

Report of the Executiver Leader Council Council 22 March 2021

With over a year since the first cases of Coronavirus in the UK were declared in York, the impact of the pandemic continues to drive the majority of the Council's work and resources, and with the recently published 'Roadmap out of lockdown' from the Government, a considerable amount of work is taking place to ensure that we continue to prioritise the health and safety of residents as restrictions are relaxed.

At the same time, there are other significant challenges and work streams ongoing, with the recently launched consultation on local government reorganisation, proposals to establish a York Health and Care Alliance, progressing our crucial regeneration programmes and much more.

As ever, I remain incredibly grateful to Council staff, volunteers, councillors and city partners for their efforts in helping respond to these citywide challenges and with the Easter break fast approaching, I hope that everyone will take the opportunity to have some well-earned rest.

Responding to COVID-19 and new national restrictions:

Since my last Leader's Report to Full Council in December, we saw national restrictions tightened from the 4th January to introduce the current national lockdown following the concerning increase in the number of positive cases across the country, linked to the spread of the new variant of the virus first discovered in Kent.

During that time, the Council acted fast to support local communities by deploying additional measures to keep key frontline services going, such as gritting and waste, as well as to ensure that support for vulnerable residents was offered via the community hubs network. To maintain services, stricter staff bubbles were introduced to protect staff, some staff were redeployed from other services and regular testing of staff was introduced in the Council's key services.

Early in January 2021, the Council expanded testing to include anyone living or working in York who is unable to work from home during the lockdown and who come into contact with other people during the course of their work. This was then further improved in February, where an agreement was reached to provide symptom-free testing at the new York Leisure Centre, part of the fantastic facilities at the York Community Stadium Complex.

The economic impact of the pandemic continues to be sorely felt for many local businesses and in response, the Council has continued to process millions in grant payments and rate relief to support the city's business community during this difficult period. The Council has consistently been one of the fastest paying local authorities in the country and has used discretionary funding to support thousands of York businesses which have not qualified for central government grants. More recently, around £7.5 million of grant payments was issued on the 8th March, taking the total financial support processed by the Council to nearly £150 million during the pandemic. These payments relate to ongoing grants to support businesses through the current lockdown, and not to any announcements made in the recent Budget. It is important to highlight that the Council is not in control of the timeline for paying Restart Grants and the Government has indicated that Restart Grants will not be paid until at least 1st April at the earliest.

With case numbers continuing to fall across the city and following publication of the Government's 'Roadmap out of lockdown', a great deal of work continues to take place to prepare the city for the relaxation of national restrictions. Of course, the first step in this roadmap has already been reached, with pupils and students across the city fully returning to schools and colleges. The Council has been working closely with the York Schools and Academies Board to ensure a safe reopening for all students and staff. The return of face-to-face education for all young people is a major and important step and I would like to take this opportunity to thank parents who have home schooled in the most trying of circumstances. Teaching and school staff have gone above and beyond to keep education settings open for vulnerable

children and children of key workers, and we will continue to support schools during this period.

We fully recognise that despite the publication of the ‘Roadmap out of lockdown’, this period remains incredibly difficult for many people in the city. We will continue to do everything we can to support residents and businesses by adapting our services where required, providing support and information, or lobbying the Government for additional funding for lower income families, or those businesses who are not covered by the grants available. As ever, if anyone needs support, then please do contact the Council on telephone: **01904 551550**, or email: covid19help@york.gov.uk.

Local Government Reorganisation

As Councillors will already know, the Government’s statutory 8-week consultation on local government reorganisation for York and North Yorkshire begun on the 22nd February, concluding on the 19th April. The consultation seeks key stakeholders views on the two proposals submitted, as well as providing local residents, businesses and organisations a chance to express their views directly to Government.

The consultation will consider two proposals to remove 2-tier local government in North Yorkshire; the North Yorkshire proposal to create a single new unitary authority covering North Yorkshire County Council’s existing footprint, with York remaining as a unitary authority in its own right, and the East/West proposal from the six of the seven District Councils which removes all existing Councils in North Yorkshire and York and merges them into two new unitary authorities.

