

# North Yorkshire Council

## Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16<sup>th</sup> March 2026

### Update on Transformation Portfolio

Report of the Corporate Director for Resources

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To update the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the transformation activity within the council, including an update on recent innovation activities and a detailed update on the Revenues & Benefits service and systems convergence.

#### 2. SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Connecting Transformation to Frontline Service Delivery - The council's transformation portfolio is fundamentally about improving the way services are delivered to residents, communities, and businesses across North Yorkshire. While the terminology and programmes may be new to some, the purpose is clear: to make services more accessible, efficient, and responsive - building on the deep expertise and commitment of frontline teams. This update is designed to give committee members a high-level overview of how transformation efforts are supporting and enhancing the delivery of services ensuring that the council remains fit for the future and continues to empower those who serve our communities every day.
- 2.2. The Transformation Portfolio of activity continues to progress. Key work includes improving customer experience through a new cloud-based telephony system and developing a Customer Platform to support the many ways that customers contact the council, The Way We Will Work programme is refreshing its vision to boost productivity and modernise working practices. To deliver the Council's Target Operating Model, finance, data and technology foundations are being strengthened through system consolidation, a new data platform, and the 'One Tech' programme. Service specific progress includes developments in sport and active wellbeing, digital improvements in waste services, updates to the SEND programme in line with national reforms, and ongoing work to strengthen housing services.
- 2.3. The council is developing a clearer, faster innovation process to test new ideas—working closely with the technology team on early proof of concept projects that explore how tools like AI and automation could improve services and deliver efficiencies. Early progress includes being shortlisted for an iNetwork Innovation Award for our work on AI Assistant bots that help staff access complex information across areas such as policy, housing, legal services, HR and emergency planning. The team is also testing and exploring wider innovations including automated meeting writeups, translation tools and AI supported training materials, with future reports to provide updates as this work expands.
- 2.4. Following a request from elected members a more detailed update on the Revenues and Benefits service and system convergence is included and sets out both the scale of the challenge and the benefits derived for both customers and the council through the consolidation of multiple systems.

### **3.0 Transformation Portfolio Update**

3.1. Work in the portfolio is spread across three priority Cross-Cutting themes, Delivering the Target Operating Model and Service Specific programmes of work. The paragraphs below set out an update on some of the progress since the last report to the Committee.

#### 3.2. Cross Cutting Themes

As set out in the Transformation Strategy, presented at the December Committee meeting, the cross-cutting themes will deliver major organisational-wide change that will help move the council towards its vision to be 'a forward looking, digitally enabled council that delivers seamless, accessible and efficient services, empowering residents, communities and business to thrive. To ensure services are high-performing, efficient, effective, and trusted.'

#### 3.3. Customer

The focus of the Customer theme is putting residents, communities, and businesses at the heart of modern service design, with all services fully inclusive and accessible. They will be digital by design, intuitive, automated where possible, and with additional support for those who need it.

3.4 This work includes a wide array of activities that will come together to deliver the council's vision. Current activity is focussed on a cloud-based telephony and contact routing solution. It manages how customer phone calls enter the organisation and how they are handled and routed to the right teams.

3.5 At go-live, this will:

- Provide a modern, resilient and scalable way of handling customer phone calls
- Route calls based on customer choices and staff skills, helping customers reach the right service more quickly
- Enable call recording for quality, training and compliance
- Provide real-time and historical management information, including call volumes, waiting times, answer rates and abandoned calls

3.6 This gives the Council a stronger, more consistent foundation for managing customer demand by phone and improves visibility of performance. It is planned that this first part of the work will go-live later this month.

3.7 The next part of this programme will be on the system that manages the work behind the contact. The Customer Platform is the system that manages customer enquiries once contact has been made. It acts as the system of record for customer interactions, capturing cases, tracking progress, and supporting consistent handling across services.

3.8 Looking ahead – seamless customer contact experience

Although the initial focus is on phone calls, the Customer Platform will eventually support a more integrated approach, bringing together contact from phone, online forms, web chat and other channels into one place to create a more seamless customer experience.

3.9 Migration of services onto the Customer Platform will take place over the coming years, enabling more services to be connected over time and supporting continuous improvement in the customer experience, helping us deliver our customer experience ambition.

#### 3.10 The Way We Will Work

The Way We Will Work programme focusses on improving the productivity of our people and reducing operating costs by creating a modern, flexible and inclusive working environment. It will embed a values-led culture that champions collaboration, accountability and innovation ensuring we work as One Council to deliver efficient, customer focused services.

