

Our city, Our community

It was an honour for many of us from across the chamber to attend and participate in acts of Remembrance across our city over the weekend of 9th and 10th November. And as the Royal British Legion tells us, 'We unite across faiths, cultures and backgrounds to remember the service and sacrifice of the Armed Forces community from United Kingdom and the Commonwealth'. I was proud to join veterans and serving personnel at both the York City Football Club act of Remembrance before the York City vs Hartlepool game and an impressive cross section of our local and near neighbour military garrisons, dignitaries, veterans from across the ages, cadets and members of our community at the City of York Remembrance Sunday service at the City Memorial Gardens. This year's reworked standing arrangements in the Gardens; to put veterans at the forefront of the event, in their rightful place, was a proud moment for our city and one that I look forward to seeing continue on into the future.

It was also an honour to host the Armed Forces Covenant Employers event at the Priory Street Centre in early October. A range of employers from across York and North Yorkshire, at various stages of the journey through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. Either considering joining or at the Bronze, Silver and Gold level of the scheme. City of York Council (CYC) has been a Gold Award employer since 2019 and has recently participated in the 5 yearly reassessment process. We will be able to announce the outcome of the reassessment at the end of November. The covenant pledge and recognition scheme recognises the commitment of the Council to provide a comprehensive range of services to covering recruitment, access to housing and education, to support those who have served or are serving in the regular and reserve forces and their families or as cadet volunteers. The pledge and covenant aim to diminish and eradicate the disadvantage that service personnel and their families experience due to short postings in numerous locations around the country and in the employment market when they leave their military roles.

I am tremendously proud to be the Armed Forces Champion for the Council and have worked closely with Cllr Rowley in his role as Armed Forces Advocate on a range of initiatives, visits and events. We recently visited Strensall's Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the base of the British

Army's 2nd Medical Brigade to observe a rare exercise to test the deployment of a full-size field hospital.

It was an honour to meet the amazingly skilled and experienced commanding officers and medics tasked with working in some of the most demanding environments in the world. Cllr Rowley and I are currently working with partners across the city to plan for the city's celebration of the important 80th anniversaries of victory in Europe and Japan in 2025.

It's also been an honour to join Askham Bryan College's recent graduation celebration at the Merchant Taylor's Hall. An opportunity to wish graduating students all the very best for the next stage of their careers and to celebrate the college's highly prized and unique range of land-based qualifications and degrees.

Dr Tim Whitaker, Principal and Chief Executive and his staff team play an incredibly important role in developing the talent that will respond to both the existing and future challenges for the UK's land-based economy and the environment as we move towards net zero and nature renewal.

I attended the National Railway Museum's (NRM) Directors Dinner along with an impressive array of Science Museum Group trustees and supporters from across the rail industry. The ambition of the NRM is really something to behold and they continue to be a leading partner in our work across the Council. Judith McNicol has been the Director of the NRM since 2017 and has guided the organisation through a number of important and impressive developments and organisational changes, the most recent being the opening of the amazing Wonderlab Gallery and the plans for the development of the Central Hall. I'd like to congratulate her on the news of her recent appointment as Managing Director of the British Museum that she will take up in early 2025.

I welcome Craig Bentley to the interim Director role at the NRM and look forward to working with him as we continue to develop the role of the museum within the York Central site and ensuring that the NRM integrates its immediately local communities into its plans.

We were delighted, along with the Combined Authority, to support the Aesthetica Short Film Festival. This is a truly international event, attracting filmmakers, games developers and industry experts from all corners of the world.

This year Aesthetica combined with the 10th anniversary of the City's designation as a UNESCO City of Media Arts and celebrated with a superb Expo showcasing 25 successful creative media businesses working in York and the surrounding region. An action packed 5 days

also saw Reignite 6, bringing together participants from other European Cities of Media Arts sharing their experience of how investment in culture drives transformative change in their economy and society.

