

Leader of the Council, Cllr Claire Douglas

Our City, Our Community

There have been a number of memorable events and passings over the months since our last regular Full Council meeting in November. It was an honour and sadness to say goodbye to one of our remaining Normandy D-Day veterans, Joe Thomas in January. I was proud to attend the memorial service held at York Minster alongside the Lord Mayor to remember Joe's service, life and family. We have also said goodbye to Ian Gillies and Hon Alderman Mick Bradley over the past months and send our collective best wishes to their families during what will continue to be difficult times. Thank you to them all for their commitment and passion for our city, through their public service, spanning many years.

I was proud to stand alongside the Lord Mayor and community colleagues across our city at the Holocaust Memorial Day event marked on 27th January to commemorate all lives lost through the holocaust and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. I also attended the commemoration of the 1190 massacre of York's Jewish population at the site of Clifford's Tower earlier this month. As the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust says 'we can learn both from and about the Holocaust and more recent genocides, for a better future. We can speak up against Holocaust and genocide denial and distortion; we can challenge prejudice; we can encourage others to learn about the Holocaust and more recent genocides'.

In the first week of March, York came together to celebrate International Women's Week with a wide variety of events both supporting and promoting the fantastic work women do across our city, country and the world. I was honoured to speak at both a local business event and the Lord Mayor's celebration of HerStory hosted at the Assembly Rooms.

Delivering for our City

The Labour run Council continues to deliver for our great city. I'd like to start by thanking Council staff across children's services who have worked ceaselessly to improve the outcomes for children and young people in care in our city. We recently reached a fantastic milestone of bringing the use of agency social workers down to zero. Providing stability for both our workforce and the children and young people in our care. I can't thank you all enough for your expertise, dedication and commitment and look forward to the publication, in mid-April, of the outcome of the recent OFSTED inspection.

Ongoing and continuous improvement across our organisation has been a focus for me since I became Leader of the Council. The Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a Corporate Peer Review in February 2024 and revisited for a progress review in December. The LGA recognises there have been a range of improvements within how the Council works to deliver better services for residents over that period, but there is still work to do. We continue to work collectively as a Council to tackle these areas, with productive cross-party work through the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's review of scrutiny arrangements and processes at CYC being a good example. Council will consider the adoption of a range of recommendations from the review, all designed to give scrutiny by both members and the public the impact and prominence it deserves.

Local Plan Update

February saw the historic adoption by Full Council of York's first Local Plan for almost 70 years. This can't have come soon enough and allows development to move forward in our city with far greater certainty of where it will take place, what it will look like, and the delivery of the affordable housing and infrastructure our city so desperately needs. We now move forward into the development and adoption of hugely important localised policies called Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and the Community Infrastructure Levy schedule. I'd like to thank all the council officers involved in this long and detailed process for their hard work and commitment.

York Central Update

York Central and the improved station frontage continue to move forward. Both are important developments to improve how our city functions for both residents and visitors improving the quality of life in our city, bringing a range of opportunities for our future generations for good quality employment and bringing much needed affordable housing and infrastructure to our city. In December David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire and I hosted a visit by senior Treasury civil servants to York Central and another visit in February by Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner MP. The Deputy Prime Minister made a joint visit to York Central and the National Railway Museum (NRM) and was able to announce funding of £15million to support the current and ongoing expansion project of the NRM. An important investment in York that will support our world class cultural offering and shows strong support for the York Central development.

York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

I was honoured to host, alongside the Chief Operating Officer, the City Leaders event in early January. City Leaders from a range of business, civic and public sector organisations in York joined us to hear more about the development and feedback on the Local Growth Plan for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. The Local Growth Plan will form the backbone of government investment in our region over the next spending review period. It is vitally important that as many people as possible have the opportunity to feed into the process. It is now out to public consultation and residents, businesses and other organisations can respond to the proposals here: <https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/york-and-north-yorkshire-combined-authority-local-growth-plan/> The consultation closes at 11:59pm on 21st April 2025.

Executive Member for Economy and Culture, Cllr Pete Kilbane

York has made a strong economic start to 2025. Reports from the end of 2024 showed increased footfall in the city centre with a rise in consumer spending that bucked the national trend. Shop vacancy rates, while always a concern, are at half the national average. Out-of-town shopping areas at Clifton Moor, Acomb and Haxby are bustling with thriving businesses and Monks Cross is performing well.

Residents can see investment around the city with the new Station Frontage scheme works progressing well while on York Central, we expect further planning applications to be submitted imminently.

It was great to see local Labour leaders working alongside national Government to secure funding for the Railway Museum recently. We'll continue this approach and remain confident it will bring forward the required investment for Haxby Station, York Central and York Outer Ring Road.