- 3.11 Establishing this programme of work is well underway. This includes planning for an upcoming Senior Manager Seminar, which will provide an opportunity to start to launch some of the key themes with staff. This is very much internally focussed as enabling services are modernised; productivity tools are promoted; and a new single strategic planning cycle is implemented. Incorporating an innovation workstream will also ensure that opportunities are sought for improving process and automation to address less efficient processes and improve productivity further. At the same time, plans are being developed to shape the longer-term future operating vision to provide clear scope and direction.
- 3.12 Demand Management  
Managing reduction in demand involves shifting to early intervention and prevention, supporting residents earlier, tackling issues at their root, strengthening community resilience and reducing reliance of statutory or costly crisis services. There is a need to ensure that our decisions are based upon data and informed by residents and local communities.
- 3.13 Work on this programme is still at an early stage, albeit there are activities already in train aligned to this across the council. The programme will seek to bring this together to help ensure that we make the most of the information and insight we have across the council to help understand and tackle issues earlier. Also ensuring that we can better join up our services to provide the right help at the right time.
- 3.14 Delivering the council's Target Operating Model (TOM)  
The TOM outlines our high-level organisational design principles and describes how we will work together—and with partners—in the future to optimise our resources and capabilities. A number of programmes and supporting projects are underway to help ensure strong foundations are in place to support the council's TOM and progress against some of these is set out below.
- 3.15 The Finance programme is making good progress in key areas, for example eight original income management systems now having successfully been transferred onto a single system, and the council is also seeing improved usage of the automated procure-to-pay processes. Work on the council's core finance system has however been delayed and now will have a go-live date later in 2026.
- 3.16 The Data programme provides the enabling tools for the council to make the best use of the data that it holds. Procurement of a data platform has been concluded; a contract signed and work underway. Implementation of a single central gazetteer has also been undertaken and is on track to go live in March, this work will improve resilience, simplify addressing and improve data quality.
- 3.17 A 'One Tech' programme has been developed with the vision to "ensure a resilient, future-ready technology foundation for North Yorkshire Council that delivers modern corporate capabilities, simplifies and consolidates systems, and empowers the organisation to meet evolving needs with efficiency, security, and innovation". This programme will act as a critical enabler, providing the technical backbone that supports transformation across services. The programme is also responsible for picking up the few remaining projects that are already in train to complete systems convergence for a number of areas such as Trading Standards/Environmental Health, replacement Parking Machines and new Parking Permit & Enforcement Systems and several HR related systems.
- 3.18 Service Specific Programmes  
There are several service specific programmes of work, with some key updates in this period are set out below:

- Sport & Active Wellbeing Programme - The consolidation of sport and active wellbeing activity under the Active North Yorkshire banner has continued at pace, the programme is now entering a key phase as the contract is signed for a new Leisure Management System that will be adopted across all sites and be fully in place ahead the remaining leisure sites in Scarborough and Ryedale being brought in house in Summer 2027.
- Waste Programme – This has made good progress with harmonisation of green garden waste processes completed and this year showing an 87% digital uptake by customers, this shift to the digital uptake of service has also been seen in the uptake of bulky waste services at 78% digital uptake. The focus now over the coming months will be the implementation of a new waste management system and the roll out of the service changes at the HWRC sites.
- SEND Programme – Work is progressing in this area, but the programme is being reviewed to reflect on progress, achievements and the recent national SEND reforms. Work is underway with the new Digital EHCP system with a view to be live in the summer, with any future amends to the system to be worked on by the supplier as the implications of the reforms are further analysed and understood.
- Housing Improvement Programme – Work is underway on a number of areas within the Housing Service to ensure that the council is best placed to meet the needs of its tenants and its statutory obligations.
- Intermediate Care Programme – Working across several services to help improve systems and processes to get people home from hospital to their usual place of residence, or to a new care facility which can safely meet their new care requirements and receive the appropriate support from a range of professionals (where applicable) to promote an optimum recovery.

### 3.19 Innovation

Within the Transformation Strategy a key enabler for delivering our vision to be forward looking, digitally enabled council that delivers seamless, accessible and efficient services was to adopt an innovation approach. This includes having a clear innovation process that ensures that we can experiment and learn quickly to allow us to act at pace when trying out new ideas or approaches. The Transformation team have been working closely with the technology team on some early 'proof of concept' activities and have developed a way of working that will enable the team to carry out research and development of products and approaches that can deliver real improvements for the council.