The Aesthetica Festival confirms that York is a leader in the creative economy. Our cultural impact across media arts and entertainment is on a global scale. A huge thanks to Cherie Federico and all those involved in organising such a successful and important event, one of the highlights of which was the City Screen premiere, to great acclaim, of the five short films made by York secondary schools. Congratulations to all of them and good luck to our future film makers.

A historic event for a city brimming with history took place in October with the York Valkyrie retaining their title as Women's Super League Champions. I have the pleasure of joining the Lord Mayor to welcome them for a congratulatory civic reception at the Mansion House on 15th November. To celebrate yet another decisive Grand Final win against the mighty St Helens. Fans from across the city will be able to join the celebrations by lining the route of the open bus taking the team from Union Terrace Car Park through Duncombe Place to St Helen's Square.

York is tremendously honoured to be the home of one of the few professional women's Rugby League teams in England. Their success is inspirational to women across the country. It's fantastic to be able to witness them go from strength to strength. The Lord Mayor, Sheriff and I were also honoured to meet another fantastic Rugby League team when Samoa's national squad used the city as a training base for their recent and first ever test series in England.

The standard of professional and international level sport in York really is going from strength to strength and I'd like to thank everyone who is associated with all the men's, women's and juniors teams in both Football, Rugby League and Rugby Union for all their hard work, commitment, skill and passion. It's truly inspirational.

York Interfaith Week took place across the city in the week of 9th November. This and the York Interfaith Group are tremendously important parts of our city's fabric. They heavily support our collective understanding of the various communities that successfully live together across our city. I am a strong supporter of the collaborative work that our Interfaith Group stimulates and am tremendously proud to be joining them for their 35th Anniversary Celebration on 17th November.

Delivering for our city

My administration's Council Plan was launched in September 2023 and we have recently published the first annual progress report, to the end of

September 2024, on the Council's website. It is a fantastic, optimistic round up of the achievements of the Labour administration and highlights the hard work carried out by councillors, working in partnership with officers and partners, across the city for the benefit of our residents. It looks to the future and lays out the actions carried out on the path to York being a vibrant, prosperous, welcoming and sustainable city where everyone can share and take pride in its success.

The Council Plan has seven key priorities, all of which are being delivered on. The areas of particular pride are the expansion of the Mental Health Partnership and hub model leading to a £2.4Million NHS investment enabling continuation of the project and the opening of a 24/7 publicly accessible hub in the west of the city. Also, the early stage academic research feedback notes the success of the city's Free School Meals programme in Westfield Primary and Burton Green Primary schools that we are in the process of planning expansion of in early 2025. And the development of York's up to date Local Transport Strategy and associated Implementation Plan that will lead to a long term programme to reduce driven miles in the city, reduce congestion and improve air quality and walking and cycling numbers.

The path forwards into delivery of 100% truly affordable housing on Council owned, housing designated, land with Ordnance Lane recently gaining planning permission and spades are now in the ground. I could go on. It really is worth a read to see the positive movement, for the benefit of the residents of York, that is going on across our city. I am fortunate that a number of people across the city have sought me out to congratulate us all on the sense of purpose, vibrancy and optimism that is spreading across our city as projects kick off, develop and expand. I cannot deny that we still all continue to operate in a tough, very tough financial climate but we are making progress, good progress and I'd like to thank everyone who has joined us on this journey and worked so tremendously hard to make these positive outcomes happen.

The positive work in the Council's Children's Services directorate is being noticed across the country. This led recently to young people and social workers meeting national children's leaders as part of a visit to find out more about City of York Council's work to transform services for children and young people.

The government minister for Children and Families, Minister Janet Daby; Frances Oram, Children's Social Care Reform, DfE; and Isabelle Trowler CBE, Chief Social Worker, met young people and children's social care teams in early October.

The Minister also visited Clifton Family Hub, which will be home to York's new dedicated SEND hub. The new hub will bring together professionals from education, health and social care in the same place, supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and their families.

