

**Report of the Leader of the Council**

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As we enter the second half of 2022, there is great deal that has been accomplished across the city, and with this, much to be proud of – from welcoming Ukrainian refugees in our city, to communities bouncing back from the impact of the pandemic.

Of course, there is also significant work ahead and at the time of writing this report, the cost of living continues to worsen and impact on every element of life in our city. Recognising that this crisis is affecting staff, partners, residents and businesses, I would like to thank everyone for their continued work in support of our city, despite the challenges, and whilst there is much to overcome, there is also a great deal to be optimistic about here in York.

**Devolution:**

Since the Government announced that they would seek to pursue a mayoral devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire in the Levelling-Up White Paper, negotiations with ministers and civil servants have continued intensively over the past few months.

As indicated by the Government in letters sent to both myself and Cllr Carl Les, Leader of North Yorkshire, the Government see a Mayoral Combined Authority as the best form of devolution for York and North Yorkshire, a policy that is echoed by the new framework for Devolution outlined in the Levelling-Up White Paper.

I'm sure colleagues will recognise that devolution is an opportunity to deliver a real step-change in investment for our city and region, particularly when you look at the levels of funding being channelled to neighbouring combined authorities in West Yorkshire and Tees Valley. To achieve this, any deal has to be right for York and through the current negotiations, we are working hard to secure the best possible deal that the Government will offer.

The timeframe for this process is moving swiftly. If and when a deal is signed, we will consult with residents, businesses and scrutiny on the

details before the Council, including Full Council, ultimately considers the deal later in the year.

### **Ukrainian Refugee Support:**

With Putin's devastating war continuing to wreak havoc on the people of Ukraine, York has been playing its part in welcoming Ukrainian refugees in the city as they flee their homes. At the time of writing this report, York currently has just under 200 Ukrainian 'Guests' staying in the city and we expect that number to continue to rise significantly in light of the number of Sponsor matches currently approved on the Government's portal – we expect a number in excess of 300.

On arrival to York, Guests will receive a visit from council staff to help them apply for school places for children and for Universal Credit and to register with GPs, set up a bank account, etc. We provide a laptop, digital support and sim cards, bus passes and help with transport. Each Guest receives a £200 one-off payment on a preloaded card to help them with their settlement.

The Council is also co-ordinating wrap-around support alongside partners, including:

- Fortnightly Thursday drop-in at York City Church (about 190 people attending);
- Fortnightly Tuesday drop-in at Gateway Church, Acomb;
- Weekly Wednesday RAY drop-in at YSJ;
- Trauma and wellbeing support;
- Support into employment in conjunction with the Job Centre;
- Parenting support;
- Specialist CAY advice service training Ukrainians with a view to provide permanent employment as advisors;
- Parent and child sessions at York Explore;
- Health Checks;
- Accredited training for Ukrainians to become self-employed interpreters.

On top of this, we have funded City of Sanctuary to help support Sponsors and to help source accommodation. They have a database of over 400 people interested in helping. They have coordinated requests from Ukrainians wanting to come on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, linking them with potential sponsors in York.

In June, we launched the 'Our City migrant hub' which is run by local residents with lived experience of being a migrant. In partnership with York Explore and other organisations across York, the Hub is offering a multi-language signposting services in the morning and opportunities to engage with the local community in the afternoon. Every Saturday, there are various community led cultural workshops as a way to recognise that integration requires two stages: one is awareness of the British system and values, the second, raising cultural awareness of other settled communities in York. We have almost 50 bilingual volunteers who work closely in delivering these initiatives.

The Council has worked at pace to put in place a very comprehensive response, with lots of extra provision, and I would like to put on record my thanks to the staff, partners and volunteers who have undertaken this work in such a short space of time.

Looking forward, we need to be reflective and guided by the voice of our Ukrainian guests, and to recognise that sadly, Putin's war is likely to continue for the foreseeable future and thus, they will probably be staying for a long time. Therefore, we must continue to support them in their settlement and integration.

### **Financial Support for Residents:**

As mentioned earlier in my report, the deepening cost of living crisis is having a detrimental impact on residents across the city, particularly those individuals and families already facing financial hardship. In response, the Council has taken a number of steps to help local residents over the coming months.

Efforts to tackle holiday hunger and food poverty were a key priority for this administration throughout the pandemic and our immediate recovery from its impact. Despite very limited funding available, we have made repeated investment to support those children most in need of help.

In May, the Executive agreed a set of recommendations, received from Scrutiny, to help respond to the anticipated increase in the number of children claiming free school meals in York. Recommendations 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 is in addition to the £50,000 already

invested to provide food vouchers to families in times of need, not just in the school holidays. Other recommendations include continuing to promote the Department for Education funded Holiday Activity and Food Programme in York and continue cross-party lobbying to the government to make the scheme more flexible.

