

## **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**17 NOVEMBER 2021**

### **STATEMENT OF THE LEADER CLLR CARL LES**

#### **Covid**

Covid figures remain a concern, especially amongst a younger cohort than last winter. There is no doubt in my mind that the mass vaccination programme has been a huge success, and continues to be so as we learn how to live with Covid, and we owe our thanks to the NHS and other staff who have delivered this, and also the many volunteers who have helped organise the vaccination stations so well.

Our volunteers in the community have also made sure that people with needs have been looked after, and I'm pleased our Chairman has visited many groups and individuals to say thank you on our behalf.

Whilst recognising others who work with us in the partnerships that make North Yorkshire the place it is, we should also recognise the sterling work done by our own staff at all levels and in all disciplines, and realise that there are still many challenges to come.

#### **Climate Change**

COP 26 is being staged as I write this, and welcome worldwide headlines are being heard "for our children, our children's` children, and those who come after".

Climate change, and how this Council delivers carbon reduction, remains an over-arching priority for the Council. I said previously that I would report on progress made at each quarterly Council meeting, and I will continue to do so, although the day-to-day portfolio responsibility has passed to Cllr White, and Greg has prepared a more detailed report. We can and will show leadership in this area, and give advice, but it is essential that we deliver on those issues that we have control over. Greg`s report details that work.

We will discuss a continued approach to meetings later today, but I hope Members will agree, that although not perfect, and both face to face and virtual meetings have advantages and disadvantages, that a blended approach to meetings can show savings in time, cost, and carbon.

We will endorse and support the work that the LEP is doing, especially around circular economies, and helping business prepare for Net Zero, and also the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission.

#### **LGR and Devolution**

As I write this statement, we are awaiting the imminent arrival of a draft Structural Change Order. As part of the rationale for LGR was in connection with devolution of powers and spending, we have re-emphasised to Ministers and civil servants, that having delivered the one, we want to get on with the other. The LEP has done a very useful piece of work in checking that our asks, finally submitted before last Christmas, are well-aligned to all government funding streams, including some that have been introduced during the past 9 months.

In preparing for as smooth a transition as possible, not only as expected by the Secretary of State, but also absolutely the right thing to do for our residents and businesses, we have

established an informal Implementation Board ahead of the requirement to have one, and also an Implementation Team of senior officers from both tiers, who are leading a number of work streams. As at last week, 12 workshops had been delivered at 6 venues across the County, with 222 attendees commenting favourably on the joint working achieved. We agreed from the start that effective communications were essential to our residents, businesses, staff and Members and you should have seen the second all-member communication by the time of this meeting.

### **Social Care pressures**

There is no doubt that this industry, both private and public sector, faces huge pressures both from increased demand as our population happily grows older, but also from a reducing workforce with competition from other areas of business. I am pleased that as the government launches a nation-wide initiative we are undertaking more locally the biggest ever recruitment campaign to attract people into a rewarding and progressive career.

### **Safety in Public Office**

We were all shocked by the tragic death of Sir David Amess MP. This has brought into sharp focus the risks that can accompany our activities at all levels of public office as we seek to help our constituents. Our officers have produced some helpful guidance to minimise those risks without preventing us from fulfilling our core purpose. The LGA and our political associations have also produced guidance, but I hope that if any Member has any concern, they will take up the offer of further advice and help from our Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive as the Council has a duty of care to all staff and Members.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES