

**Decision Session – Executive Member for  
Culture, Leisure and Communities**

**31 January 2023**

Report of the Director of Customer and Communities

**City of York Council - Human Rights City Commitment Strategy**

**Summary**

1. This report seeks to reaffirm City of York Council’s commitment to being a Human Rights City and to move forward the relationship between CYC and the York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN).

**Recommendations**

2. At this stage the Executive Member is asked to:
  - Re-commit to the declaration made in 2017 to become a Human Rights City, recognising that this marked an ambition and was a significant step on a journey, and putting those rights at the heart of decision making;
  - Commit to moving forward in agreement with YHRCN with a refreshed structure for the Human Rights and Equalities Board produced by a joint task group;
  - Facilitate in partnership an annual or bi-annual national Human Rights City conference;
  - Implement the Council’s responsibilities within the attached Action Plan (Annex A) and any agreed priority items in the annual indicator report including:
    - Work with the YHRCN and the University of York to develop and deliver Human Rights training to CYC leadership team, managers and staff.
    - Commit to planned meetings between the YHRCN Executive, senior members, and officers to discuss progress with the human rights agenda.

- Agree to work alongside YHRCN to review the 'Community Voices' project to ensure that it meets its original objective to work with the most marginalised.

and

- Agree for a regular public reporting back through the Executive Member's Decision Sessions.

Reason: To reaffirm City of York Council's commitment to being a Human Rights City.

## **Background**

3. On 24 April 2017 the Lord Mayor of York signed a declaration making York the UK's first Human Rights City. The declaration states that it marks an ambition, not a destination, and as such work on the human rights agenda should be ongoing, with human rights and equalities at the heart of policy and decision making in the city.
4. York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN) is a civil society partnership hosted jointly by York CVS (Centre for Voluntary Service) and the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) at the University of York. York CVS roots the Network within York's vibrant civil society. CAHR roots the Network in wider human rights discourse.
5. In early 2018 the Human Rights and Equalities Board (HREB) was set up to work with partners across the city to further the Human Rights agenda. This board has been Chaired by the relevant Executive Member. Until recently this model worked relatively well, with CYC and YHRCN working closely together on a number of priority areas from the annual indicator reports for example on hate crime, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and homelessness- with YHRCN retaining the role of 'critical friend'.
6. In 2021 City of York Council's Executive made a decision to alter access arrangements to the city centre for Blue Badge holders as reported here: [Agenda for Executive on Thursday, 18 November 2021, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#).
7. Executive made the decision on balance of all the evidence from the report including consultation and scrutiny feedback to reduce the risk to life caused by the use of vehicles as a weapon in the City Centre's most heavily pedestrianised streets. The decision was to remove as many vehicles as possible from accessing the whole footstreets area during pedestrianised hours which included those with blue badges.
8. In December 2021 YHRCN released a statement expressing its 'disappointment and dismay' at the decision taken by Executive. It

highlighted the fact the network had been commissioned to produce a report on how the council could respect human rights when taking complex decisions which, it felt, was ultimately ignored.

9. The YHRCN referred to this in their 2021 '*York Human Rights City Indicator Report*' here: [York Human Rights City Indicator Report 2021](#) as '...the biggest challenge to-date to York's Human Rights City status..... the York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN), a civil society coalition, is looking to reset its engagement with the City of York Council'.
10. Since the City Centre Access decision taken in November 2021 the Human Rights and Equalities Board has not met. CYC and YHRCN agreed there is a need to develop new structures to move forward constructively.
11. Members of the CYC Executive and leading members of the YNRCN have met twice to consider how to move forward to ensure that any governance model in the future does not fall or cease if two key members are at fundamentally different positions on a matter of significance to residents in the city. Equally the governance structure must demonstrate there is trust that all parties have considered fully the Human Rights impacts of decisions being considered, and that this is at the heart of policy and processes going forward.
12. Within these proposals CYC and YHRCN will work together to reset their relationship within the new structure and provide residents with reassurance that there is real intent by all parties to deliver on the promise of being a Human Rights City.

## **Consultation**

13. The Leader, Deputy Leader and portfolio holder along with senior officers including the Chief Operating Officer have met with the YHRCN Executive to develop the proposals included in this report.

## **Options**

14. It is open to the Executive to accept the recommendation to move forward on the proposals in this report and its commitment to Human Rights City status or decline to do so.

## **Analysis**

15. This sets out in further detail the Council's commitment to deliver its contribution to reset this relationship and to move forward with a refreshed strategy and architecture around the Human Rights agenda.
16. YHRCN presented CYC with a 6-point Plan which has been used as a steer in creating this report and the attached Action Plan at

Annex A.

