

**Council**

**20 October 2022**

## **Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council**

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### **Cost of living crisis**

The council is working to support residents through the cost of living crisis, in partnership with money experts who are hosting a month of activities, events and signposting.

From 11 October to 11 November, the partnership is encouraging everyone to make sure they're getting everything they're entitled to; to maximise income and reduce outgoings; and not to suffer alone. Whether or not someone is struggling with money or not, going through these steps can make a big difference.

While some benefits may be familiar, there could be others that residents haven't heard of and may be entitled to, such as Pension Credit. Even residents with savings or their own home could be eligible. Maximising income by reducing outgoings could include tips on how to trim home energy usage or moving to cheaper suppliers.

This crisis has made it more important than ever to start conversations about money, a step which could help residents to become more financially confident and resilient. There is advice and information available to everyone, no matter what their situation.

Supporting this work through the partnership are organisations such as Older Citizens Advocacy York, York Energy Advice, Stop Loan Sharks and Community First Credit Union.

This campaign is building on the first Challenge Poverty, Talk Money Month held last year and on a week of action held in May 2022. It is also being supported by an ongoing campaign to signpost people to sources of information and advice, and the next edition of the *Our City* newsletter:

Cllr Ayre can tell you more about the £13.6 million being paid out this year to residents eligible for a range of support the Council and from the Government. It may be helpful to tell residents about the Government's independent and anonymous benefits calculators to see what financial

support can be claimed at [www.gov.uk/benefitscalculators](http://www.gov.uk/benefitscalculators). Advice is also available across the city from your local community venue or library.”:

Installing energy efficiency measures makes your home cheaper to heat. The Green Homes Grants include improvements such as loft insulation, under floor insulation, external wall insulation, PV solar panels and air source heat pumps. Call 0333 202 4820 or visit [www.york.gov.uk/GreenHomesFunding](http://www.york.gov.uk/GreenHomesFunding) for more details

## **Devolution Deal**

Following the approval at the special full council meeting earlier this month, local consultation is now set to begin on the Devolution Deal for York and North Yorkshire. The proposed deal marks a major milestone for York, with significant government funding for the region over the next 30 years and the opportunity to work together across North Yorkshire to deliver greater autonomy and tackle the climate and cost of living crisis we face. After many months of discussion we have reached the point where the statutory consultation gets underway

I would like to thank all the officers who have spent many hours working up this proposal in partnership with colleagues in North Yorkshire, securing a wide range of elements which will be of significant importance to our city and the future prosperity and wellbeing of our citizens. At this time when all local government budgets are under severe strain it is important to consider that this funding is only available to us through this deal. The proposed deal also comes with some new powers that are devolved down from central government or other agencies, bringing new powers closer to the people in the city, albeit regionally.

There are some very important elements including the provision of an additional £50m for York Central to help us to bring forward an exemplar zero carbon development that provides economic prosperity and affordable living at the heart of York yet helping to sustain our historic city close by.

I do acknowledge the position of many including my party in opposing the centralising of power in the metro mayor model, particularly given that some powers including some transport powers will be moved up to the region’s new combined authority. However, as mentioned earlier, this is a government process in which we have very little control and

fundamentally, if we want to secure that investment, this is the only deal on the table. .

Devolution can help us accelerate the local and regional work we are undertaking to address many of our challenges, including access to significant devolved transport budgets (and powers such as bus franchising) from Government. The scale of investment could help us to work more effectively across the region to tackle the climate emergency on a wider scale following the carbon reduction pathway which has been mapped out by the LEP and the regional climate commission.

On such an important matter, it is only right that we ensure that we consult widely and engage with all stakeholders and residents before a final decision. Feedback from the communities in our city will be essential to helping us all consider that decision, so it is important we can get moving on the consultation and welcome contributions to help ensure that we get the governance right for the new Combined Authority and the elected mayor with effect from May 2024 .

