

Leader of the Council Report to Full Council 19 September, 2024

Our city, Our community

Civil unrest and York's response

Early August saw a hugely challenging period nationally with troubling and totally unacceptable civil unrest across communities in England. This was a tremendously unsettling few weeks for communities in York. I was proud to see how community representatives, the police and emergency services, elected members, Council staff, the voluntary sector and York's residents all worked in solidarity and support of each other. York is proud of its social justice history, its status as a City of Sanctuary and Human Rights City. Our city showed it will not countenance or tolerate racism, intimidation or violence and I'd like to thank you all for any positive part you played in events over that period to allow our communities to feel supported and cared for. We will no doubt have challenges around this issue in the future and we should all do everything in our power to moderate our language, show a collective rejection of racism and discrimination and continue to move forward together towards a tolerant and welcoming nation.

Yorkshire Day

Yorkshire Day celebrations were hosted in York on 1 August for the first time in 39 years. It was a joyous event with over 120 civic representatives from a huge range of cities, towns and districts across Yorkshire celebrating our great county in our fine city. The Lord Mayor, the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell and I provided a warm and thought provoking, welcome to our visitors. Breakfast was hosted at the Guildhall, followed by a civic procession to the Minster, with residents and visitors lining the route, for a service of thanksgiving for Yorkshire Day, encouraging public service and humility for all elected members and celebrating the embracing Yorkshire welcome that residents who have moved from other nations and communities to York have experienced. Music at the Minster was provided by the York Philharmonic Male Voice Choir and soprano Wenjun Li, accompanied by Ioanna Koullepu on piano. The uplifting message from Reverend Canon Tim Goode, 'we commit ourselves afresh to working together for a just and fair society in which all people are treated with dignity and respect and enabled, without fear, to be the people God calls them to be' is one we should all consider every day of our public service as elected members.

Lunch was provided at the Citadel by Yahala Mataam, the fantastic York based social enterprise whose mission is to give opportunity, build confidence and instil dignity in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in York. It was a day of celebration of Yorkshire, its amazing diversity, service, humility and inclusion. I cannot thank enough the council staff, community groups and representatives and other volunteers who worked so hard to make it a success.

York Community Fund Launch

It was great to see the launch of York Community Fund take place at the Merchant Adventurers Hall in July. This independent fund is a partnership between Two Ridings Community Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, City of York Council, York CVS and York Together. The launch event was a tremendous example of York pulling together for the good of our communities. It was attended by voluntary and community organisations, businesses, philanthropists and was a real celebration of the work that is taking place across our communities.

Already accepting donations of any size, the Fund will help support organisations making a positive difference in communities across our city. This includes funding activities, projects, support and providing help with the running costs of these organisations.

The Fund is a meaningful way in which individuals and businesses, through their corporate and social responsibility commitments, can contribute to York's communities and voluntary sector, helping in areas such as affordability, climate action, health and wellbeing. I thank those who've already contributed and urge anyone else who can to do so.

Delivering for our city

I would like to draw attention to the progress that our children's services team has made over the past months. This has involved an awful lot of hard work and unrelenting focus from senior managers, heads of service across the team, and front-line staff carrying out the day-to-day, face-to-face work with young people and families. Their work has resulted in a transformative reduction in agency staff working in the department with only 1 remaining at the time of writing. In addition to a renewed sense of purpose in terms of the practice model that staff are being trained in and delivering, and the launch of Together We Can, wraparound support for young people in our care.

A recent letter from Ofsted concerning CYC's Children's Services stated "corporate parenting as being completely transformed with children being the top priority at the corporate centre.

Relationships with politicians and multi-agency partners are much improved and this is reaping benefits for children.

For example, the council wide approach to children has led to the increased housing offer for young people in the context of high waiting lists for York properties.”

This is vitally important work and progress for York’s children and young people and has seen the council coming together as the corporate parents that our children need at a time when they need it most.

Changemakers Programme

Children and young people in York will benefit from work to explore how to best help families facing challenges, thanks to a £300,000 funding boost. City of York Council is one of only four local authorities chosen to partner with Foundations, the national What Works Centre for Children and Families, and the Youth Endowment Fund on the Changemakers Programme.

