

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 July 2021

STATEMENT FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT, SCRUTINY, AREA COMMITTEES, PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND LOCALITY BUDGETS

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE

Stronger Communities

Stronger Communities through the Community Support Organisations (CSOs), in conjunction with their volunteers, partners and networks continue to provide support to our most vulnerable residents where required; this includes the collection and delivery of shopping and prescriptions, caring for pets, offering regular social contact by telephone, and acting as a local agent for the Covid-19 Self-Isolation Grant. Immediate support requests for shopping and prescriptions have decreased this quarter, with demand for befriending, information, advice, and guidance increasing.

In line with the Government's recovery roadmap, the CSOs have continued to review and develop their transitional activity, in order to build the confidence of those who have been self-isolating or shielding and to support them in re-engaging in their communities. In May, the CSOs supported 2,838 individuals, undertook 94 accompanied shopping trips and 677 people participated in other activities that aim to build their independence. They have also continued to support the roll out of the vaccination programme, with a contribution of 3,231 volunteer hours to clinics, and completed 96 journeys to appointments.

The Stronger Communities team is aware that staff and volunteers in CSOs are in regular contact with a wide range of people, with a variety of support needs. With this in mind, in June, we had two offers, both of which were made free to CSO volunteers and staff.

1. Champion Health - a simple online wellbeing / mental health self-assessment tool. This licence is in place for a year and unlimited use is available to anyone with a NY postcode.
2. Mental Health Awareness Training – 4-hour Mental Health Awareness training course for volunteers and those in co-ordinating / managing roles within CSOs.

All courses are fully booked and there is a waiting list to cover another two courses; this will equate to 60 individuals trained living / working or volunteering in North Yorkshire contributing to encouraging mentally healthy communities and workplaces.

Covid-19 Related Work

Community and Recovery Grants

In addition to the support for CSOs, the programme has kept a small grants programme in place this quarter, to support communities as they continue to respond to the pandemic, and adapt their activities in line with the varying levels of restrictions. Since April, around £35,000 has been allocated to 38 community groups and / or projects that support the re-opening of Covid compliant support and social groups and developing digital activities, for example virtual walks.

Sustainable Food Support

Members will be aware that the County Council was awarded £532,000 via the Defra Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies Grant last financial year. £277,000 of this funding was awarded to 48 groups and / or projects last financial year to support and expand the direct provision of food for those people and families experiencing financial hardship. These projects have now been monitored and evaluated, and this quarter, further funding has been secured. This will be used to review how some of those food support options could be maintained or developed in a sustainable way on a longer-term basis, linked to social care and prevention work.

Financial Hardship

It has been confirmed that the Covid-19 Grant scheme (running under North Yorkshire's Local Assistance Fund) for those self-isolating is due to continue until September when the Scheme will be reviewed. As shielding advice from the government has now ended the criteria of the Scheme has been revised and the number of applications allowed within a rolling 12-week period has been reduced to two from 1 April 2021.

To date 1,308 applications have been approved, of which 716 were repeat applications, with the average award being £97. This award covers emergency support for food or energy top ups.

The use of the Scheme has been reducing month on month and May saw a decrease in applications of 62% compared to April. In May/June:

- There has been a reduction in applications received and approved through the Fund. Three Districts made no application at all this quarter (Craven, Richmondshire and Ryedale).
- Noticeably, 16 of the CSOs made no application to the Scheme this quarter reiterating decreased demand on the Scheme.
- Food remains the primary award type received.
- 'Long term health condition' continues to be the prevalent circumstance / group of people the Scheme is supporting.

We are hopeful in continuing to see a reduced need and demand for this Grant Scheme as Covid-19 measures reduce and the vaccination rollout continues.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

Stronger Communities continue to lead on the delivery of this programme, which has been launched with the branding of FEAST (Food, Entertainment, Arts & Sport Together) in partnership with Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) and the voluntary and community sector. Coordination of the programme is being undertaken by North Yorkshire Together who are currently preparing for the summer holidays by inviting proposals from locally based clubs and community organisations to deliver enriching activities (Covid restrictions permitting). The activity sessions will be available to all children and young people in North Yorkshire, but will be free to families eligible for benefits related free schools meals.