Furthermore, over £1 million was invested in our Household Support Fund to help during the cost of living crisis. Payments will be made to qualifying residents that meet the criteria of the scheme. Payments will be made in July and will include families with children which are claiming Council Tax Support, recipients of Personal Independence Payments and Disabled Living Allowance at the higher rate, and pensioners claiming CTS.

This follows on from the financial support provided through the York Financial Support Scheme, as well as the distribution of fuel vouchers and provision of Free School Meals during Easter break from the funding allocated as part of this year's budget.

Lastly, households across York have been receiving their £150 council tax rebate to help reduce the impact of national energy cost increases, following the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Spring Statement. Payments are continuing to be made and expected to be delivered to more than 48,500 households. I am sure colleagues will join me in thanking the teams behind processing these payments – a large undertaking given the small amount of time to administer.

This is clearly a very challenging time for so many, so whilst it's important for us to do what we can as a local authority to ease the burden of the cost of living crisis, Local Government cannot do it alone. I hope that serious action is taken by the Government urgently to properly address the underlying issues of the current economic challenges and I welcome continued cross-party lobbying to central Government on the issue.

### **Children Services Action Plan:**

Following the recent inspection of the Council's Children's Social Care services in March this year, intensive work has been underway to develop a new action plan to immediately improve key areas of work within Children Services.

Whilst the inspection recognised that significant investment had been put into the service and that there were a number of areas of strengths, including support provided to children and families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the corporate leadership's commitment to ensure that the needs of children are prioritised, the overall inspection judgement was that York 'required improvement to be good'.

The draft action plan, which has received input from colleagues at Scrutiny, sets out how improvements will be made in 7 areas of Children's Social Work. These are:

1. The consistency of written records so that they provide an accurate account of decision-making for all children;
2. The quality of assessments to ensure that they consistently inform care planning;
3. The effectiveness of social work supervision in progressing plans for children and addressing practice shortfalls;
4. The analysis of return home interviews;
5. Responses to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless;
6. The pace of planning for children in unregistered children's homes;
7. Children's influence and attendance at the corporate parenting board.

The majority of recommendations made by Ofsted had already been identified locally and I am pleased to report that work in these areas is already underway. Work to develop aspects of the service has been ongoing for some time and the action plan provides us with an opportunity to further refine our commitment to continuous improvement, and to demonstrate the changes that have already been implemented to achieve these goals.

The pandemic provided unprecedented challenges for children's social care, to which the service responded, and there were positive steps taken even under those considerable pressures. This draft Action Plan will help us to continue this work and further improve our services so, together, we can ensure that every child in York receives a better start in life.

## **York's bid for GBR:**

Whilst we still await the announcement of the GBR HQ shortlist from the Government, rumoured to be delayed due to the impact of nationwide rail strikes, we continue to promote and communicate the strengths of York's bid for GBR, something that has been underlined by 2 new reports highlighting the importance of York's rail sector and the opportunities the new HQ could bring.

The Council's latest Quarterly Economic Update estimates the York rail industry already has 5,200 employees and that the proportion of highly skilled jobs is larger in York than UK average levels. Our rail industry, which with York at the heart of the Yorkshire and Humber cluster, is a relatively large part of the Yorkshire economy, and larger than anywhere outside London. It has been estimated at roughly £356.3 million gross value added. Therefore, moving the GBR HQ to York could have a major impact on the local economy, and estimates the move would add £110 million to York's economy, creating 1,600 new jobs.

In a further boost to York's bid, Northern Policy Foundation has published a report which spells out a £600 million risk to the government if it "fails to learn lessons from past civil service relocations" and makes clear that "if locations are not carefully, selected moves can be disastrous".

York has already made a clear and compelling case to be the new National Headquarters for Great British Railways, and the sheer strength of our bid demonstrates what an exciting and important opportunity the new GBR headquarters represents. We will continue our work with partners and colleagues to promote York's bid and I look forward to the announcement of the shortlist.

## **Local Plan Progress:**

The Council has been notified that the next stage of Local Plan hearing sessions are set to take place this month from the 12<sup>th</sup> July, and are expected to last around three weeks. This comes after the latest round of hearings, which started on 10<sup>th</sup> May and took into account comments submitted to-date in relation to soundness, were concluded.

Being able to move to Phase 3 hearings is a promising step forward towards adopting a Local Plan for our city, in what would be the first time in 60 years. It is now crucial that we continue to build on the progress and work with the inspectors to take this plan forward to adoption.

