

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 November 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

Covid-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery

The network of 23 Community Support Organisations (CSOs) who have been in place since the start of the pandemic are still in place across the county and continue to provide support to our most vulnerable residents where required. Funding from the Department of Health and Social Care has enabled us to ensure that they will continue to be available throughout the winter until end of March 2022. Despite high infection rates being seen across North Yorkshire through September and October, referrals from the Customer Service Centre to the CSOs remains low. Befriending and welfare calls however continue to dominate the requests received and the CSOs have shifted their focus from response to a broader range of recovery activities to support people to regain their independence. Examples include Walk & Talk groups, supported trips, exercise sessions, chair aerobics classes, social events, friendship groups, bereavement friendship group and a range of activity groups.

Although the numbers of people being seen by CSOs has reduced, the complexity of need has increased and some are reporting a strain on volunteer numbers as most of the economy has re-opened and the furlough scheme has ended. Since the start of the pandemic an impressive 171,000 volunteering hours have been undertaken.

Interest across the health and social care system in the role that CSOs and the wider voluntary sector can play to support our communities continues to grow and discussions are on-going with partner in both social care and health regarding opportunities to build on the successful model to help support both immediate winter pressures and also longer term health and social care transformation.

Covid-19 Related Work

Community and Recovery Grants

In addition to the support for CSOs, the programme has continued to offer small grants to support communities as they continue to respond to the pandemic, and adapt their activities in line with the varying levels of restrictions. A further 110 awards have been made this quarter bring the total for this year to 148.

Sustainable Food Support

The programme has utilised a further £150k of national pandemic funding to run a third round of grants to food banks and food projects. The emphasis for this round was less on crisis support and more in relations to longer-term sustainability. A further 23 organisations have benefitted from this round of funding with some new projects around healthy eating, nutrition, cooking and education being established.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

As plans are currently underway for the delivery of the Christmas holiday activity programme, which will see a blended offer of virtual and face-to-face holiday activities for the 12,500 children who are eligible for free school meals, we are able to report on the delivery of the summer programme. This is the first year the Council has undertaken such an ambitious project across the county and as such, the programme was designed from scratch. 'North Yorkshire Together' (a collaboration of North Yorkshire Sport, North Yorkshire Youth and Rural Arts) worked with the Council and coordinated a network of 48 activity providers – a mix of larger commercial holiday club providers, professional sports clubs, arts organisations and very local grass roots sports and community groups) to deliver face to face activities and food to over 6000 children and young people across the county. Provision was made in the October budget for the Department for Education to fund this programme next year, which will give us the opportunity to build on the progress made this year.

Household Support Fund

The government announced in October additional funding for Councils to help support residents and families facing financial hardship over the winter months. A significant proportion of this funding will be made in the form of direct support to eligible families. In addition to this, Stronger Communities are leading on three further elements: additional funding for food banks; additional resources for the commissioned 'Warm and Well' service; and additional funding for the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund.

Wider Stronger Communities Programme

Although pandemic related work has continued to be a large element of the Stronger Communities work over the past quarter, there are some notable projects that are being delivered that are non-pandemic related.

Children and Young People – Early Help

The team has been working with the Early Help team from Children and Young People's services to design a project that seeks to grow community capacity by working alongside and with our communities to stimulate, support and develop activities that enable children, young people and their families to be happy, healthy and achieving. The government has made additional funding available to local authorities to establish Family Hubs and the team will continue to work with CYPS Early Help to develop proposals for North Yorkshire.

Health and Well-being

The Stronger Communities Programme has continued to develop its relationships with partners in the NHS and strengthen our reputation for delivering grass roots social action programmes across a range of priorities. The team has managed grass roots mental health funding across the county – on behalf of the NHS – for the past two years. In this final year of NHS Suicide Prevention funding the team will manage the programme for the whole Humber Coast and Vale Integrated Care System footprint. Alongside this, the team will manage the VCSE investment budget for the Community Mental Health Transformation programme.

Support for Refugee Resettlement

In Selby and Scarborough, the team has been working with partners in the voluntary sector to deliver some wrap around support to the afghan families being housed in temporary bridging accommodation. The support has been targeted at children and young people and linking the families to wider community provision.

North Yorkshire has been playing its part in helping to respond to the largest human evacuation into the UK in recent times as a result of the crisis in Afghanistan. As we have witnessed on our television screens, Afghanistan has been plunged back into the dark ages by the Taliban and faces one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes, brought about by drought and severe political oppression.

