

Council

20 October 2022

Report of the Leader of the Council

Since my last report to Full Council in July, a great deal has happened. We now have a new Prime Minister and Cabinet; the country sadly lost Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II following her 70-year reign, and the Cost of Living Crisis has worsened. As we enter the final three months of 2022, there is undoubtedly many challenges that face our residents, businesses and communities; challenges that are beyond our control as a Council. Yet, despite this, we know that there is outstanding work taking place here in York to meet these issues head on and bring about a better quality of life for the people of our city.

As ever, it has remained a busy and difficult past few months, so I would like begin this report by thanking our staff, residents, businesses, fellow councillors and city partners for their continued contribution to our city, even during difficult circumstances, from supporting Operation London Bridge, to responding to the current Cost of Living Crisis – thank you.

Devolution:

I would like to thank colleagues for their support and contribution to our last extraordinary meeting of Full Council, where it was agreed that the Council would proceed and undertake the statutory consultation on the proposed deal and Scheme.

The proposed devolution deal is designed to secure investment on a much larger scale than we are currently able to access. It is the only city and rural region deal on this scale, previously achieved by the likes of Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and South and West Yorkshire.

If agreed by colleagues in the New Year, a new combined authority will be created with a directly elected mayor, who will have powers to invest £540million of new money in transport, housing, and education over the next 30 years. The proposed deal also looks to secure York's influence in the new working arrangements of the Combined Authority. This will be supported by a transfer of powers and devolved budgets from Whitehall, meaning there will be more flexibility over how best to spend money on local priorities, such as transport, affordable housing and economic development sites.

Colleagues know the significance of devolution and the potential changes to local governance in our city, and therefore, it is crucial that the upcoming consultation seeks the views and thoughts of residents, communities, and businesses across the city. The consultation on the details and timeline of a mayoral-led combined authority for York and North Yorkshire will launch later this month, lasting a period of 8 weeks. Colleagues will then have a final opportunity to consider the deal, alongside the feedback received from the consultation, later in the New Year.

Cost of Living Crisis:

As everyone will be fully aware, the worsening Cost of Living Crisis and current economic outlook continue to have a detrimental impact on residents, businesses, and organisations across the city, particularly those individuals and families already facing financial hardship.

In May, the Executive agreed recommendations, received from Scrutiny, to help respond to the anticipated increase in the number of children claiming free school meals. This included allocating the remaining £43,000 in the holiday food budget to provide supermarket vouchers to families who are in need and for whom other support may be inaccessible. This was in addition to the £50,000 already invested to provide food vouchers to families in times of need, not just in the school holidays. Over £1 million was also invested in our Household Support Fund to help during the Cost of Living Crisis, but this funding will only go so far.

Recognising the widespread impact the current crisis is having on our city, the Council is working to convene a Cost of Living Summit on the 31st October, following the previously agreed Council motion, in order to draw together expertise across all sectors, learn from residents and businesses on their experiences and crucially, identify where we can work together with our partners to develop a more coordinated response to the current crisis, recognising that the Council with its limited financial means cannot make the difference alone.

The current state of public finances and recent change in fiscal approach outlined by the new Chancellor is also a cause of concern, not only for City of York Council, but the entire Local Government family. Local

authorities up and down the country have been at the forefront of the country's response to the pandemic, supporting refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine, and managing increasing demand for social services. At the same time, rising inflation, rampant energy bills, cuts to council resources and lack of action on Social Care funding have resulted in depleted Council budgets.

Following the Conservative Party Conference earlier this month, views and opinions raised by Ministers in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will not fill Local Government with confidence that support will be there when we need it most. Unless there is a change in approach, this will mean difficult financial decisions for Councils up and down the country, and the City of York Council is no different. That is why our continued cross-party lobbying efforts are needed now more than ever.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II:

Following the sad passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II on the 8th September 2022, communities across York came together to share their condolences and commemorate the life and service of Queen Elizabeth II.

For many in the city, it was an emotional goodbye to the longest-serving monarch in British history. A letter of condolence was sent to The Royal Family by the, The Lord Mayor of York, myself and the Deputy Leader; flags across the city flew at half-mast to mark the period of national mourning; and books of condolences were made available across the city, including West Offices, so residents could pay their respects.

York has always had a strong affinity with the Royal Family and many residents in York will remember The Queen's visits and connections to our city, including reopening York Minster following the 1984 fire and more recently in 2012 for the Royal Maundy service. As Head of State for over 70 years, The Queen has been a part of most, if not all our lives including, importantly, a connection to our wartime generations.

I would like to thank colleagues and council staff for their work as part of Operation London Bridge, from ensuring our city's civic traditions were upheld during the passing of the monarch, to re-arranging council meetings and helping to organise the regional and local proclamations of His Majesty The King.