### **Bus Service Improvement Plan and Bus Services**

This is a critical time for public transport in the face of changing travel patterns, increased costs and staffing challenges. I am very much aware of the concerns for the future of bus services in the city, especially seeing the scale of cuts threatened in other parts of the country. Despite changes in government I hope that the recent last minute additional 6 months of funding to operators is a sign that the government is still committed to its Better Bus strategy. We also have the prospects of promotional £2 single fares from Jan 2023 but will need to work with operators and the DfT to ensure that York residents get the maximum long term benefits from such innovation.

York was one of only two places in the Yorkshire region to receive indicative BSIP funding. Our BSIP sets out how we will continue its long-standing programme to improve bus services in York to encourage greater use of the service – in support of the city’s local transport and environmental policies, and to recover service use to levels seen before the covid pandemic – indeed higher than that.

As explained in the report approved by Executive earlier this month, the Enhanced Partnership has now been ‘made’ and funding will secure upgrades to York’s bus infrastructure, including stops, shelters,

improved bus information and real-time information screens, as well as improvements to local bus service levels and new bus priorities. Another key part of the plan is also improved ticketing and cheaper fares for young people. Park and Ride site upgrades will also be undertaken through this investment, including overnight parking and improved connections to longer-distance bus services. However the funding will not entirely shield us from the impact of changing travel patterns, and the bus network review being conducted now will help to identify changes that are needed to create a comprehensive but sustainable range of provision for all parts of York.

Many of the proposed BSIP Enhanced Partnership measures are designed to improve accessibility both in terms of physical access and information. The plans for example also include a feasibility study of a new city centre shuttle service and provision of audio-visual announcements on buses and at bus stops.

We're committed to delivering bold, local action to deliver economic and social benefits, such as new green jobs, economic savings and much improved well-being for York residents. Improved public transport is not only a benefit to local people and the local economy, but also a key tool in meeting our climate emergency and Net Zero commitments.

The BSIP funding and this new partnership represent a great opportunity to drive change through very significant investment. The Enhanced Partnership has now been established and work will soon be underway to start implementing the measures within the improvement plan. I am pleased to report that a range of user groups and local organisations have already been invited to nominate representatives for the 'Enhanced Partnership Forum' which will have a crucial role in helping to shape service provision and guide the delivery of the plan.

### **New Electric Buses**

Colleagues may remember that earlier this year the Council was successful in securing the second largest funding allocation in the country from the DfT to deliver new electric buses, over £8 million from the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) funding scheme. This follows on from the significant investment in 2020 securing the existing fleet of locally manufactured Optaire double decker electric buses, making a significant improvement to air quality within the city and helping to reduce running costs and carbon impact of the whole service.

Following that work, First Bus has now placed an order for 44 Electric Vehicle buses with UK manufacturer Wrightbus, investing £10.2 million of their own funding in the new vehicles, along with the further £8.4 million from ZEBRA grant complete the electric fleet project. The investment includes:

24 single-decker buses and 20 double-decker buses will save nearly 2,700 tonnes of CO2 every year, and the first vehicles expected to arrive in 2023. This is the largest ever UK EV bus order outside of London, and it is estimated that the project will be completed over the course of the next 2 years.

### **Haxby Station**

Progress has been made in recent months on the project includes the completion of a resident consultation, securing of an additional £1.1m funding from government and the submission of a Levelling Up Fund bid to improve the infrastructure which will support sustainable travel options for travel to and from the station.

The recent government funding announcement represents another positive step for the project. This funding and the progress made most recently will ensure we are ready - if the full funding is agreed by government – to build a new station at Haxby by 2024.

The new station would provide direct access to the rail network for thousands of local residents from Haxby, Wigginton, and surrounding communities. This means improved access to new employment, business and leisure opportunities, increasing connectivity for our part of York, and providing faster, more efficient, and sustainable travel.

I look forward to working with local stakeholders and delivery partners to ensure that this project is finally realised and brings the desired benefits for the local community and the city.