

## **Report to Full Council from the Executive Member for Finance and Performance**

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With the new Executive arrangements in place, it is important to note that this is a wide-ranging portfolio, covering everything from the council's finances, ICT, HR, procurement, customer services, property and the crematorium. In addition, it includes some of the Council's major projects and the Local Plan. As I am relatively new in this role, this report provides a brief overview of some of the current issues in the portfolio.

### Finance

The Council continues to face serious financial pressures in relation to reduced government funding. As part of the previous administration, we ensured through careful financial management that we were able to protect key services such as libraries, ward committees, and have ensured no charges for green waste.

The next few years remain challenging, and will require the Council to deliver further savings. However, we will do this in a way that protects key services. We will also deliver on our capital programme, which will see significant capital investment into the city. Our new budget proposals set out our ambitions and reflect the early priorities of the new administration.

I can confirm that the Council's statement of accounts were prepared on time, and were discussed at a recent Audit and Governance meeting. The underspend on the 2018/19 accounts is considered at this meeting as part of our budget proposals.

### Local Plan

At an extraordinary meeting of Full Council on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018, members resolved to submit the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. There has been ongoing correspondence between the Council and the Inspector as part of the examination process and as a result, a number of modifications to the Plan were approved by Executive on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. These proposed modifications were

submitted to the Inspector in March and the Inspector has requested that the Council undertake a 6 week statutory consultation on the proposed modifications The Proposed Modifications consultation runs from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June to Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019.

Following the consultation period, the representations will be sent to the Inspector who will then confirm when hearing sessions can take place. It is anticipated that the first phase of hearing sessions could take place in October 2019.

### Community Stadium

Over the coming months, the project will see the completion of a scheme that has been many years in the making, and I am looking forward to it providing a major sports and leisure facility for the residents of York and the wider region.

The scheme has already attracted Cineworld, and Hollywood Bowl as major attractions, and we have secured the Women's Rugby League World Cup to play fixtures at the Stadium.

As already announced at the Executive meeting in June, we have recently been notified by the building contractor of a delay. This arises due to issues relating to the electrical supply connections, which will delay some aspects of the build programme. It is understandably disappointing that the Stadium is delayed further, and I share in the frustration of sports fans and local residents who want to see the Stadium up and running. That is why the Council will be reviewing matters with all partners so that we can better understand the issues that have led to delays, and most importantly, ascertain an accurate timeline of the project. Senior representatives from Buckingham's visited the Council to discuss the project last week and assured us that they are working on the project as fast as possible.

We remain on track for handover of the build from the contractor later this year. A number of matters remain commercially confidential, but a further update will be published as information becomes available.

## HR

There are a variety of ongoing work streams relating to HR, including a new wellbeing strategy, which is being developed with Public Health. A review of statutory and mandatory training needs has also been carried out, and online mandatory training is now available. The Apprenticeship strategy is also being refreshed, in order to maximise the benefits apprentices can bring to the Council.

## Digital Services

A full programme of digital improvements is in place across the Council, for example, work has been completed at the Shambles and Kings Court area to improve the broadband for our SMEs in those streets. The Council is working to identify how we can improve connectivity in other parts of the city as well.

## Registrars

Registrars appointments can now be booked and paid for online, with 70% of all weddings now booked online. This means that the service is available 24/7 and because all fees are paid online in advance, the appointment can focus on the purpose of the appointment rather than the payment. The Register Office have had a successful launch on Instagram with photos of the venue being used to help promote wedding bookings in York.

Furthermore, the General Registrar's Office have monitored the performance of the York Register Office and recognised the significant improvement across all services in the last financial year.

## Crematorium

A new contract has been awarded so that work can start on replacing the old cremators at York Crematorium. Work on the new waiting area will also begin early next year. All of this work will result in improved services and a better environment for bereaved York families during a difficult period. We will ensure that, if there is any change and/or

disruption to services, that Funeral Directors and the public will be kept informed and supported.

### Benefits Services

York is now the best performing service in the region for our 10,000 benefits claimants in York. We process both new claims and any reported changes quicker than any other council in the region, which means that our residents get the help they need faster. With regards to those residents that are not on the existing legacy benefits, such as housing benefits, we are monitoring closely the impacts of Universal Credit and seeking to mitigate some of those through our continuing financial inclusion work.

Benefits Performance 2018-19													
New Claims (days to process)													
Authority	Craven	Hambleton	Harrogate	Richmond	Ryedale	carboroug	Selby	York	East Riding	Hull	N Lincs	NE Lincs	National
Days	20	15	24	34	17	22	21	11	23	26	22	26	20

Change in Circumstance (days to process)													
Authority	Craven	Hambleton	Harrogate	Richmond	Ryedale	carboroug	Selby	York	East Riding	Hull	N Lincs	NE Lincs	National
Days	6	3	4	3	3	5	4	2	3	9	8	9	8

## Revenues Services

In terms of Council Tax, collection rates are above both Unitary and National average, and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the region

Council Tax Collection rates						
East Riding	Hull City	N Lincs	York	NE Lincs	National	Unitary National
97.98%	93.71%	95.43%	97.58%	93.50%	97.00%	96.70%

Business Rates collection is also above National and Unitary average, again 2<sup>nd</sup> in the region.

Business Rates collection rates						
East Riding	Hull City	N Lincs	York	NE Lincs	National	Unitary National
99.19%	98.28%	97.81%	98.69%	97.19%	98.30%	98.20%

## Assets and Property

**Castle Gateway Project** - A series of public consultation events on the detailed designs of St George's Field multi-storey car park, new apartment buildings at Castle Mills, and a new riverside walk and pedestrian cycle footbridge over the Foss took place in the spring. These events helped refine the designs ahead of the submission of planning applications this summer. Once submitted, a report will be taken to October Executive setting out the proposed delivery strategy and business case for funding.

**Guildhall** - Construction work will start in September on the redevelopment of the Guildhall and we look forward to bringing this historical site back into operational use for the city, opening up the building to the public and providing new SME growth space and animating the riverside.

Our commercial estate continues to provide both essential income for the council and economic space for businesses in the city. The portfolio is now 100% let or under offer, reflecting the continuing strength of the city, despite some challenging trading environments.

Cllr N Ayre, 9 July 2019