activity promoting the space as an attractive indoor and winter wedding venue is already underway, resulting in good interest and a number of confirmed bookings.

The Scarborough Open Air Theatre has now announced its 28th show for the 2026 season, with Alanis Morissette performing on 5 July 2026 completing this season’s lineup. Ticket sales for the upcoming season have already surpassed all previous annual records for the venue. In addition, the Scarborough Food & Drink Festival will return to the Open Air Theatre on 11–12 April 2026, ahead of the stage build taking place in May in preparation for the new season.

ACTIVE NORTH YORKSHIRE

Following approval in February 2026, a single membership and pricing strategy will be implemented in September, with some minor changes coming into effect from April. A communication plan is in place to support the implementation programme.

A programme of work is currently being developed for the delivery of £36m of leisure investment focused on transforming facilities in Pickering, Selby, Skipton, and Whitby into modern health and wellbeing hubs with improved pools, gyms, and studio spaces. Alongside the leisure investment strategy, £3m will also be invested in new gym equipment across 12 hubs and this is currently going through the early stages of procurement.

The circa. £1m investment to repair and reopen both swimming pools at Richmond is in progress and it is expected that the pool will re-open early in Autumn. In November 2025, Harrogate Leisure and Wellbeing Centre proudly won National Group Exercise Provider of the Year at the National Fitness Awards. This achievement is a testament to the dedication of our entire Group Exercise Team, whose passion, innovation and community focus continue to make a real impact. It's fantastic to see the team recognised nationally for the work they put into delivering the very best experience for every customer.

The Healthy You service has completed its first year of delivery. A total of 1934 adult referrals have been received to date. The service has some excellent examples of positive change for individual participants, however there is more work to do to increase referrals across the whole of the County and increase the understanding of the service by key partners to increase the referral levels for Children and Young People.

HOUSING

Landlord Services – the Housing Standards' rolling programme of stock condition surveys, scheduled for completion in September 2026, is progressing well. As of the end of January, onsite surveys have been completed for more than 5,000 homes. We are now validating and analysing the data to inform future capital work programmes.

The surveys are identifying a significant number of routine repairs that have not been reported by tenants. Addressing these issues is essential to prevent further deterioration and return properties to lettable standard. This has contributed to a growing repairs backlog. A draft strategy outlining our approach to managing and reducing this backlog was presented to the February Housing Improvement Board.

Similarly, our Tenant Census is also making good progress with over 2,220 responses received to date. The information we are gathering from our tenants will help to ensure that our services are inclusive, accessible and meet their needs.

Enforcement efforts continue to target the highest-risk private sector housing case. Preparations for the Renters' Rights Act are well underway, including updates to enforcement and civil penalty policies scheduled for decision in May 2026, as well as extensive staff training and increases to team capacity.

Progress has continued in the Housing Improvement Agency to reduce the backlog of Disabled Facility Grant cases with added staffing resources. The Healthy and Sustainable Homes team is on track to achieve its year-end target of installing energy efficiency measures in approx. 54 households. Marketing initiatives have now commenced to support Year 2 delivery, and new energy advisors have been hired to provide post-installation assistance to residents across all tenures. Lifeline transformation and the digitalisation of 2,400 households to prepare for the January 2027 cut-off date are also advancing.

We have continued adding new homes to the Housing Revenue Account through acquisitions both new-built and second-hand properties and are on track to have delivered 70 new homes by the end of March 2026. We delivered a further 12 homes to be used for temporary accommodation.

We have awarded our first grants from the Community Led Housing Fund, awarding £94,835 to Craven Community Land Trust to support the purchasing of two affordable homes in Giggleswick. With further smaller grants provided to community groups to progress feasibility studies, which should lead to applications for future development funding in due course.

We also awarded grants from the Affordable Housing Delivery Fund and Rural Housing Delivery Fund - £435,000 awarded to deliver 15 affordable homes for the Hunmanby scheme and £440,000 for 11 affordable homes in Shipton by Beningbrough. Both went to Broadacres Housing Association and all homes will be rented at a social rent.

COUNCILLOR SIMON MYERS