

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

18 March 2026

STATEMENT OF COUNCILLOR HEATHER PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Legal and Democratic Services

The Appeals Team is planning for the school admission bulk appeal that follow the national offer days for primary and secondary school places each year. For Year seven entry, the appeals run from the end of April until late July and for Reception entry the appeals run from June to July. This is a very busy time of year and so effective planning and scheduling is of paramount importance. Throughout the year, there are large number of in-year school admission appeals, exclusion reviews and transport appeals.

HealthWatch North Yorkshire is a grant funded service, contract managed by Legal and Democratic Services, that plays a lead role locally in ensuring that the voices of local people are heard in the planning, design and evaluation of health and social care services. National changes to a range of organisations involved with or linked to patient safety were announced in 2025. As part of this, subject to the necessary legislation being enacted, all HealthWatch services will be abolished in 2027 and the funding passported through to the NHS local integrated care boards and local authorities. The detail of this is still being worked through but there are concerns about what this then means for the voice of the service user and the potential loss of all that HealthWatch North Yorkshire has achieved over the past 5-10 years.

Localities

The Localities service has made strong progress this quarter, in areas such as voluntary sector and Parish sector support, strengthened partnerships, and outcomes across digital and financial inclusion, community resilience and wellbeing, and social regeneration. Some key highlights in recent months include:

Communities:

- **Digital Inclusion:** £500k UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding fully allocated to 31 new cross-sector- projects, with demand for device recycling at its highest level. 286 refurbished devices were distributed through Reboot, supported by new tablet donations.
- **Local Food Support:** Enhanced collaboration continued across Scarborough, Harrogate and Richmond, alongside support to 29 Household Support Fund food projects to boost winter resilience.
- **North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF):** Demand increased to 2,946 applications, with over 80% relating to food and energy. December saw a sharp seasonal rise. Importantly, the team has initiated developmental work to strengthen NYLAF's wider engagement model – including reviewing authorised agents, refreshing training and preparing for a stakeholder event to improve consistency, access and awareness going into next year.
- **Cost of Living Campaign:** Delivered in conjunction with Communications and Customer, Revenues, and Benefits, featuring social media activity and widespread partner distribution. The targeted Pension Credit mailout has been highly successful, with 90 households securing Pension Credit via the new telephone support service delivered by the Income Maximisation Team.
- **Inspire Grants:** Strong demand continued with 48 grants (£43,701) awarded – a significant increase on Quarter 3 last year.
- **Community Anchor Network:** Ongoing development with 27 place-based organisations. A new Community Anchor Organisation confirmed for Malton and Norton.
- **Community Partnerships:** Ten potential new partnerships explored; Nidderdale Community Partnership established and continue to support the delivery of the local Town Investment Plan (TIP). Broader work on TIPs continues across the county in partnership with Regeneration.

- **UKSPF Delivery:** Localities continue to manage £1.3m capital for village halls and £200k revenue for Community Wealth Building across North Yorkshire and York on behalf of the Mayoral Combined Authority. 52 awards to community buildings have been made, with 8 Community Wealth Building awards also made. Training and support are also being provided to social enterprises.

Parish Liaison and Local Devolution:

- **Parish Liaison:** Continued strong engagement through meetings, drop-ins- and surgeries, with further improvements in data management and Parish Charter implementation.
- **Devolution:** The proposal for Knaresborough Market was agreed in October, implementation is underway.

Migrant Programmes:

- The SWIFT programme continues to grow, delivering 51 hours of training to 288 people and strengthening casework pathways.
- Rolling out new translation and British Sign Language access tools that are improving first point of contact resolution.