To make sure eligible families know about the programme we will be sending every child currently receiving free school meals a pack with information about FEAST and a booklet with ideas for activities and things to do over the summer holidays. There will also be online resources available that all families can enjoy, which North Yorkshire Together will be promoting throughout the summer.

Reboot North Yorkshire

Work on Reboot North Yorkshire continues to progress. The collaborative project led by the County Council formed to address digital inequalities and to increase digital inclusion by getting as many people online as possible. The initial focus was to help supply school children with vital equipment to enable them to access lessons, which has subsequently been broadened to everyone in the county who needs help to get connected. Work has commenced on starting to enlist the support of our local communities and voluntary sector groups as Community Partners to allow a network of community Reboot Projects to grow and develop across the county.

Reboot North Yorkshire continues to work closely with Citizens Online and their Digital Champion Coordinator for North Yorkshire, who will now be in post until March 2022.

Broader work

The re-introduction of business as usual projects and work streams continues to increase, and the Stronger Communities team continue to strengthen local community assets and infrastructure. This includes encouraging collaborations between voluntary organisations and community groups as well as stabilising, and / or building capacity within them if required. The Programme has provided specialist support to assist 13 VCSEs (voluntary, community and social enterprises) with work areas such as restructuring their organisations, re-modelling their services and providing additional capacity for fundraising over the past year, and this work area is steadily increasing.

Members will be aware that the Stronger Communities Programme is subject to a 5-year independent evaluation. Evaluation of the CSOs has now been encompassed within this, alongside continuing to develop the Programme's ten-year strategy, People, Place and Power. Discussions on a strand of this Strategy, building on existing infrastructure and the creation of 'Community Anchor Organisations' in localities have been accelerated by the needs presented by Covid-19 and the mobilisation of the CSOs. This quarter, two events have taken place in conjunction with the CSOs, and Health and Adult Services (HAS) in order to exchange learning, but to also start exploring potential options for strengthened working relationships in the future.

Legal and Democratic Services

A total of 106 remote access, live broadcast meetings of the Council's committees were held from 19 May 2020 to 6 May 2021. The benefits associated with holding remote access, live broadcast meetings have been significant. Comparing the years 2019/20 (meetings in person at County Hall, Northallerton) and 2020/21 (remote access meetings), the Council saw:

- An overall reduction in mileage claimed by councillors of 131,338 miles
- An overall saving in travel claims of £55,221
- An estimated saving in terms of time not spent travelling to and from meetings of 5,013 hours or 668 working days
- An overall saving in carbon dioxide emissions associated with reduced travel estimated to be 36.774 tonnes per annum
- An average of 62 views per meeting on the Council's YouTube site.

A response from the Council to the call for evidence on local authority use of remote access meetings, issued on 25 March 2021 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, was submitted in early June. Whilst highlighting the benefits of being able to hold remote access committee meetings in a county the size of North Yorkshire, the need for local authorities to be able to decide for themselves how they hold their meetings was emphasised.

Since the 7 May 2021 and the expiry of government regulations which allowed for committee meetings to be held remotely, the Council's committees have continued to meet informally using MS Teams. As resolved at the meeting of County Council on 5 May 2021, any formal decisions required are then taken by the Chief Executive Officer under his emergency delegated powers, in consultation with the committee and taking all relevant information into account. All such decisions are published on the Council website and circulated to all County Councillors and senior officers.

The School Admissions Appeals Team are on track to complete all of the bulk admission appeals for primary and secondary schools by the end of the summer term. The bulk appeals have all been held remotely using MS Teams. Parents and carers have been firmly in support of the use of technology to enable them to join meetings remotely. The current Department for Education regulations that enable the appeals to be heard remotely lapse in September 2021, at which point the appeals hearings will return to in-person meetings at venues across the county.

County Councillor Locality Budgets

The seventh year of the scheme started on 17 May 2021 and the last date for the receipt of recommendations will be 31 January 2022. Members will be able to make recommendations totalling £10,000 and the arrangements are as in previous years.

This year County Councillors are particularly encouraged to focus on projects or activities that respond to local needs and community initiatives arising from the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of climate change, and/or that promote the Council's Stronger Communities programme.

99 recommendations have been made to date, amounting to £107,067 (14.87%) of the allocated funding.

David Chance