We're confident that this is a robust and sound plan, one which will ensure York is able to deliver the housing and jobs our city needs, whilst also protecting the city's unique character, green belt and natural beauty.

### **York's new HyperHubs:**

York is now proud to be the home of one of the largest electric vehicle charging hubs in the North. The city's new electric vehicle HyperHub at Monks Cross has opened this month, following the completion of works from Northern Powergrid.

For a limited time, the new site won't be charging for electricity, in a bid to test the new technology and encourage residents and visitors to use the new site.

Both HyperHub sites contain 4 Ultra-Rapid (150kW) and 4 Rapid (50kW) vehicle chargers, helping to support the uptake of modern electric vehicles that have larger battery capacities and are capable of Ultra Rapid charging. The new Hyperhubs not only offer sustainability, convenience and speed, but are also one of the cheapest places in the UK for Rapid and Ultra Rapid charging (25 pence per kWh).

Our Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy and work with EvoEnergy are key to the success of this project. The HyperHubs are just the latest part of city wide work to support more sustainable travel and our efforts to make York cleaner and greener.

### **York Central:**

The York Central project continues to make significant progress, with a number of important milestones in the development of the York Central site reached, from establishing the York Central Partnership, of which the Council is a member, to creating the Enterprise Zone and award-winning masterplan.

Over the past few months, residents will have seen contractors on site delivering the first phase of infrastructure works, which is now complete. Having had the opportunity to visit the site and see the works taking place, it is encouraging to know that real progress is being made, something I'm sure residents and businesses have wanted to see for many years now.

Unfortunately, like so many other areas of the economy, the cost of construction has increased. The original costs of the infrastructure works were estimated and verified in 2018 and since then, we have seen rampant inflation linked to events such as Brexit, the pandemic and sadly, the war in Ukraine. With all this in mind, and given the significance of the York Central scheme, we have agreed to release £35 million of Enterprise Zone funding and enter into agreement with Homes England to contribute to the infrastructure costs. By doing so, we can maintain that crucial momentum and ensure some of the public benefits to the scheme outlined in the masterplan are delivered, such as new pedestrian and cycle routes.

### **Housing Delivery Programme:**

Over the past month, our ambitious Housing Delivery Programme has earned 2 planning awards and secured approval to build 85 new zero-carbon homes in the city.

The Planning Awards 2022 named the programme Best Housing Scheme (Fewer than 500 homes), and highly commended the scheme for the Design Excellence award. The Royal Town Planning Institute Yorkshire awarded the programme Excellence in Plan-Making, and will take forward the scheme to the national RTPI awards later this year. This is excellent recognition of the work and objectives of the Housing Delivery Programme. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff who have been working on the programme for their outstanding progress and of course, the work to come.

Alongside these awards, planning permission has now been granted to build 85 energy-efficient, zero-carbon homes at the Hospital Fields Road and Ordnance Lane. At present, 40% of the homes are earmarked for a mixture of social rent and shared ownership, with grant funding now being sought to increase this further.



## **York Outer Ring Road:**

Progress continues to be made on dualling the York Outer Ring Road. We know from the consultation process that residents and city partners are squarely behind this scheme and therefore, to reduce as much delay and prolongation as possible, myself and colleagues agreed to proceed with necessary utility diversions at the last meeting of Executive.

Learning from other major projects, we know the process of diverting utilities can be a timely and costly process, so factoring this in at this early stage will be a real benefit to minimising delay and ultimately, progressing the scheme. We are looking forward to the submission of a planning application, which will signal a major next step forward for this important project. Upgrading the Ring Road provides us with an opportunity to reduce congestion and journey times and enhance pedestrian and cycle facilities, which would see car journeys move out of the city centre.

## **The Guildhall:**

It will be a great pleasure to join colleagues for our first Full Council in the newly restored Guildhall Council Chamber this month. Earlier in April, works to restore the complex were completed, with the new leaseholder, the University of York, already helping local businesses setup in the complex.

The Guildhall works began in September 2019. The refurbishment and redevelopment follows a long period where only reactive repairs were carried out; and represents the most significant investment since extensive rebuilding works after the bombing in 1942 that caused serious damage. As colleagues will see, the redevelopment of the historic buildings has seen modern elements incorporated around the historic core of the Guildhall, to secure the long-term future of the site: with high quality offices, shared business space and meeting rooms, which will also be available for community use. There will also be a new café, riverside restaurant, and new external areas with better access for local residents.

## **Levelling-Up Fund Bids:**

The Council has submitted a series of bids to the Government's Levelling-Up Fund to secure further investment in major regeneration and transport projects in the city.