York Central:

Colleagues will know that work has begun by John Sisk and Son Ltd to deliver over £100m of vital infrastructure needed to unlock the York Central site. More recently, site preparation works were carried out by the Council and partners, which included creating the site compound and temporary access, clearing vegetation on land owned by Homes England and Network Rail and removing three disused buildings.

Over the next three years, John Sisk and Son will deliver the second phase of key infrastructure works, including the construction of a new road bridge and a new pedestrian and cycle footbridge over the East Coast Main Line railway, two kilometres of road (with separated cycle and pedestrian paths) that will connect Water End through the site to Leeman Road, and a rail spur to the National Railway Museum. John Sisk and Son will also provide the earthworks and utility works for the entire site.

The potential investment of up to £50 million to support and deliver the York Central brownfield regeneration scheme, secured as part of the proposed Devolution deal, is also positive progress towards further unlocking this transformational project, and indeed recognition of the benefits York Central could have for our city and the wider region.

Enhanced Bus Partnership and Bus Services:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for engaging and sharing their views on the draft Enhanced Bus Partnership agreement, which will be considered before the improvement programme begins. In July 2022, the DfT confirmed a funding award of over £17 million for York as part of our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The creation of the 'Enhanced Partnership' is a condition for receiving the BSIP funding, in which York was one of only two places in Yorkshire to receive indicative BSIP funding. Once confirmed, the funding will enable the council and local bus operators to implement a wide range of improvements to the city's bus network and associated infrastructure, from improvements to bus stops, to better ticketing options.

Colleagues and residents will be aware of some ongoing concerns that local operators have expressed over the lack of sustainable long terms

funding deals that would support current services. I know that intensive work is currently taking place by officers and providers to encourage and support residents to return to buses and retain as many services as possible. Whilst the government's decision to extend crucial emergency support until next March is welcome news, we must all be aware that this merely delays the cliff edge for another six months.

I have written to the new Transport Secretary to warn her that local operators are still contemplating cuts as bus services are still reeling from the impact of the pandemic. Bus driver shortages, low passenger numbers and impending funding cliff edges is leaving services in a constant state of retreat, in York and across the region. I have asked her to urgently provide a sustainable, long-term funding deal for buses, one which will prevent the need for any further cuts and most vitally support driver recruitment and retention. This, alongside the plans laid out in the Enhanced Bus Partnership plans, would ensure that services are there for communities when they need them.

Haxby Railway Station:

Colleagues will know that efforts to deliver a new railway station in Haxby is one of this administration's priority projects and therefore, I am pleased that we are making continued progress on this scheme, with the support of the local community driving the project.

Haxby & Wigginton residents have been waiting patiently for a much-needed new railway station, one which will offer residents more sustainable travel options and improve connections including to local towns and cities. This, alongside our other major transport projects, such as the dualling of the Ring Road and investment in bus infrastructure, will lead to improved connectivity and commuting opportunities for our residents.

The chosen site has clear benefits; however, there will clearly be some legitimate concerns over local impacts, so it's crucial that the community is kept involved in the project to help mitigate any concerns and make Haxby station a real asset for the local community and the wider region. I look forward to our continued work with the local community, Network Rail, and the DfT to move this major project forward and ensure that a new station is delivered to the benefit of the city.

Purple Flag:

Last month, I was pleased to be joined by council officers, Make it York, North Yorkshire Police and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner at a roundtable to consider further actions we could take to promote a safe, enjoyable and family-friendly evening and night time economy in York, as part of the city's Purple Flag accreditation.

Following a successful and constructive discussion, actions were agreed by all partners to continue our work together to address anti-social behaviour, particularly in the run-up to the festive season, and to continue to promote York as a safe place to visit. This work will look to build on measures already agreed earlier this year to help protect the city centre and nearby residential areas from alcohol-related anti-social behaviour. Following 2 separate consultations in February this year, over 90% of respondents agreed to the reintroduction of powers to address groups drinking and associated anti-social behaviour.

Ultimately, we must continue to build on the work achieved under Purple Flag and with our partners, continue to improve on our evening and night-time economy offer, including taking firmer action on anti-social behaviour and building on our city's outstanding reputation as a safe city to visit and enjoy.

Recycling:

Colleagues will be pleased to know that our waste teams will be expanding the range of materials collected at the kerbside. In an effort to make it easier for residents to recycle even more, the following items can now be collected as part of our expanded recycling collections:

- Foil;
- More plastic bottles (such as fruit shoot bottles);
- Cleaning product bottles with lids and trigger spray nozzles;
- Plastic yoghurt pots;
- Margarine tubs;
- And light-coloured and clear plastic food trays.

We know residents are doing an excellent job of recycling in York, with around 43% of all waste being either reused, recycled, or composted. The addition of foil and more plastics to kerbside collections will help us

further boost our recycling rates and continue our work to make York greener and cleaner.