As already agreed by Full Council, the Council’s position is to support the North Yorkshire County Council proposal, retaining City of York Council as a unitary Council on its existing footprint. The Council will be preparing a robust submission to the Government consultation, emphasising that the retention of City of York Council, alongside a new unitary authority, will pave the way to quicker devolution, additional

investment into York and minimise disruption to the region's wider Covid-19 recovery.

We know from the support across different sectors in the city and consultation with local residents, many do not support a merger and instead, wish to retain local decision making in York, rather than break the 800 year historical connection between the city and the Council. Therefore, we will be clear to Government, any change to York's boundaries to include rural and coastal areas would either increase the cost to residents, or stretch services further, thus making it harder to meet York's own unique challenges.

Given the significance and potential consequences of local government reorganisation in our region, we are raising awareness to encourage greater participation in the consultation, so I would encourage everyone to visit the Government's consultation page here:

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/northyorkshire/>.

York Health and Care Alliance

Proposals to establish a Health and Social Care Alliance for York will be considered by the Council's Executive, having been developed by a number of health and social care partners in the city, including NHS commissioners and providers, and community and voluntary sector organisations. The aim of the Alliance will be to strengthen health, care and public services in the city by building healthcare locally around residents, rather than around organisations. By doing so, the Council and its partners can better tackle health inequalities which existed before COVID, but have been magnified by it, and improve the general health and wellbeing of the York population.

The proposals will also work to lock-in some of the positive work seen throughout the pandemic, which has been achieved by partners working in a more collaborative and effective manner due to the challenges of the pandemic. The proposals have been developed in response to the

recent publication of the Government's 'Integration and Innovation' White Paper, which sets out a series of reforms to health and care which the Government intend to implement at the beginning of April 2022.

If agreed, the proposals would see the York Health and Social Care Alliance run in shadow form during the 2021-22 financial year, in order to further develop governance and accountability structures. Once all partners have agreed a terms of reference, the board would be formalised in 2022, when the new national legislation takes effect.

In shadow form, we are proposing that the Alliance will not make decisions and members will report back to their own organisations, including to the Health and Wellbeing Board. We will then review the Alliance and how it has worked over its shadow 12 months, with further public reports to be presented to the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee and the wider Council.

Residents will still be able to access healthcare in the same ways they always have, but ultimately, we hope that by establishing a York Health and Care Alliance, we can improve how healthcare is delivered in the city and address the health issues that will make the biggest difference to residents' lives. This is an opportunity to develop healthcare around our residents, tailoring services in the city to local priorities.

Response to Flooding

Following severe weather from Storm Christoph back in January 2021, the Council had to prepare the city for flooding in a new and Covid-secure way. Together with partners and volunteers, the Council's frontline teams worked swiftly to put in place temporary defences well in advance of when the flood peak was estimated, as well as communicate with affected residents about what action was being taken to support them. During those few weeks, defences were provided to properties in the immediate flood risk area, pumps and defences were delivered to properties most at risk, and contact through letters and doors knocking were undertaken at properties where flooding might occur.

With the number of Covid cases high in the city during that time, it was inevitable that there would be an increase in the number of infections within our frontline workforce. To manage this, we proactively put in place additional measures to sustain key frontline services over the winter, as well as deployed the flood defences early.

Looking forward, it is clear that serious flooding will become increasingly more frequent for us as a city, given the impact of climate change. Whilst our frontline staff have protected the city on this occasion, the emotional and financial cost of flooding to our communities, who are affected by severe flooding at least once every year, is undeniable. With local authorities facing major financial constraints, the Government must honour its commitments to York's residents by providing the necessary funding and delivering a long-term Yorkshire-wide plan to address flooding, including upstream measures.

York Central

Site clearance works at York Central are now underway, with work taking place from the across the 42 hectare brownfield site, which will enable the Council and its partners to unlock the site and provide up to 2500 new homes; up to 6500 jobs and a vastly improved visitor access experience at the National Railway Museum.

Millennium Green will receive the first in a series of major improvements as part of this work. This includes improvements to around 300 meters of footpath, a new timber viewing platform, renewals works to the pond, 3 new benches, improvements to the southern culvert wall, a new fence along the eastern boundary and temporary fencing and flooring to protect the Millennium Green oak and mosaic throughout the duration of the works.