17. CYC and YHRCN agree there is a need to develop new structures to move forward. This will recognise that consideration of human rights will entail debate and, at times, contention and that also there needs to be a mechanism for direct discussion between the council and the YHRC Network that respects the different roles of the two bodies. This report is asking for Executive to endorse ongoing work to develop joint proposals for a governance structure that resets the relationship and achieves the objectives outlined below.
18. In relation to the development of new structures the Executive agrees and recognises that no one single group, board or structure can meet all needs and that we should consider structures that provide, as a minimum, for the following:
  - Tackling the issues raised within the York Human Rights City Indicator Report and reporting back on progress; and
  - Engaging the city's key agencies in the vision of York Human Rights City, developing human rights approaches as a means of every day problem solving for all and encouraging "translators" and "champions" who will help to institutionalise human rights values across the city's institutions.
19. There are several practical steps the council, and Executive, is taking to demonstrate its shared commitment to being a Human Rights City.
20. It has already been agreed there is a need to allocate sufficient officer resource to Human Rights and Equalities. As such, a team to focus on all aspects of Human Rights, Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion is being brought together and led by the Assistant Director of Customer & Communities. The team will include the Access Officer, a post created to ensure accessible design standards are developed and adhered to, and equalities impacts for the disabled community are considered as part of associated impact assessments which will directly influence key decisions and policy development.
21. The team will also provide strategic direction and organise training in relation to the council's human rights and equalities work, increasing knowledge and awareness amongst all officers and elected members. The Human Rights and Equalities Impact Assessments will be a fundamental part of decision making and not a 'tick box exercise'. This process will be continually developed and refined.
22. Reporting back on progress against associated action plans regularly to the Executive Member in public will be undertaken.

23. The council in partnership will facilitate an annual or bi-annual national Human Rights City conference commencing in 2023/24 in York with a view to sharing national best practice and undertake learning and development.
24. YHRCN run the Community Voices project on behalf of CYC, with the intent of amplifying the voices and agendas of those residents in marginalised communities and groups. It is acknowledged that YHRCN are seeking to jointly review this project review this programme with CYC, to ensure that it meets its original objective to work with the most marginalised and:
  - a. Create an opportunity for them to be heard both individually and collectively and influence policy making.
  - b. Encourage meaningful participation by engaging with communities and individuals in ways that enabled those participants to set the agenda.
  - c. Engage with, and understand, the needs and priority issues for those whose voices are not being heard already.

## **Council Plan**

25. Human Rights City status is consistent with the Council Plan priority of “Safe communities and culture for all”.

## **Implications**

26.
  - a. **Financial** – The costs of the proposals in the report can be contained with current council budgets
  - b. **Legal** – The continuation of the Human Rights City commitment will assist in demonstrating the Council’s consideration of the human rights impacts of both the Executive and non-Executive decisions it makes; however, all parties must be clear that, with regard to decision-making, the Council’s discretion to take decisions which are contrary to expressed views cannot be fettered.
  - c. **Equalities** – The Executive Member is not being asked to make a decision which requires a full Equalities Impact Assessment. However, the recommendations in the report and attached action plan have clear, positive implications for both equalities and Human Rights. The review of EIAs, which will be co-produced with the Centre for Applied Human Rights, and the transition to using Human Rights and Equalities Impact Assessments (HR&EIA) will ensure proportionality in decision making. The

ongoing recruitment and establishment of an equalities team will significantly strengthen the Council's commitment to Human Rights and Equalities.

- d. **Human Resources** – As per the content of the report
- e. **Crime and Disorder** - If the recommendations of this this report are implemented the hate/crime elements of work, undertaken in partnership, will have a positive impact on crime and disorder.
- f. **Other** - There are no known Information Technology, Property, or other implications arising from the report.

### **Risk Management**

- 27. The main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which concern risks to effective working in partnership and the Human Rights City status.

**Contact Details**

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	<b>Report Approved</b>	✓	<b>Date</b> 20 January 2023
<b>Specialist Implications Officers:</b> Legal – Bryn Roberts Finance – Patrick Looker			
<b>Wards Affected:</b> All			
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>			

**Annexes:**

Annex A - CYC Action Plan

**Background Documents:**

Executive Report November 2021 on City Centre Access:

[Agenda for Executive on Thursday, 18 November 2021, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

**Abbreviations:**

- CAHR - Centre for Applied Human Rights
- CMT – Corporate Management Team
- CYC – City of York Council
- EIA - Equalities Impact Assessment
- HREB - Human Rights and Equalities Board
- HR&EIA - Human Rights and Equalities Impact Assessments
- NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training
- York CVS - Centre for Voluntary Service
- YHRCN - York Human Rights City Network