With all these projects, and on developments unlocked by the adoption of York's Local Plan, we are sending a clear signal to business to invest in York. We have a stable and secure economic environment and are a great place to do business. In return, we expect support with infrastructure and high quality, secure employment for our residents. The sort of employment that offers opportunities to build a good life for themselves and their families in our great city.

Tourism continues to recover well post-pandemic with York hosting 9m visitors annually, worth £1.7billion to the local economy. Hotels reported a bumper year with increased levels of room occupancy and spending in restaurants.

Rates of economic inactivity, though well below regional and national averages, remain a cause of concern. We'll make full use of our share of the £10m Trailblazer Fund, awarded by the Labour Government to the Mayor, to help residents back into work through innovative and supportive programmes.

York's strong visitor economy creates a benign circle supporting a vibrant cultural scene that appeals to both residents and tourists alike. From the Ice Trail to the International Shakespeare Festival, there is something for everyone. We continue to ensure that York Residents can live interesting and rewarding lives through projects like Cultural Passports for Young People and supporting the Reignite programme of events connecting businesses and media arts in our UNESCO designated City.

We are proud to play our part in making York a great place to be, but it is very much a team effort across the city. I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the many fantastic individuals, organisations and businesses who are making York such a happening place.

Executive Member for Education, Children and Young People, Cllr Bob Webb

The York Hungry Minds initiative continues to expand by adding another school, Fishergate Primary. I want to thank staff at Fishergate for their work to support their children and young people in providing a universal Free School Breakfast following the February half term break.

Members and residents are encouraged to watch the meeting of the Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee last November in which the findings from independent research by two Universities highlighted the benefits of this programme. We are proud of the work that York Hungry Minds is doing and we remain ambitious for children and families in York to expand this initiative over time.

On Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), it's pleasing that the York SEND Employment Forum continues to work with organisations to develop and grow the locally supported internship scheme offer for young people with SEND. This will support individuals to develop skills and gain access to the world of work. A great example of this is Aviva hosting interns under the city's first Supported Internship Programme, arranged through national charity [DFN Project Search](#). This includes a commitment to run a second programme from September 2025. Aviva interns are currently working in the following roles: IT Service Desk, Administrator, Data Scientist, and Videographer.

It is also pleasing to see development of York's SEND family hub moving at pace. Reflecting the ethos of the city's other Raise York Family Hubs, the plans will bring services supporting children and young people with additional needs together in one place: a dedicated SEND hub at Clifton Family Hub.

I hope that by bringing together professionals from education, health and social care to work in the same place, families will be able to get the advice and support they need more quickly, reducing unnecessary assessments and waiting times.

As Corporate Parents it is absolutely essential that the Council and officers celebrate our care leavers. In early November I attended a football match between care leavers and a local team. This was a great opportunity for young people to make new friends and connect with other care leavers and staff in order to build their own networks. More recently, I was able to celebrate with foster carers, young people and staff at the Annual Care Day event. It is excellent to see attendance at these events growing every year.

I continue to make Primary School visits and recently visited Lord Deramore's in Heslington and primaries at Wigginton, Elvington, Clifton Green, St. Oswald's in Fulford and Ralph Butterfield in Haxby. Links with our maintained schools and between those schools are important to us and it is great to see City of York Council maintained Primary Schools staff have held joint training day sessions for the first time ever.

Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency, Cllr Jenny Kent

Climate

The creation of two new micro-woods has been completed at Rawcliffe and Burnholme, with the help of local schoolchildren and the use of a £39,000 grant from the Coronation Living Heritage Fund. Planting utilises the Miyawaki method, designed to maximise biodiversity and wellbeing opportunities for the sites.

Also on trees, Green Streets tree planting is underway, with a tree being planted for every cared for individual in York in celebration of the fantastic work of the carers and their support networks in our city.

LED lighting improvements are now complete at the council's West Offices and Hazel Court depot, reducing electricity consumption by 50%, saving costs and 37 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent each year.

Over 900 streetlights have been upgraded to LED, saving 0.25 megawatt hours of electricity and 41 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year. This success resulted in an increase in grant funding from the Mayor's Net Zero Fund with an additional allocation for upgrading an extra 400 streetlights.

Development of the outline business case for a Green Energy Park at Harewood Whin has progressed well with the first two milestones scheduled in the coming months. The strategic outline case goes to the project board in June for approval, while the final outline business base is due at Executive in the months soon after.

The City Leap – Local Net Zero Accelerator project, funded by the Government Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, has completed an initial options appraisal considering potential models for net zero delivery across the region. The asset base review is also complete, with a market prospectus in development.