Customer

Customer Service

Performance by month for front line queues – % of calls answered in four mins

Month	Q3 2024/25 % of calls answered in 4 mins	Q3 2025/26 % of calls answered in 4 mins	% Difference in 2024/25 to 2025/26
October	92.73%	91.71%	-1.02%
November	96.00%	91.65%	-4.35%
December	95.25%	97.51%	+2.26%
Q3 Overall	94.51%	92.48%	-2.03%

Performance by month for front line queues – Average speed of answer (- difference is a quicker average, a + difference is a longer average)

Month	Q3 2024/25 % average speed of answer (mm:ss)	Q3 2025/26 % average speed of answer (mm:ss)	% Difference in 2024/25 to 2025/26 (mm:ss)
October	00:52	00:50	-00:02
November	00:35	00:50	+00:15
December	00:38	00:28	-00:10
Q3 Overall	00:42	00:46	+00:04

In Q3 2025/26 demand for social care has declined compared to the same period in the previous year, this is a consistent trend to quarter 2. In Q3 call demand accounted for 49% of overall social care demand, compared to 51% for 2024/25. Email demand however is consistent across both years, indicating it is likely that the only reason for the lower percentage and volume of call demand is due to an improvement in call performance in social care which has led to fewer repeat calls. This improvement in call performance compared to the previous year has been consistent across the last six quarters which has resulted in the proportion of call work to decline within the service compared to the previous period. It is also important to note that now out of hours York social care calls are through a separate queue so have been removed out of the social care call figure from 17 July 2025.

	Q3 2024/25 Social Care Demand	Q3 2025/26 Social Care Demand	% Difference in 2024/25 to 2025/26
Call Demand	17,773	15,522⁴	-14.5%
Email Demand	16,895	16,206	-4.1%
Total Demand	34,688	31,728	-8.5%

[4] Reporting is broken for the weekend of 29-30 November 2025, this figure for out of hours calls cannot be retrieved, therefore please take into account that there are 2 days' worth of missing data in this section.

Customer Programme update

The new Customer Experience Strategy and transformation programme are moving forward steadily. Work has begun on launching a cloud-based Netcall customer platform and contact centre solution. The system is being set up now, with the telephony feature scheduled to go live on 16 March 2026. This upgrade will enhance agents' experience and provide customers with new options, such as requesting a call-back instead of waiting in line. Planning for upcoming phases of the new platform's development is underway, and further updates on progress will be shared in due course.

Welfare and Benefits

Household Support Fund (HSF)

The seventh phase of HSF began in Q3 and will close at the end of Q4. The Department of Work and Pensions funded programme aims to support those most in need or crisis with significantly rising living costs in 2025/26. In line with the scheme guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework and delivery plan, 26,270 households across North Yorkshire were identified for a direct award in the form of a £190 shopping voucher to support them over the winter months. The direct award window was live between 8 October 2025 - 12 November 2025, of which 95.4% of the eligible cohort redeemed their voucher, within this phase the eligible cohort criteria was expanded to include residents who received 75% to 100% of Council Tax Reduction as of 1 September 2025. The cohort continues to encompass families, pensioners and working age adult households.

This scheme is delivered in a combined cross directorate approach, where customer service handles all phone calls initially. Customer Services help customers redeem their vouchers and answer general queries, but more complex queries are passed through to the Welfare and Benefits Service. This year there has also been a communication campaign promoting Pension Credit uptake within the scheme. This entailed incorporating a Pension Credit leaflet to all household support fund eligible recipients and a more targeted communication to those who identified to be eligible for Pension Credit but not claiming the benefit throughout December. To ensure the support was available to these residents upon receipt of this communication, the Welfare and Benefits, Customer Services and the Income Maximisation teams worked together to provide this service. Overall, 2,955 calls were received that related to Household Support Fund and Pension Credit in Q3 of which 99.9% were handled.

Targeted Pension Credit Campaign 2025/26

Overview

A Pension Credit campaign launched in late November aims to boost take-up among eligible older residents by raising awareness and providing direct support. Aligned with the HSF and wider Cost of Living activity, the campaign was to run for around three months to focus on pension-age households. Due to strong engagement, the campaign has been extended to ensure more residents can access support they may be missing.

Support provided

The Income Maximisation Team has delivered a full range of support, including eligibility checks, telephone-based completion of Pension Credit claims, follow-up calls, in-person appointments, and comprehensive welfare benefit checks to identify additional entitlements such as Blue Badges, bus passes and Attendance Allowance.