The visit follows a period of significant positive change in the service, which has seen an end to the use of agency social workers, creating more consistency for children and families; the adoption of a new model of working, which puts children and young people at the heart of everything the teams do; and a significant reduction in the number of children in care, thanks to better early support for families.

National Care Leavers' Week took place in late October and gives young care leavers the opportunity to challenge the perceptions faced by them, raise awareness of the issues those in care face, and celebrate the incredible things many go on to achieve.

Events were organised across the city to celebrate care leavers and the family, carers, friends, and mentors who support them. These events included a football match between care experienced young people and Jorvik City, played at Millthorpe School and a celebration event including pizza making provided by Dough Disciples.

In the same week York Care Leavers Forum was nominated for the National Voice Awards 2024 in The Collaboration Award Category. The awards recognise the work of children in care councils and care leaver forums in England and I'm really pleased to say they came 2nd overall in this important national award.

The shortlisting highlights the work the team and 'I Still Matter' group have been doing to work together to reshape and design the new local offer for care leavers. The project included consultations with wide groups of care leavers to ensure the new offering was designed around lived experiences and includes increased support for care leavers who are parents, improvements to financial support, a leisure and travel offer and wellbeing support.

We have recently introduced and adopted a York Youth Strategy focussed on bringing different partners together to form a new York Youth Partnership. The council developed the strategy with youth sector partners and all have worked together to build a plan for a 'Give it a Go Week' to get more young people engaged in youth provision across the city.

York has a successful programme of year-round events and festivals for visitors and residents. This proposed city wide programme for York's

youth will follow a similar model to York Residents' Weekend but would shine a light on activities for young people, engage them in new activities and showcase the positive difference youth work can make in their communities.

The Corporate Parenting Board has recently been working with care experienced young people to investigate and develop a plan for CYC to treat care experience as a protected characteristic. Some other authorities have presented council motions to do this but in York we wanted to go further to highlight this important issue and make sure that it had the buy in of young people. I'd like to say a big thank you to the Corporate Parenting Advisors for their work in bringing all the research and youth voice together to really influence decision making during this process.

Queen St bridge has gone! Contractors John Sisk & Son have done an impressive job and completed the works ahead of schedule, to reveal views of our historic city walls that haven't been seen for over 150 years. Over the coming months we'll see the area in front of the railway station being transformed, creating a new gateway to the city which celebrates our heritage, welcomes people, and vastly improves sustainable transport links.

The final set of anti-terrorism bollards at the junction of High Ousegate and Piccadilly have been installed in time for the Christmas markets, removing the need for the cumbersome temporary bollards used in previous years. The complete set of bollards enables vehicle access to the foot streets to be controlled throughout the year.

We're delighted to have approved York's Local Transport Strategy Implementation Plan at an Executive meeting last week. This sets out the schemes and initiatives that will provide a foundation for our Movement & Place Plan. Accessibility, sustainable travel and connectivity lie at the heart of the plan, and packages include increased Blue Badge parking, a city centre sustainable travel corridor, greater rollout of 20mph speed limits, a parking strategy that makes best use of York's limited public highway space, repairing and maintaining pavements and cycle paths, and trials to improve sustainable travel along a radial corridor and in one neighbourhood and one village. We'll be starting consultation on some of these packages in the new year to ensure that the plans are well understood and developed with input from residents and businesses.

Riverside path consultation. We're delighted to be inviting residents and business to give their views on plans to upgrade the Riverside path between Scarborough Bridge and Jubilee Terrace.

This scheme is a much needed improvement of a key section of our walking and cycling network which will deliver more space for walking and cycling, increase flood resilience and improve lighting along the path. The consultation runs until 1st December.

