

**Council****15 December 2022****Report of the Executive Leader**

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As we enter the festive period, our staff and city partners continue to respond to numerous challenges that we face, whilst maintaining momentum on a number of strategic issues for the city, including the consultation on the proposed devolution deal, supporting residents and businesses with the Cost of Living crisis, developing the council's budget proposals, progressing major regeneration projects and readying frontline services to respond to Winter.

With 2023 only a few weeks away, I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank council staff, partners, residents, businesses, and councillors for their hard work during 2022, and indeed, for the work that will be undertaken throughout the festive period and into the New Year. I wish everyone all the very best this Christmas.

**Devolution**

Colleagues will know that the statutory consultation on the governance arrangements within the proposed devolution deal is underway and due to end on the 16<sup>th</sup> December. As part of this work, the council has been making every effort to engage residents, businesses, and stakeholders to highlight the consultation and encourage everyone to fill out the survey. There has also been a series of drop-in events at York's Explore Centres to provide residents the opportunity to ask officers questions directly about the proposed deal and the devolution process. As it stands, the current response rate to the consultation is good, with well over 1,000 responses at the time of writing this report.

Once the consultation has concluded, councillors will then have the opportunity to review the feedback alongside proposed deal. We will then consider whether to agree the deal and send the consultation feedback back to Government in the New Year, which would then enable the Government to create the Draft Order needed to establish the new Mayoral Combined Authority.

I would like to thank everyone who has already participated in the consultation to date, and to fellow councillors who have promoted the consultation in their local communities. I would encourage those who have not responded to visit <https://www.ynydevolution.com/>, and complete the survey to let us know your thoughts before the deadline.

## **Council Budget**

Considerable work is underway to put together the council's 2023/24 budget proposals, amidst unprecedented financial pressures and increased demand for our services. Challenges brought about by the pandemic, rising energy, fuel and food prices, and inflationary increases are making it incredibly difficult for the council to balance its budget, just as it is making it difficult for individuals and households to balance theirs.

Across the country, the LGA currently estimate that councils are facing additional cost pressures of £2.4 billion in this financial year. In 2023/24, they estimate a funding gap of £3.4 billion just to maintain services at pre-COVID levels. For all these pressures to be met through council tax alone, councils would have to raise council tax by 20% over the next two years, which I'm sure many would agree is neither sustainable nor desirable, given the impact of the current Cost of Living crisis on our residents and businesses.

We are no exception to these challenges and as it stands, the council has forecast a budget gap of some £10 million. Therefore, the focus of this year's budget proposals will be to stabilise our financial position, allowing the council to continue to deliver crucial services and support our local communities during the difficult months ahead.

We will also look at options to maintain the ambitious capital programme and continue to invest directly in our city, from accelerating vital regeneration projects, such as York Central, to delivering new low carbon and affordable homes.

There is no doubt that there will be tough decisions to make, and to help us make these decisions, several focus groups will be held on the budget, as well as a consultation survey, to gather the thoughts and views of local residents and businesses. Given that we continue to wait for details on the Local Government Financial Settlement, which is rumoured to not be expected until late December, our detailed budget proposals will be published for review and comment in the New Year.

## **Cost of Living Crisis**

We know that residents and businesses are facing huge financial challenges at this moment time, and current financial forecasts suggest that the economic situation is not due to change anytime soon.

That is why last year, we paid some £37 million to households who needed it most and are currently rolling out another phase of the Household Support Fund. As part of the next phase, over £1 million will be paid to households to help support them through the crisis. This support is aimed at a broad range of recipients, including those with children, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities. It will also include vulnerable households who are ineligible for other Government support with the Cost of Living. Over the coming weeks, the council will be writing to 3,000 potentially eligible families, inviting them to apply. In doing so, they could receive one-off payments of between £200 and £300 early in the New Year, following the appropriate fraud checks being carried out. Anyone who needs support but does not qualify for this Household Support Fund payment, will be signposted to other support available in the city, including the York Financial Assistance Scheme.