- 3.20 This work is at an early stage with a lot of the work focussing on what we can learn from others, researching opportunities that are available to us and trialling new tools as a 'Proof of concept' to determine whether they will deliver benefit for our service users and the council. This work will establish where there are potential improvements in the speed and quality of the services we deliver and help to give an indication of the time and money that they council may be able to save as a result of using tools such as AI or automation and therefore whether there is a case to scale up these products for adoption by the council. As this area of work develops, future reports will bring forward more information on the areas that are being explored and pursued.
- 3.21 This approach has had early success and has led to the team being shortlisted for an Innovation Award by the iNetwork. This is in recognition of the council's work on AI Assistant bots – these AI Assistants simplify complex information through an easy-to-use chat interface for user questions, quickly delivering accurate, accessible information, boosting efficiency and productivity by connecting users to complex guidance, drafting content, and enabling translation into other languages or more accessible formats. The bots are being tested and developed to help with a range of activities, for example:

- CYPS Policy and Procedure Buddy (Polly): Bespoke bot trained on specific policy and procedures.
- Housing And Care Buddy (Hanc): Multi-council bot focused on national housing and care legislation, externally funded Proof of Concept across five councils, led by NYC.
- Legal Assistant is a specialist tool for qualified legal professionals, streamlining navigation of subscription case law and legal resources.
- Resilience and Emergency teams, HR, Learning & Development bots being developed in house that use our existing guidance to answer questions put to them.

3.22 The development of the bots is through a combination of being directly provided by a third party, building a new product with an external partner or built in-house using our own technology teams, using either the NYC corporate website or internal SharePoint data.

3.23 Alongside research and development of AI Assistants the team are also looking at other innovation opportunities, like the use of products to automatically write up conversations, such as meetings or client interactions. Opportunities for translation tools and the use of AI in helping to develop training materials are also being investigated.

#### **4.0 Revenue and Benefits System Consolidation**

4.1 This report provides an overview of the successful consolidation of North Yorkshire Council's Revenues and Benefits systems following Local Government Reorganisation. The programme represents one of the most complex system and service transformations undertaken by North Yorkshire Council, delivered within a highly constrained timeframe and alongside significant organisational and legislative change. In Appendix 1 you'll find an overview of the work completed, detailed in the accompanying presentation slides

4.2 Work began in 2023/24 as legacy system contracts approached expiry. Seven separate Revenues and Benefits systems, all based on NEC software but configured differently and hosted on premise, were consolidated into a single, cloud based NEC solution. This included the replacement of multiple document management systems and the implementation of a new customer access platform. In total, 21 legacy systems were converged into three core cloud solutions, enabling a single, countywide Revenues and Benefits service.

4.3 The new systems went live on 23 June following 18 months of delivery and seven weeks of planned system downtime. Alongside the technical consolidation, the programme delivered a new customer service model, revised print and post arrangements, new website content, full referencing of customer and property accounts, alignment of payment schedules, a new payment routing solution, and full integration with wider council systems. Post go live activity focused on stabilisation, configuration improvements and process refinement to ensure the service was fully optimised following convergence.

4.4 The consolidation has delivered clear benefits for residents. Customers now experience consistent and accessible services across the county, supported by a single team. Interactions have been simplified through a unified website, standardised forms, streamlined call routing and a single reference number. Staff now have improved visibility of customer circumstances, enabling more proactive and tailored support. Service resilience has been strengthened through the move from seven independent offices to a single operating model. The approach has received national recognition, including acknowledgement from the Department for Work and Pensions for the speed and effectiveness of postmigration recovery.

4.5 There have also been significant benefits for staff and the organisation. The move to a single cloud based platform has reduced duplication, improved data quality and enabled statutory returns to be produced from a single source. IT risk has reduced through the removal of

multiple legacy systems, training can be standardised, and long term efficiency savings are expected. The programme has also supported the development of a unified culture following reorganisation, strengthening collaboration and shared ownership across teams.

- 4.6 The scale and complexity of the programme presented a number of challenges, particularly around data migration and supplier capacity. Early issues led to a reset of the delivery timeline to prioritise quality and assurance. Strong governance, robust contract management and daily operational oversight were critical to overcoming these challenges and achieving a stable outcome.
- 4.7 Following go-live, the service focused on tackling backlogs that accumulated during the system outage, with performance recovering at pace and national recognition received for the speed of backlog resolution. Alongside the programme, the service has continued to deliver significant additional work, including service restructures, implementation of new legislation and multiple internal and external audits.
- 4.8 While the core consolidation is complete, further work remains. Priorities since the implementation has been to ensure we have submitted all our national returns, recovery, implementing of new government legislation. The project will now go to the next phase of progressing a “one front door” customer approach, expanding digital forms, further automating finance processes, decommissioning remaining legacy systems, enhancing business processes and strengthening the use of customer feedback to support continuous improvement.
- 4.9 Overall, the programme has delivered a stable, resilient and futureproof Revenues and Benefits service, providing a strong platform for improved customer experience, compliance and long term transformation.

## **5.0 REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

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