

Leader of the Council Report to Full Council 21 March 2024

Our city, Our community

The winter season has been a tremendously busy and vibrant time across our fine city and region with a huge range of celebrations, events and commemorations. York is an amazing place to live with a community constantly active in its support of each other in so many notable and important ways. This is such a valuable strength of our city. I'd like to highlight a few of the events I attended, often alongside the Lord Mayor. The beautiful Christmas celebration at the Minster, a service of Nine Lessons and Carols on 23 December, was a fantastic start to the Christmas week. On a more sombre note, in January, we attended the Holocaust Memorial Day event at York St. John's University. This is always so thought provoking and a very necessary space for reflection. It's so important we all take the time to remember what actions are possible in our society and vow to not see such things happen again.

There is a hugely exciting and growing strength and recognition of excellence across the Further and Higher Education sector in York. The Lord Mayor and I were both very fortunate to be asked to join York College & University Centre to celebrate the fact they have been granted membership to The Chartered Institution for Further Education. They are one of only 19 Further Education Colleges in the UK to be awarded such an honour. Membership to the institution is only granted to colleges who demonstrate exemplary Further Education by a strong track record of delivering the skills needed in modern Britain, a strong ethos of collaboration for the benefit of their key stakeholders and excellence in leadership and Governance. It was a joy to be there, along with a range of city partners and employers to see them officially unveil their Royal Charter. And I'd like to congratulate the staff and students on their fantastic achievement.

It was also a joy to join the University of York for their 2024 Graduation Dinner. A celebration of another part of our city's excellence in education. It was a joy to hear about the success of so many students at all levels of their Higher Education journey achieving their goals and taking their next steps on their careers.

Within our staff at City of York Council we have a number of currently serving army reservists. I was therefore invited to join the Commanding Officer of the 4th Battalion of The Royal Yorkshire Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hill and the Helmand Company for breakfast at the Worsley Barracks, Army Reserve Centre on Fulford Road.

It was fantastic to learn and appreciate more about the reservist work that our employees and many other people across York do. This is a tremendously important aspect of the military life of York and the Council's staff body. I thank all reservists across the city for their commitment and expertise.

York International Women's Week

York International Women's Week took place from 2 to 10 March with International Women's Day celebrated on Friday 8 March. There was a huge range of events taking place across communities in our city. During the week I was glad to open and take part in a City of York Council, NatWest and Google Garage supported event Empowering and Inspiring Women in Business in York. Louise Toal, the inspirational Managing Director of The Distance gave a fantastic keynote speech encouraging women across York to start or grow their business. Kyra's annual International Women's Day event was a joy to attend and support. Kyra is a fantastic organisation doing such important work to support and empower women across our city to make positive changes in their lives. Thank you to all the volunteers, staff and programme participants for everything you're doing. And finally on the evening of 8 March I attended the event hosted by the Lady Mayoress. An inspirational evening at the Mansion House to celebrate 'York Women Changing Our World'. Elly Fiorentini masterfully interviewing three inspirational York women showing us all how to get out there, take our opportunities and make a difference. A hugely inspirational week celebrating women across our city. Thank you to everyone involved in the organisation, and delivery of the events. I'm already looking forward to 2025.

Domestic Abuse Strategy adopted for York and North Yorkshire

A new domestic abuse strategy for York and North Yorkshire was launched at the end of February, demonstrating the strong partnership approach we're taking to working with partners in the police, other local authorities as well as the voluntary and community sector. Last year there were over 2,000 domestic abuse related crimes in York. Behind each of those crimes are victims and survivors and their family members who need support, to live free from abuse and harm. This strategy is a major milestone in our work across York and North Yorkshire to drive system-level change around Domestic Abuse, for the sake of all our communities and residents, putting the voices of victims at the heart of our response.

Delivering for our city

It has been an absolute joy to see 2024 get off to a flying start with the launch of York Hungry Minds, the free school meals programme in both Westfield Community Primary and Burton Green Primary schools. Helping to tackle the cost-of-living crisis for households and deliver health and educational benefits for the children of York. The visit I made to Burton Green Primary was an absolute joy. Learning about and seeing the positive benefits of the free breakfast provision for the children attending the school. The teaching staff, children and parent/carers are already gushing with the positive benefits of healthy food bringing children into school regularly and early. Enjoying the social aspect of eating together in a calm environment and transitioning into really positive, constructive and enjoyable learning in the classroom. Westfield and Burton Green are the start of the programme's pilot and we look forward to learning more about the benefits of the scheme as both the Universities of York and Leeds evaluate the outcomes. The programme is publicly supported by the Archbishop of York and Sinead Peach, Captain of York Valkyries and York's Director of Public Health. I'd like to thank them for their support and everyone who has contributed their time, expertise and financial support. It's been a great team effort.

Another highly important and notable improvement delivered by the Labour administration since January has been the reversal of the Blue Badge holder access ban in the city centre. Blue Badge holders can now access their city via Goodramgate and the Blake Street/Lendal loop at all hours. Consultation is continuing with the disabled community to monitor the success and challenges of the scheme with the aim of improving how it works for everyone. We are currently working towards introducing Blue Badge parking bays on Blake Street and Lendal in order to extend the maximum time a Blue Badge holder can stay in the city centre beyond the 3 hours parking permitted on double yellow lines.