School Attendance Campaign:

With the new academic year underway, the Council has been working with schools in the city to launch a new campaign to help encourage regular school attendance and emphasise its importance. The campaign highlights the long-term positive impacts that regular school attendance brings, together with the potential negative implications that are linked to poor attendance.

We want to help every pupil in the city to reach their full potential and young people who attend school regularly are more likely to get the training and skills they need for the career they choose to embark on, as well as be less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour and crime.

The last couple of years have been incredibly difficult for young people with disruption caused by the covid pandemic, and this has had a negative impact on school attendance across the country, including in York. Schools across the city are working with families and young people who are struggling with school attendance, and it is important that any parent or carer concerned about their child's attendance get in touch with their school straight away to discuss any issues before they escalate.

Energy Efficiency Grants:

The Council has partnered with E.ON to help deliver over £2 million of energy efficiency measures to homeowners and tenants who rent their home from a private landlord.

The Green Homes Funding grants are for households with a total income of £30,000 or less, who live in a property with a low energy efficiency rating. Eligible homeowners could be awarded up to £10,000 of free energy-saving measures. For tenants of privately rented properties, the landlord will need to give permission and will be required to contribute a third of the cost of the works with a maximum grant of £5,000.

Eligible residents can apply for these grants to cover a variety of energy-saving installations. These could include fitting exterior wall and underfloor insulation, installing air source heat pumps and solar photovoltaic panels to generate electricity.

The grants are a result of the council's successful bid for funding to help pay for energy efficiency measures to be fitted in York homes.

York's Dementia Strategy:

Following approval of York's Dementia Strategy, a programme of inspiring dementia-related activities were held last month to help launch the new strategy.

During September, a series of activities, information events, and training sessions were run by members of the city's dementia partnership to mark the publication of 'Dementia Together'. The partnership includes the Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Forward, York Health and Care Partnership, York Minds and Voices, and Healthwatch.

The programme was well received by those who attended, offering a wide variety of events which reflect the strategy's key themes of Preventing Well, Diagnosing Well, Supporting Well, Living Well and Dying Well. The sessions covered topics ranging from addressing positive mental health, to dementia care training; home technology to support young-onset dementia diagnosis; support for families and carers, a theatrical workshop on dementia in the LGBT community, to making paper birds and a group bike ride.

York Jobs Fair:

More than 70 York employers and 400 residents attended this year's York Jobs Fair, the biggest since the start of the pandemic.

The event at the York Railway Institute saw employers including Marks and Spencer, Hiscox, The Grand Hotel, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in attendance. Several education institutions also helped provide residents with information and guidance about acquiring new skills, new jobs or changing their employment in York.

The event, which is funded by City of York Council and organised by York Learning in partnership with Job Centre Plus, was very well received by both employers and would-be jobseekers.

Many colleagues will know that the York Job Fairs are always hugely popular both with employers and prospective employees and I'm delighted at how much they've grown since 2012, when the first such event was organised in York. It was fantastic to see how many local and regional businesses were at the York Railway Institute to offer new opportunities, career changes and qualifications to local residents, particularly after a few difficult years.

York Business Festival:

The programme of events for York Business Festival 2022 has now been published and is due to be held next month. Now in its 12th year, York Business Festival 2022 will be a month-long programme of free events from the 1st November, to the 30th November.

This year's festival will focus on how to support growth and spark innovation for local businesses, given the context of current and future challenges. The events will cater to all business needs and have been developed around the new 10-Year Economic Strategy. The programme will include a series of sessions supported by various partners that cover 5 major themes. These are:

- An economy driven by good business.
- Thriving businesses - the right conditions for Sustainable Growth.
- Reducing carbon - a greener economy.
- Developing our people - a thriving workforce.
- York as a global city.

The month-long festival will see local, regional, national, and international speakers come together to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing our economy and local businesses. I would encourage fellow councillors to take a look at this year's festival programme and where possible, enjoy the wealth of events on offer this year.

Rugby League World Cup:

Next month, the Rugby League World Cup comes to York, as the LNER Community Stadium will host a women's group game and both women's semi-finals. We're also delighted to welcome the New Zealand Men's Rugby League team to York, the first of a number of teams that will be staying in the city for the Rugby League World Cup, including the women's world champions, Australia.

This tournament will be viewed across the world, and I have no doubt these teams will inspire a new generation of athletes here in York. We will be working with our partners to ensure this event creates a long-lasting legacy for the sport and the wider community, with resident engagement set to be a key part of the programme.

Bringing this world event to York is the result of a huge partnership effort, and I know that our residents will give all the teams a fantastic welcome. I hope the teams enjoy their stay in York and I'm sure colleagues will join me in wishing them all the best in their matches.