The programme aims to explore how to put research about what helps parents and children overcome a wide range of challenges into practice at a local level. It is co-funded by the Youth Endowment Fund and Department for Education.

In York, the programme will initially focus on how to best help parents during pregnancy (antenatal period) and how to best support children aged between six and eleven years old with their mental health and wellbeing.

Improved support offer for Care Leavers

The improved Local Offer for care leavers, recently approved at Cllr Webb’s Executive Member decision making session responds to the views of young people and feedback from the National Advisor for Care Leavers on how the Council, as corporate parents, should be supporting care leavers to move towards independent adulthood. The new offer enhances what has been offered in the past through extending the bus pass for care leavers from the age of 21 to 25, a newly implemented annual subscription to a Mindfulness app supporting emotional well-being, a 12 month long payment for internet access and addressing the current ‘cliff edge’ in relation to council tax, spreading support over three years rather than the existing one year. Also changes to the university accommodation offer have been made to better reflect the fact that care leavers should also be supported through other forms of further education and apprenticeships. I look forward to hearing over time how this package works for our care leavers and responding to their feedback on the scheme.

Housing Delivery Plan Update

It was pleasing to see Planning Committee approve the new 100% affordable Ordnance Lane housing scheme recently. I know officers and Cllr Pavlovic have put a lot of hard work into preparing a scheme that stacks up financially and which delivers more of the affordable housing our city desperately needs. I look forward to further sites coming forward in meeting our commitment to deliver 100% affordable housing either the council or its partners will develop on existing council land.

We continue to work with a housing partner in developing a revised proposal for Castle Mills. Such schemes are complex and take time but we're confident what they deliver will be fantastic for the city.

York Community Woodland opening

It was fantastic to join the Lord Mayor, Cllr Jenny Kent, representatives from Forestry England and Council officer colleagues for the opening of the York Community Woodland last month. 210,000 trees, one for each York resident, are now growing well on 78 hectares just outside Knapton, with wild meadow swards between them and wildflowers on site. This will not only be a fantastic place for all to walk and play in but will also help offset our city's emissions by capturing 18,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide as they mature.

I'm pleased to see this location on the doorstep of Acomb, a ward with far too little open green space. I hope its residents and those right across the city will, over time, enjoy the leisure opportunity the woodland provides.

Bus Service Improvement Plan Benefits

Over a quarter of a million reduced price bus tickets have been sold to families and young people since January. The reduced tickets were just one of several measures this administration chose to prioritise using York's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding, making bus travel more accessible and affordable, easing the financial burden on families. A programme of upgrading bus shelters is also well underway, with over 150 shelters now having real-time information screens and audio announcements.

First Bus Depot launch

At the end of August, we joined First Bus in celebrating their York depot becoming one of the first net zero bus operations in the UK. This achievement has supported both the Council's net zero ambitions and will help to markedly improve air quality across the city.

Working in partnership with the council has enabled First to electrify at pace, and their fleet of 86 all electric buses has reduced emissions by over 90% since 2020. It's a fantastic achievement and we are now looking forward to assisting other bus operators running services in the city going electric and bringing in more bus priority measures to help buses cut through congestion.

Combined Authority and Regional

York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority is in full swing with the arrival of elected Mayor David Skaith in early May. He has visited and been welcomed with enthusiasm at a large range of organisations, businesses and events across the region. The partnership working between politicians and officers across the Combined Authority, City of York Council and North Yorkshire Council has already been productive for the region with over £11m being allocated to York through the Brownfield Housing Fund, £3.3m for York through the Net Zero Fund, the setting up of four additional funds consisting of the Carbon Negative Challenge Fund, a Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets Fund, a Business Innovation Fund and a Skills Innovation Fund, and early win projects being funded and assessed for implementation across the region. York has received £14.4m in total since funds have started to flow from the Combined Authority. Vitrally important additional funding allowing York to move forward in delivering on our housing, climate emergency and city infrastructure improvement goals.