The first bid was submitted for £20 million of funding to revitalise the city centre, as part of three linked projects supported by partners. This includes £10 million to deliver the new Castle and Eye of York public realm, as part of the Castle Gateway regeneration, and a further £10 million for Parliament Street and Coney Street and the Riverside Quarter developments. If successful, this funding would help us deliver new and high quality public space in the Castle Gateway area, make major improvements to Parliament Street and open up a riverside walkway, with improvements to Coney Street.

In addition to this, we have also submitted a transport bid to help deliver Haxby Railway station. This seeks to secure £5 million to support the proposed station and improve active travel links and accessibility in local communities, beyond those already included as part of the Haxby Station project proposal.

Whilst our first bid for Levelling-Up funding was unsuccessful, we were encouraged to receive positive feedback from civil servants. We have listened to the comments and will adapt our bid to give it the best possible chance, and whilst recognising that York has been placed in the lowest tier for levelling-up grants, we have a strong and compelling case.

## **Shared Prosperity Funding:**

As colleagues will know, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will replace the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). Projects previously funded by the ESIF include various skills, employment and community based projects across York and the wider region. As such, we have asked officers to undertake the necessary work to unlock York's share of the investment, including engaging with partners and preparing an investment plan for the city.

The investment plan, once approved by Government, could see over £5 million shared amongst projects in the city over the next three years through various organisations in the city. The Investment Plan will

reflect the city's priorities and a partnership group will be created to ensure that a strong plan is created and submitted. We are lucky to have so many great partners and organisations across the city who make a real difference and I look forward to working with them to submit the strongest possible investment plan on behalf of the city.

### **Developing Family Hubs:**

Families in York will soon be able to access services, support and advice from a wide range of child and health professionals in newly created Family Hubs. York is one of 7 areas in the UK to be awarded the funding to develop a Family Hub model by the Department for Education.

The new hubs will deliver support services for the whole family, from conception, through a child's early years, until they are 19 years of age (or 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities). They will include services such as midwifery, health visitors, mental health support and services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities - all to be provided in one place for the first time. The aim is to ensure that everyone can access the help and support they need at an early stage, tackling any issues before they escalate. Detailed proposals for the hubs will be developed in conjunction with local young people and families, and we have committed to the Family Hubs being up and running by March 2024.

This funding enables us to bring services together for the first time, providing universal support for children, young people and families in our city. A dedicated team of professionals will be drawn from a wide range of organisations to progress this work. I'd like to thank the team who put the bid together and for creating such a strong vision for the hubs.

### **Health Trainers making an impact:**

The Health Trainer service, which has helped hundreds of residents gain access to free health and wellbeing support, celebrated its first anniversary during June. Data shows that over 600 residents, aged 16 years and over, have benefited from the Health Trainers service in the past year, including:

- Roughly 400 York residents gaining support on how to quit smoking;
- And around 200 residents seeking advice on healthy eating or weight management.

Our free health training service aims to help as many residents as possible in their health and wellbeing. Whether that be stopping smoking, reducing alcohol intake or generally helping them to find groups or activities and get back into the community, there is plenty of support on offer for everyone.

### **York Pride:**

It was excellent to see communities across the city celebrate Pride Month this June. Colleagues will have seen that the city walls were illuminated in the rainbow colours of Pride and the rainbow flag was proudly on display at the Mansion House.

The council was delighted to support and see the return of York Pride a few weeks ago, the first time since 2019. Staff and councillors joined in the celebrations and the city-wide march on 18<sup>th</sup> June, as well as supporting various stalls on the Knavesmire.

It's been 50 years since the first Pride march in the UK. Recent tragic events in Oslo continue to show that we can't take progress for granted and so we must continue to take meaningful action where we can to ensure no one is discriminated because of who they are.

### **Celebrating the Platinum Jubilee:**

I know that colleagues will agree that the bank holiday weekend was a special occasion for the City, as communities across York celebrated The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and historic 70 year reign.

It was excellent to see residents and visitors enjoy the wide range of events York had to offer, from the beacon lighting ceremony, to the various street parties in local communities. York's unique connection to the Crown and the Monarch is an important part of our city's legacy, history and a great source of pride. Her Majesty is a true example of a true public servant, dedicating her life to this country, and it has been excellent to see our city celebrate her service.

### **Congratulations to York City FC:**

As I'm sure everyone will know, York City Football Club were victorious in their National League North playoff final against Boston, winning by 2 goals to send the club to the National League next season. Around 7,500 fans travelled to the LNER Community Stadium to watch the match. It was a record turnout for the club in the newly built LNER Community Stadium, which was successfully built and opened in 2020 following significant investment from the Council.

I know that everyone across the city will join me in celebrating this fantastic achievement and wish the club all the best next season in what is their centenary year.