The Council will continue to working closely with John Sisk and Sons to limit any disruption to neighbouring residents and businesses, and to keep them informed of any planned works. As ever, I would like to thank

all local residents and businesses for their patience whilst the works are underway.

This infrastructure work is part of a wider £155m funding pot secured by the York Central Partnership to deliver infrastructure to open up the site for development. York Central remains one of the most important and attractive regeneration sites in the country and is an opportunity that many other towns and cities in the UK would envy.

York Railway Station

Work on the Station frontage scheme can begin this Autumn, following planning committee's approval last month. The plans to modernise the station include removing Queen Street Bridge, which hasn't been needed since trains stopped passing under it in the 1960s. The scheme has been developed by the Council in partnership with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Network Rail and LNER and will improve the entrance to the railway station in order to keep vehicles and pedestrians apart, make it easier to change between modes of transport, create new public spaces and develop an improved setting for the City Walls and other heritage buildings in the area.

The challenges posed by the pandemic have reinforced the need for us to be on the front foot with our key regeneration schemes, including the station front and York Central. The station front upgrade will not only provide a much needed modernisation of the station and surrounding area, but it is also an integral part of the wider York Central scheme.

Local Plan

The Council has provided more information regarding the definition of the city's green belt to the Planning Inspector examining the local plan. The additional information submitted provides further detail on how the boundary of the green belt has been defined. Officers have also issued a timetable to deliver all the remaining additional information requested by Government inspectors by the end of April.

In response, additional resources have been invested to progress the Local Plan, so we can ensure delivery against the timetable and most importantly, secure a Local Plan that achieves the right balance for York. The inspector's latest letter, received on the 3rd March, acknowledges the very tough challenges we've worked through over the last 15 months and has accepted the timetable to take the process forward.

As ever, we continue to work hard to progress a new Local Plan for York, with council officers having recently supplied additional information to the inspectors. It is clear that starting the lengthy and costly Local Plan process again would be the wrong thing to do; for York's residents and businesses, for a sustainable recovery from the pandemic and for York's green belt.

The Council has published its submitted evidence on its key decisions page, which will be added to the latest correspondence on the examinations webpage found here:

www.york.gov.uk/localplanexamination.

LNER Community Stadium

I was delighted to see York City Football Club play their first game in the new LNER Community Stadium last month. The Council and leisure operator GLL took control of the site from the contractors in December, which includes:

- An 8,500 seater stadium for York City Football Club and York City Knights;
- A community hub, including a library and community offices for York's sports clubs;
- York Against Cancer shop and offices;
- NHS outpatient services;
- New swimming facilities, gym, dance studio and sports hall with spectator seating.

There is no doubt that the LNER Community Stadium will be an incredible home for both York City Football Club and York City Knights, and the only frustration on this occasion was that supporters could not give it the welcome it deserves. With a new state-of-the-art leisure centre, swimming pools, library and NHS Services; the stadium complex is an asset that we should all be very proud of.

HyperHub Sites

The Council is currently working in partnership with Evo Energy to start construction on the largest HyperHub sites in the region. A total of £2.2 million will be invested to develop the sites next to Monks Cross and Poppleton Bar Park and Rides, with the aim of making them into high quality, high speed electric vehicle charging hubs. Each HyperHub site will consist of solar PV canopies, battery energy storage, 4 Rapid and 4 Ultra Rapid electric vehicle chargers. The chargers will help the region to support the next generation of electric vehicles, which have significantly larger battery capacities.

Construction on both sites has already started and is being led by EvoEnergy. The new sites at Monks Cross and Poppleton are scheduled for completion in June this year. To guarantee the best result for residents, we plan to continue to own our charging network. This allows us to plan how the network will grow, set tariffs and enables us to deliver next generation chargers as quickly as possible.

Secondary School Admissions

Figures published this month show that 93% of York children have been allocated their first preference of school for September 2021, an increase of 4.4% on last year's figures. The total size of the cohort starting school in September 2021 is 1921 pupils, compared to 1947 last year.

Of course, this has been an incredibly difficult time over the last few months for many young people and I hope that by knowing their plans

for September, this will help them start to look to the future. I am sure everyone at the Council will wish all those starting a new school in September the best of luck with the next phase of their journey.