Combined Authority and Regional

A huge milestone was reached for our region in January 2024 with the creation and inaugural meeting of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. Officers, elected members, and government ministers have been working closely over an extended period of time with the deal agreed in the summer of 2022 and the order finally approved through Westminster in December 2023.

The process of bringing devolution to York and our region has been a cross party effort initiated in the previous administration and completed in the new administration. Myself and Cllr Kilbane as lead members for

York on the Combined Authority are working constructively with the leadership of North Yorkshire Council to bring additional funding into the region. York has already benefitted from funds to bring forward Brownfield Housing sites and money allocated to a number of important Net Zero projects across the city. We look forward to the elected Mayor joining us following the sub-region wide election on Thursday 2 May 2024.

The opportunities for a comprehensive, joined up, regional approach to transport, inclusive economic development, achieving net zero and delivering truly affordable housing for our residents are extensive. The ability to make decisions, on these large-scale strategic issues, closer to our communities affected by them is very much welcomed. This doesn't come without its challenges though. There will be a lot of work needed by elected members, the Mayor, and officers to make sure the people of our region feel connected to the Combined Authority, and it is delivering for them in the communities they live in.

The public launch for the Combined Authority took place on 1 February at the Guildhall. A hugely optimistic event with standing room only during the speeches. This shows the level of interest and hope for the investment and opportunities it can bring to people and businesses across York and North Yorkshire. The meetings of the Combined Authority have started, the organisation is preparing for the arrival of the elected Mayor in May. I will keep you updated as we move through the early stages of this new, joint endeavour.

Other notable regional activities that have taken place over the past few months are the ongoing meetings of the hugely important Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission. Our region has one of the largest decarbonisation challenges in the country. Yorkshire and the Humber is a large-scale energy producer and home to some of the most carbon intense manufacturing in the country. The task is huge but there is huge and collective determination to deliver on net zero commitments. The commission is currently focussing on Climate Talking Points, a presentation of four key policy asks to be put forward to all political parties creating manifestos for this General Election Year.

1. Set out a clear path to reducing emissions, restoring nature, and empower places to impose targets and go further and faster on that journey than national government targets, if they wish.
2. Create locally managed funding pots, on minimum five-year financial cycles, so that key sectors (e.g. housing upgrades, public transport, and active travel) don't need to bid repeatedly for multiple, disjointed funding sources.
3. Join up climate, skills, and economy strategies and ensure they address the big challenges together, including ageing populations, poverty, skills shortages, and climate risks.

4. Commit to a 'nature first' approach to publicly funded infrastructure projects so that our buildings and infrastructure can cope with future climate scenarios, and that nature recovery is woven in to all climate actions.

I have also participated in the Convention of the North 24 held in Leeds earlier this month. The Convention of the North brings the elected Mayors from east to west together along with local authority leaders, business leaders and policy makers to promote and develop our broader region on a national and international scale. I chaired the panel facilitating the development of the Net Zero policy theme for the Manifesto for the North and then presented the collaboratively developed policy position to the full convention.

It was a hugely thought provoking and motivating event with a large contingent of young people from Leeds and Bradford schools joining the Net Zero panel to tell us to 'be more ambitious, achieve more at pace and the need to focus on action rather than talk'. As always young people's input into the Net Zero debate is hugely impactful and focuses policy makers minds. I encourage everyone to take a look at the proposals of the Manifesto for the North 2024 on the Convention of the North 2024 website.

Closer to home on Net Zero the first meeting of the re-initiated York Climate Commission took place at the Guildhall in January. Around 100 organisations of all sizes and from all sectors across the city took part. The drive for change and action in York is palpable and 8 working groups have been set up covering a range of issues including nature recovery, food, waste and retrofitting of public, private and commercial buildings. There is a huge amount of work to do and given the council's activities only contribute 4% of the emissions in the city this is not a challenge we can tackle on our own. I'd like to thank everyone for joining the commission and showing your commitment to creating a cleaner, greener city for residents now and those of the future.

Business Support and York Central Update

I attended the 2023 York Press BusinessIQ Awards held in late November. It was a great evening showcasing the impressive array of successful businesses across York, both startup, growing and firmly established. The diversity, innovation and creativity in business across our city is truly awe-inspiring. Times have not been easy for business over the past years with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation hitting them persistently and squarely. But as is often the case in the commercial world, adversity often creates successful innovative approaches and it was great to see that being played out across the

room. Finalists were nominated by their customers, peers, colleagues and other business leaders. It was great to meet and congratulate the finalists and winners. I look forward to seeing them again later this year.

I was also glad to participate in the panel at the recent Insider York Central Breakfast event. The level of interest and optimism around the progression of the York Central development is palpable in the city. Hosted by our partners the National Railway Museum around 150 people from a range of industries across York and regionally attended the event. It was the first public outing of the Master Developers, McLaren Property and Arlington Real Estate since the announcement of them being selected by Homes England and Network Rail as the strategic developers.

An opportunity for businesses and organisations across our city to start to better understand the approach of the developers and the opportunities that the site will bring for them and our residents. I and others across the city have been heartened by early-stage conversations that have been taking place with McLaren and Arlington. Our alignment on making sure the York Central development delivers for the people of York, on reaching above policy sustainable and affordable housing delivery, sustainable transport and movement aims, inclusive and good quality economic development and substantial nature and biodiversity net gain is looking very positive, and I look forward to being able to update you on further detail as the months progress.

Cllr Douglas, Leader
12 March 2024