Between August and December 2021, North Yorkshire County Council, in partnership with district councils will have resettled approximately 120 persons under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, which will represent our 'fair share' of the national total based upon population size. The resettlement programme is funded by the Home Office.

The permanent resettlement of Afghan families in the county has progressed relatively smoothly thanks to the effective local and regional partnership working that has been built up over the years in relation to the Syrian refugee resettlement programme.

A new element has been in relation to providing support to the Afghan families in two 'bridging hotels' in the county for families waiting for permanent housing in the UK. It was the Home Office's decision to use the hotels but it was left to local partner agencies, led by the County Council to put in place services to support the families. Most arrived in the UK from mid to late August on military flights and so came with little or no luggage and had witnessed distressing scenes in Afghanistan.

Locally a fast and co-ordinated response was required, with minimal notice and support given by the Home Office. The range of support has/continues to include:

- Supporting the families to get their children into local schools as quickly as possible and ahead of more recently published government guidance requesting that school-aged children should be in school no later than eight weeks following arrival in the bridging accommodation. Ongoing support and guidance to schools is being provided by the County Council's English as an Additional Language Team.
- Wrap-around support provided in both hotels by the Refugee Council. This centres upon helping families with a range of general enquiries and putting them in contact with relevant agencies. Previous to the Refugee Council staff being appointed; our Early Help teams visited the hotels to respond to a range of enquiries and concerns that the families had. The support in those early days was crucial.
- Local Job Centre staff have arranged the Universal Credit Claims and provided general advice on employment and training in the UK.
- Mental health support is being provided through a tailored approach of group sessions on a range of topics and where required followed up with 1-2-1 support.
- North Yorkshire Youth and North Yorkshire Sport are providing a range of activities for the children and young people including at weekends and on an evening during the week.
- English language classes for the adults have now started provided by our Adult Learning and Skills Service.

Despite the current crisis in Afghanistan, the families permanently resettled in North Yorkshire and those temporarily living in hotels, highlight that the last 20 years were not a waste even though the situation in that country is now very grave indeed.

The adults – male and female - were employed by the British in Afghanistan as part of a newly emerging group of well-educated people, working for or alongside the British Army or in UK

government departments and other agencies. At some risk to their own lives, they principally wanted to make a change for the better for their country and even in these darkest of times we should not lose hope that they might be able to do so one day. For now though they are saddened by the situation that their country is now in and whilst they are very appreciative of the support that we are providing locally for them, they are naturally very concerned about the safety of their families back in Afghanistan. Understandably as well, the families in the hotels with no homes to go to yet will particularly feel that their lives are in limbo. We will continue to support the families as best as we can and we should be proud to have such courageous people living amongst us.

Household Support Fund

HSF is a new allocation of temporary funding from DWP to upper tier councils in England to support low-income households who need it most, including for example, through small grants to meet daily needs such as food and energy during the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The individual allocations to councils and the guidance was issued on 6 October. North Yorkshire's allocations is £3.54m. Officers have worked with colleagues from district council and other partners to develop a local eligibility framework and approach. At least half the allocation will be distributed to households with children in receipt of council tax reduction or support. Other funding has been allocated to food banks, a hardship fund for energy costs managed by Warm & Well, and increased eligibility to food and energy costs through NYLAF.

Legal and Democratic Services

A total of 173 remote access, live broadcast meetings of the Council's committees were held from 19 May 2020 to 1 November 2021. The continued use of remote access meeting, following on from the expiry of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 on 5 May 2021, is under review and will be considered at the meeting of the County Council on 17 November 2021.

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 there has been no formal response from government and it is unclear whether this remains a priority, the Local Government Association has recently issued its own call for evidence so that it can take forward discussions.

The School Admissions Appeals service has been holding remote access Panel meetings since June 2020. The Department for Education regulations that enable the appeals to be heard remotely have been extended by another year through to September 2022. Remote appeals can be held where it is justified upon the basis of managing covid risk. We will continue to assess the situation but anticipate returning to appeals in person in the spring. This is unlikely to be well received by many parents and carers as they have found remote access meetings convenient and better able to fit around work and caring commitments.

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.

239 recommendations have been made to date; amounting to £301,445 (41.87%) of the allocated funding. 10 members are yet to submit any recommendations, with just over 2 months remaining of the scheme year.

David Chance