The Mayor, Cllr Carl Les, Leader of North Yorkshire and I have recently participated in the recruitment process for the Combined Authority's Business Board. The exceptional business acumen, skills, and commitment to the region of the business leaders who applied to join the board is truly outstanding. We are all looking forward to the Business Board meeting for the first time over the Autumn and starting the task of providing expert input into the abundant economic growth opportunities across York and North Yorkshire. They will initially provide input into creating the Growth Plan for our region, supporting existing businesses to grow and innovate and promoting and creating a thriving start up environment for entrepreneurs. It's a truly exciting time across the region and an environment that York is tremendously well placed to take advantage of.

Local Plan Update

Consultation on the Gypsy and Traveller policy in the Local Plan ended recently and officers will now submit all representations to the Inspectors for their consideration.

We hope this is now the final issue successfully resolved and that the Inspectors will be able to issue their report on the soundness of the Plan

shortly. We expect this will then allow for the Plan to be presented to Full Council for approval and thereby adoption.

We still await indications from Government as to any revisions from their consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), but we have been told that plans at this late stage in the process will not be required to start again so for the first time in decades York will have a clear local development plan. This will signal a sea change in the number of schemes coming forward for development and we can finally start delivering homes at scale, including the desperately needed affordable housing the city needs.

York Central Update

Mayor Skaith and I visited the York Central site in early summer where we were hosted by senior figures from Homes England, Network Rail and the developers McLaren and Arlington. Progress is moving forward at a pace with refinement of the plans for phase 1 of the project that the developers hope to submit to the planning authority in the first quarter of 2025. Phase 1 will include significant housing, public realm, green space, commercial space and the western entrance from York Station into York Central. I have had a firm focus over the past 16 months on representing the hopes and aspirations of the citizens of York and what we all need to see delivered for our city on this hugely important development site. Good quality jobs across a range of skill levels, affordable, energy efficient, housing for residents to live in, not for short term investment opportunity, place building including green space, health and community facilities and integration of the site into the surrounding communities and the existing city centre.

I continue to be impressed with the inclusive and listening partnership approach of the developers and remain very optimistic that we will see York Central deliver a strong array of opportunities for a great place to live, work and play for future generations of York residents.

Council Budget 2025-26 Consultation

I would like to take this opportunity to thank residents, organisations, businesses, and partners across the city for participating in the hugely important public consultation concerning the Council's 2025-26 budget that closed in early September. Community sessions were run by an independent research firm that led conversations with residents from a range of communities allowing them to contribute their views on priorities for spending of the Council's approximately £150million revenue budget. The outlook for the Council's budget continues to be exceptionally challenging, with cuts of £10million per year required over the coming three years in order to keep a balanced budget and our city solvent. I

look forward to seeing the final analysis of the findings. Providing opportunities for residents to better understand which services the Council must spend its Council Tax and Business Rates Income on, and which services are discretionary is an important process that must continue through to budget setting in February 2025.

Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission (YHCC) - Climate Action Plan

Finally, I'd like to draw your attention to the publication of the YHCC Climate Action Plan 2024 on Wednesday 18th September. The Commission is an independent advisory group and was set up to support ambitious climate action across Yorkshire and the Humber. It is made up of climate leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sectors in the region. I am currently a Vice Chair alongside a private sector Chair and 3 other Vice Chairs covering the region. The Climate Action Plan 2024 is a truly collaborative publication bringing together data sets, costs and actions taking place across our region. It outlines the task that faces Yorkshire and Humber to reach net zero by 2038, adapting our places to the climate impacts that are already affecting our region and will worsen in the years to come; protecting and restoring nature, building on our region's incredible natural assets; and doing all of this in a way that is fair and involves our communities. Its publication is a perfect opportunity for members across the council chamber to remind ourselves of the commitments, we as a Council, have made in the forms of declaring a climate emergency and approving a pollinator strategy to provide spaces for nature to thrive and survive. York has made large strides in starting to tackle our carbon footprint but there is still, collectively, a very long way to go. [Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission](#)

Cllr Douglas, Leader
10 September 2024