We've negotiated more Park & Ride (P&R) buses over the busy Christmas market period, to help reduce traffic congestion and enable more people to take advantage of our fantastic P&R service. We're promoting the service widely, encouraging both visitors and residents to give P&R a go, with buses running every 10 mins and adult return fares just £3.80, with up to three accompanied children travelling for free.

Combined Authority and Regional

The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (YNYCA) and associated partnership working continues to go from strength to strength. The Business Board has now been recruited and will meet for the first time in the coming weeks. The range of business leaders that applied to join the board was truly awe inspiring. York and North Yorkshire showcases a vast range of successful and growing businesses of all sizes and from a wide range of sectors. The successful applicants and chair are now in place. Cllr Kilbane and I are very much looking forward to working with the board and Mayor David Skaith to turbo boost economic growth in our region. It's an exciting opportunity that we must all embrace. The first task of the Business Board will be to participate in the production of the YNYCA Growth Plan.

The Growth Plan priorities have been approved by the Combined Authority at our recent meeting in October. These have been produced in partnership with North Yorkshire, York, business expertise approved and the government through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The approved priorities are below and will be worked up into the Growth Plan that will be submitted to MHCLG in the spring and will form the backbone for economic and infrastructure development across our region:

- Increase productivity and innovation within the Food and Farming Sector;
- Maximise our science, knowledge, innovation and research strengths to drive growth in an Engineering Biology northern cluster;
- Create economic opportunities through the need to transition to Clean Energy;

- Enable technological and digital transformation through investment in Digital Infrastructure and Skills; and
- Accelerate Place-based Sustainable Development.

York has recently had a string of successes in bringing in new and additional funding from the YNYCA to support our local aims and priorities. The total investment in York since the inception of the Combined Authority has now reached over £18Million. Recent successes include:

Funding approved for two pipeline projects at a total of £500k. Including Our City Centre Regeneration, that will develop a spatial framework for York's city centre public spaces, a delivery strategy and a list of identified capital regeneration projects to deliver the programme. Investment has also been secured for our Construction Skills initiative, a public-private sector partnership to provide training and apprenticeships for people across our city to learn and develop the skills required for the building of the sustainable homes of the future and retrofitting our council owned and private properties across the city.

We've also secured a further £2Million towards two initiatives including:

Cultural Passports for Young People to develop and deliver a cultural development and engagement programme for Young People and a significant £1.54Million contribution towards delivery of improved Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure to enable more vehicles of all types to be charged at three strategic sites around the city periphery.

The Combined Authority is bringing tangible, important additional capacity and funding to York, allowing us to deliver more of our priorities. Thank you to officers from across the Combined Authority, City of York Council and North Yorkshire Council for all the hard work that has gone towards making this happen so quickly. It's very much appreciated.

York Central Update

It has been very encouraging to see the plans for Phase 1 of York Central move apace. McLaren and Arlington, the appointed developers hope to bring forward the next stage of planning application in early 2025 to include approximately 1,000 sustainable homes with up to 50% truly affordable, a large development of commercial space, the western entrance to York Station, substantial green space and public space to the rear of the station. I was part of a team of developers and partners who recently welcomed senior civil servants from government, MHCLG, to York to learn more about the York Central plan and our collective aspirations for the good quality homes, jobs and leisure space the project will provide for our fine city.

It's a tremendously exciting time in the evolution of York, a place that can celebrate its fine heritage and history yet look to the future for our young people. I look forward to seeing the final plans develop and know that the developers want to share these with you, both Members of the Council and our residents.

Local Plan Update

We have recently been notified that the Local Plan Inspectors expect to have their final report with Forward Planning Team officers in the Council imminently. A short period of checking the final document for factual accuracy and typos will follow and we hope to adopt the plan in early 2025 after over 6 years of very hard work. York desperately needs a Local Plan. Developers, the Council and its partners are all ready to get building on the identified sites, to deliver the homes our city so desperately needs. Adoption and implementation cannot come quickly enough.

Cllr Douglas
Leader of the Council