In addition, a discretionary scheme is inviting applications from December 2022 to March 2023, with the aim of supporting potentially financial vulnerable residents, and specifically families with disabled children who may be affected by the increase in utility costs. Those families with children on the higher rate Disability Living Allowance will automatically be paid up to £250. Any resident can apply to the discretionary scheme, and they do not need to receive a DWP benefit.

As already mentioned in this report, the financial sustainability of councils is on a cliff-edge, particularly as the cost and demand for our services continues to rise. We know that the funding we have been allocated by Government is clearly not enough to support all of those in need and the support payments we are able to make are small in comparison to the increasing financial pressures residents face.

We will continue to make the case for more funding to be provided to support all people struggling financially at this time, whilst continuing our work with partners locally to provide assistance and advice to residents during the Winter period.

### **Home Office Asylum Seeker Accommodation Scheme**

The Council has been informed by the Home Office that York, amongst other cities, has been chosen to host families and couples needing support and accommodation, as part of the programme to move asylum seekers from tented accommodation to safe, private, self-catered accommodation. The Home Office is booking and paying for hotel and

serviced apartments and is doing so in partnership with the North East Migration Partnership, of which Migration Yorkshire is a member.

This temporary accommodation will be provided for at least three months, with support from a Home Office-funded welfare officer. The council will coordinate additional support with the city's community and voluntary sector. Mears Group, the Government's contractor which supports asylum seekers, is also working alongside local voluntary groups, health services, education providers, North Yorkshire Police and Migration Yorkshire to provide support.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank council staff and partners that have acted quickly and were ready to respond to this decision by the Home Office. York is a welcoming city, having already stepped up to support asylum seekers through the pandemic and welcome those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Once again, our city stands ready to support people when they need it the most.

Whilst we welcome those in need, the Government needs to recognise the pressure placed on local authorities, health and education services, where statutory services and extra support must be provided. Given the ever-tightening constraints on our budgets, additional financial assistance for local authorities must be forthcoming from the Government and we will continue to make this case.

## **10-Year Strategies**

Following the 'Our Big Conversation' consultation, numerous workshops with stakeholders, focus groups and sessions in Explore York have led to the development of the Council's new proposed policy framework, which includes the Climate Change Strategy, the new Economic Strategy, the Health and Well Being Strategy and the upcoming 10 Year Plan.

I would like to thank all the residents, businesses and local organisations who participated in Our Big Conversation, as the thousands of comments that were received ultimately helped shape the strategies and the ambitions within them.

By considering the strategies together, we want to recognise and ensure that the co-benefits of these interrelating strategies can be delivered for the long-term benefit of the city.

## **A Rating for Climate Action Leadership**

York is now amongst only 122 cities across the world to be awarded an A rating for climate action leadership by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP). The Climate Strategy and Action Plan, which was developed with the support of city partners over the last 2 years, was judged by the CDP to clearly demonstrate the city's vision and action to combat climate change, and the A-rating that they awarded recognises this work and highlights that York is delivering twice as many climate mitigation and adaptation measures as those not adjudged to be on the 'A-list'.

It is fantastic to receive this high recognition and it speaks to the quality of the work that has gone into the development of our climate change strategy and action plan. I would like to thank our officers, the many partners, community groups and residents that have helped to create our plans, as they all deserve this high recognition for their efforts.

## **Supporting Young People with SEND**

Following agreement at Executive last month, £8 million of capital funding will be invested in 5 capital projects to ensure that the changing needs of children and young people with SEND can continue to be supported here in the city.

The schemes have been developed in response to national and local data about changing SEND needs, together with detailed feedback from York's Inclusion Review survey. The data showed an increase in the number of children with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs across the country, as well as in York. It's hoped that the projects will enable young people with SEND to get the support they need locally. The schemes receiving the investment are:

- **Developing St Paul's Nursery Enhanced Resource Provision:** This scheme will develop the existing enhanced resource provision in the maintained nursery, creating an early year's support hub focused on communication needs.
- **Expansion of Haxby Road Enhanced Resource Provision:** This project will create a new Enhanced Resource Provision to support children in mainstream primary school with autism and SEMH. The new facility will be run as a 'second site' to the existing enhanced provision at Haxby Road Primary School.
- **Huntington School Enhanced Resource Provision:** This project will create accessible facilities for young people in mainstream secondary

school, with complex communication and interaction needs, particularly those with autism and anxiety disorders. The three-year project will create a new three new classrooms, break out facilities, sensory rooms and a hygiene suite.