January's Green Business Forum on sustainable tourism coincided with the York Tourism Conference at York St John University and was the highest attended event yet, with over 40 local businesses represented.

Our Business Decarbonisation Support programme (funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund) has provided 39 businesses with tailored carbon reduction plans, identifying annual savings of 756 tonnes of CO₂e.

Environmental Services

The Neighbourhood Caretaker initiative, with investment of £150k per annum to improve how our communities look and feel and better support the many groups and individuals who already do such fantastic work looking after our streets, parks and gardens, will launch soon.

Our Parks Investment Fund of £500,000, announced to boost our city's parks and gardens, address critical infrastructure needs and inequality of access to play, was confirmed in the council budget passed last month.

Climate resilient, pollinator-friendly planting worked well over the first-year trial period and will now be rolled out to further locations around the city.

And pleasingly, reports of missed waste collections and fly tipping are both down.

Executive Member for Finance, Performance, Major Projects, Human Rights, Equality and Inclusion, Cllr Katie Lomas

Budget

Our budget for 2025/26 has no new cuts to services for residents but does contain some ongoing savings from the restructuring of the council. That work will be continuing through the year, alongside the ongoing work in cost control and budget compliance.

Now that the 2025/26 budget has been agreed, we have begun planning for the 2026/27 budget process during which we aim to refine the consultation process and to explore how we use scrutiny to develop budget proposals in line with recommendations from the recent external scrutiny review.

Pension Credit Campaign

As a result of the recent Pension Credit campaign designed to encourage take up of Pension Credit, (which enables a claim for winter fuel allowance) we have seen a significant increase in take up of benefits. This means a lifetime amount of £10.6m extra benefits for residents.

Measures	Totals
Number of households who claimed something	231
Number of people in claiming households	246
Annual Pension Credit	£1,402,670
Backdated Pension Credit	£338,866
Winter Fuel Payments	£49,200
Total amount for pensioners in first year	£1,790,736
Lifetime amount	£10,638,225

There will be a continuing campaign to encourage residents to claim the benefits they are entitled to along with signposting to other sources of support, including our York Financial Assistance Scheme and Household Support Fund.

Financial Inclusion Grant Scheme

Applications to the grant scheme were invited in January and decisions are being made as I write this report. This grant scheme allows organisations to bid for funding for schemes that support financial inclusion for residents and affordability in line with the Council's EACH priorities. The additional funding agreed in the budget will increase the total amount available, supporting more work to be done across the city.

Human Rights and Equalities Board (HREB)

The Human Rights and Equalities Board has continued to meet and recently considered the draft Human Rights Indicator Report and the recommendations that might be included in it. We look forward to the final report and to working with partners across the city to respond to the recommendations.

We are now planning for the annual public meeting of HREB where the Indicator Report will be the main topic.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

The consultation on the Council's EDI strategy closed recently and we are very grateful to all residents and other organisations who contributed. Our EDI strategy is important in ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone and that we create a fairer city where everyone can thrive. We are looking forward to welcoming our Head of EDI into post this month. She will be considering feedback from the consultation soon and we expect the draft strategy to go to scrutiny later this spring.

Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, Cllr Lucy Steels-Walshaw

Domestic Abuse

Cllr Steels-Walshaw was pleased to take part in a highly successful domestic abuse awareness campaign promoted by City of York Council last December and an event to raise business awareness last month. These events discussed the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse across all sections of our communities in York, understanding the definition and types of domestic abuse and how to recognise them. The sessions also highlighted support and services available for people, both those experiencing abuse and those for perpetrators. Feedback was extremely positive with attendees expressing more confidence to support people who make disclosures and to advocate and signpost to support. The Public Health team also launched an awareness campaign featuring a poem from a survivor, powerfully highlighting the impact of domestic abuse on individuals, their families and friends.

Adult Social Care Strategy Consultation

The strategy consultation, which closed earlier this month, asked for feedback from people who receive care and support and from carers, residents and professionals to help shape how adult social care delivers services for the city. This supports our ambition for people to live happier, healthier, longer and more independent lives. The feedback will be used to inform the strategy's development. The council will update residents on how their views have contributed to shaping the strategy throughout its development. We want to continue to ensure York is a place where people receive the right support at the right time, in a way that works for them.

Health Trainer Success

The York Health Trainers empower residents to lead happier, healthier lives offering support around alcohol use, smoking, healthy eating, getting and staying active and being involved in their communities. Health Trainers in York have been celebrated as providing the most effective stop smoking service in the country, with 82% of people who set a date to stop still successfully stopped 4 weeks later, compared with 57% nationally. The Swap 2 Stop Vape offer which provides a 4 week vape kit posted to the home has been highly successful, with referrals to the service doubling since its introduction in October 2024. Health Trainers have also recently launched weekly drop-ins at 3 Explore libraries helping to improve access for residents wanting support across the city.