Key Activity

Campaign activity has included issuing 1,200 targeted direct-mail letters, promoting the offer through social media, radio and partner organisations, maintaining a dedicated telephone line for resident enquiries, and sending follow-up letters to those who did not initially respond.

Customer Contact (to date)

To date, the campaign has supported 224 residents. Of these, 89 were found not to be eligible, 34 were already receiving Pension Credit, 90 successfully made a new claim, three require follow-up work such as call-backs or visits, and 8 chose not to proceed despite being eligible.

Financial Impact (to date)

Residents have collectively secured £4,418.58 in additional Pension Credit each week, equating to an annualised financial gain of £250,556.16.

Additional Benefits Secured (to date)

The campaign has also helped residents access 72 additional entitlements, including Attendance Allowance, Blue Badges, bus passes, Council Tax Support, health-related assistance, TV licence concessions, utilities support and other related benefits.

Real Stories from Local Customers

Blue Badge Renewal and Increased Income: Customer was unaware they could receive Pension Credit and was struggling after their Blue Badge expired. Following eligibility checks and a full benefits review, their Pension Credit claim was completed over the phone, and support was provided to secure a new Blue Badge and disabled bus pass. They now receive £79.75 per week, improving financial stability and mobility.

Private Pensions and a Second Property: Customer believed private pensions and joint ownership of an additional property meant they were not entitled to help. A full benefits check identified eligibility for Attendance Allowance, which will subsequently enable Pension Credit and Council Tax Reduction claims. Ongoing support will continue as further entitlements become available.

Hidden Entitlements Beyond Housing Support: Customer receiving only their State Pension, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction assumed no further support was available. After a full check, their Pension Credit claim was completed and further entitlements were identified, including Attendance Allowance, Blind Person's Tax Allowance and a free TV licence. They now receive £179.66 per week in additional income.

Risk of Losing Attendance Allowance: Customer worried about losing Attendance Allowance and unaware they qualified for Pension Credit received timely support. Their Pension Credit claim was completed immediately, and a home visit was arranged to help with the Attendance Allowance review form. This prevented loss of benefit and protected their Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. They now receive £65.96 per week in Pension Credit.

Summary

The campaign is generating strong results, improving financial resilience for older residents and unlocking more than £250,000 in annualised Pension Credit awards. Feedback shows reduced stress, improved confidence and increased awareness of available support.

Development Management and Enforcement

Planning operations

Work on a single hosted planning system (One Uniform) continues. This is an important project to help us deliver a more efficient and effective Planning and Building Control service and provide greater consistency of customer service across the whole Council area.

Since my last update we have now migrated across Scarborough and Craven. For Building Control this now means that we have all our legacy areas in the single hosted One Uniform. For Planning and Land Charges we are now starting to focus on the next two areas to migrate across which will be Hambleton and Selby. This is a significant undertaking as the two areas will migrate simultaneously. This will happen over the weekend of 2 and 3 May with final checks being carried out on Monday 4 May and Tuesday 5 May.

As previously, in order to facilitate this work, we have to close down the current system which will have a short-term impact on service performance levels. We will be ensuring that appropriate communications are put out to our customers to raise awareness.

Development Management and Enforcement

From 1 April until 31 December 2025 the Planning service has determined 143 major, 1,182 minor, 2,319 other and 13 county matter applications. The number of applications being received remains high and, in addition, the service has also dealt with a considerable number of other types of applications, including prior approvals, screening opinions, scoping reports, trees, hedgerows, discharge of conditions, telecommunications etc. In addition, in the same timeframe, around 1380 new enforcement cases were received and the service closed 1,950 enforcement cases following investigation.

Performance for planning applications across all types continues to exceed statutory national government targets.

Locality budgets

The eleventh year of the scheme started on 12 May 2025 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations was 31 January 2026. 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 409 recommendations were submitted amounting to £429,379.40 (95.4%) of this year's budget. A report on the expenditure and operation of Locality Budgets in the 2025/26 financial year will be presented to Corporate and Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2026.

COUNCILLOR HEATHER PHILLIPS