- **Specialist SEMH Sufficiency:** A consultation will be undertaken with education providers in the New Year to look at ways of providing local, specialist support to the very small number of children and young people who have been permanently excluded from their school. Creating a more localised solution will enable the existing mixed-use facility at Dansegate to focus solely on providing specialist support to children and young people with autism and SEMH.
- **Applefields School:** The three-year project will continue to develop and enhance existing provision at Applefields Special School, adapting and restructuring classrooms and upgrading the hoist and hydrotherapy pool.

These projects are critical to ensuring schools across the city can continue to meet the needs of young people with SEND in York, and crucially, it will enable us to have the right provision in place to support children in mainstream schools, where they can learn and develop alongside peers from their local communities.

## **York Central**

Colleagues will have seen the series of consultation events that took place during November, providing residents and businesses the opportunity to find out more about progress at York Central and give their feedback on the next stages of the scheme.

The events allowed members of the public an opportunity to meet the team behind York Central, ask questions and discuss the project over a series of three in-person events, and one online webinar. This included a focus on York Central's proposed Government Hub and shaping ongoing plans for the new public square.

York Central is a once in a lifetime opportunity for York, with potential for a new office quarter, new neighbourhoods, an expanded and enhanced National Railway Museum, improvements to York Railway Station, and a network of vibrant public squares with routes linking to surrounding neighbourhoods and the city centre. The Government's interest in locating a hub on the site reaffirm York Central's undoubted quality and potential. With infrastructure works ongoing, I look forward to our

continued work with partners to maintain momentum on this all important project.

## **Royal Visit**

York was pleased to welcome King Charles III and the Queen Consort in an historic visit to the city last month. As is the tradition, the King entered the city at Micklegate, the traditional royal entrance into York, where he was received by the Lord Mayor, the Lady Mayoress, the Sheriff, Sheriff's Consort, along with myself, the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk.

In their visit, Their Majesties unveiled a statue of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The statue, designed and carved by York Minster stone mason Richard Bossons, was unveiled following a memorable service at the Minster.

It was a great honour that the new King and Queen Consort chose to visit our city, and that York Minster's tribute to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was rightly recognised. I would like to thank everyone who was involved in preparing and supporting this event, from our staff to various city partners.

## **New Library for Haxby and Wigginton**

The city's newest library, based in Haxby and Wigginton, will open its doors to residents for the first time in early January 2023, once the construction work to co-locate a permanent library at Oaken Grove Community Centre is completed.

In partnership between with Explore York Library and Archives, and Haxby & Wigginton Youth & Community Association, the project will replace the old library in Haxby and Wigginton, which was closed in 2016 on the grounds of public safety. The new library will be open six days a week and will include a new reading café, run by Explore, providing the community and customers visiting the centre with a place to relax.

I'm delighted that this initiative is almost nearing its conclusion and that a library will soon be back at the heart of Haxby and Wigginton. As ever, I'm proud that we are a city opening libraries and investing in community spaces.

### **Weekly Drop-in-Centre for Armed Forces Community**

Veterans, serving personnel and their immediate family members are invited to weekly drop-in sessions where they can meet other members of York's Armed Forces community and access independent specialist support.

The weekly sessions are every Tuesday from 10.30am - 12.30pm at the Spurriergate Centre, Spurriergate. A team will be on hand to provide direct advice or signpost requests for support to specialist partners, who can help across a spectrum of topics such as health, welfare, housing, education, employment, and finances.

This is the latest in our work as part of the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure that York is a welcoming place for serving armed forces personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families to live and work.