Supporting unpaid carers

We cannot measure the huge value of the service unpaid carers provide for the people they care for. There are 5,000 carers registered with York Carers Centre but we know around 15,000 residents provide unpaid care. The Unpaid Carers Survey, which closed this month, is a collaboration between York Council, York Carers Centre and York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The collaboration will be working to identify the support carers need and how we can add to and improve the available offer. There has been a concerted effort for people with lived experience to be involved with this project so that services can be developed in a way that delivers the most impact and which influences future provision.

Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities, Cllr Michael Pavlovic

Fantastic news - we now have an adopted Local Plan!

After almost 70 years without one, York now has a development plan that sets out how our city will change, not just in the number of new homes built but with the employment opportunities to support economic growth, its health provision, sports and play space and new schools. It will ensure our city retains what makes it unique and special.

The Plan is vital to start addressing the housing affordability problem by building the homes the city needs for its young people, its families, key workers and graduates. The Plan will have to be reviewed soon given the time that's passed since it was initially submitted. But our immediate priorities are delivering the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and preparing the Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that will enhance our adopted Local Plan policies.

The planning process will need to be responsive to the development profiled in the Local Plan. Last year the Labour Administration, working alongside the York Chamber of Commerce, convened a roundtable with developers and agents and more recently agreed a new Planning Protocol. This outlines an approach to the planning process that will lead to better applications that are consistent with Local Plan policies. In return, the council will deliver a speedier decision-making process, and therefore quicker build out of sites, that meet the needs of local communities.

Our Housing Delivery Programme has seen the first sales on the Duncombe Place development, final sales at the Lowfield Development and getting close at Burnholme, and the commencement of groundworks at Ordnance Lane. The Willow House development is now in the final design phases. An upcoming Executive report will cover other sites that, as we pledged in the Labour Manifesto in 2023, will see us working in partnership with Housing Associations to develop 100% truly affordable housing on Council owned, designated housing land. This will see hundreds more genuinely affordable homes coming forward for decisions in the coming months.

Our investment in the council's existing housing stock to an unprecedented level demonstrates our commitment to council house tenants and to our assets, and will see more new kitchens, bathrooms, insulation and damp and mould tackled. Recent grant funding will see more homes both in council and private stock better insulated and made more energy efficient to reduce fuel bills for those most struggling with the cost of living. Our building services teams' performance indicators are better than they have been for years, resulting in cross-party support and praise at scrutiny this month.

Proposals to deliver a new approach to how the council works will be discussed in the coming months, following significant scrutiny already. The Neighbourhood Model is about bringing decision making and services closer to the communities they serve. This includes the council, other agencies and voluntary groups working to deliver what works best for those communities.

Executive Member for Transport, Cllr Kate Ravilious

It's one thing to have a Local Transport Strategy (LTS), but quite another to enact it. This month we published our Highways Annual Maintenance Programme and I'm really proud of the work officers have done to align the programme with our transport strategy. This year we have increased our investment in highway maintenance to £9m and in addition to addressing the poor state of our roads, we will be carrying out much needed maintenance on some of our active travel routes, repairing footbridges and pavements, and incorporating road safety improvements into some of our routine highway maintenance works. We are also trialling a recycling methodology for resurfacing in a limited number of locations, with significant environmental benefits and reduced carbon emissions.

We are also moving forward with several schemes in our LTS Implementation Plan. This month I was pleased to approve the Riverside Path Improvement scheme to proceed to detailed design and construction. This will really help to boost active travel along this key corridor.

Over the next couple of months we'll be launching public consultations on the improvements to our Park and Ride sites and the City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor – two schemes that will transform bus travel throughout the city and bring massive benefits not just for York but for the surrounding region too. Complimenting those schemes is the Station Frontage scheme, which is really starting to take shape with new bus stops now in operation.

We're continuing to use our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding to support families and young people and to market bus travel. Last year our Park & Ride service carried 4.5m passengers, recording its busiest year since 2017. We're also investing in upgrading bus stops across the city and it's fantastic to see accessibility improvements and real-time screens being rolled out.

Finally, we're delighted to be hosting the Active City conference here in York this summer and look forward to welcoming around 500 delegates to the Barbican. We're planning walks and rides to show off our wonderful city, and view this as a fantastic opportunity to share experiences, learn from others and raise the profile of active and accessible travel in York.