

Council

15 December 2022

Report of the Deputy Leader

Devolution

As agreed previously by Full Council, the statutory consultation on the proposed devolution deal and its governance arrangements is underway and is due to finish mid-December. Devolution can often be a dry subject and hard to engage local residents on, but to date, we have been receiving a good response rate to the consultation, which will ultimately help all councillors in their final consideration of the proposed deal in the new year.

Devolution is undoubtedly an important issue for the city, so I would ask everyone to continue to publicise the consultation and encourage others to fill out the survey, if not already done so. The proposed deal includes considerable funding for our city, over half a billion for York and North Yorkshire over the next 30 years, along with the transfer of some powers from Government departments and agencies, so it is important we hear from as many people as we can in the city before we all come to consider the issues once again in a few months' time.

Cost of Living Crisis

The pressure and challenges posed by the Cost of Living Crisis continues to worsen as we enter winter, with the first frosts now upon us. At the end of October I attended the 'Cost of Living Summit' which brought together leaders from community, voluntary and faith groups, businesses and organisations to hear first-hand experiences of the Cost of Living Crisis, and importantly, to share offers of support and work together to respond to the challenges we face in the city.

The Summit, hosted by the University of York at the Guildhall, was organised by the Council and chaired by Professor Kate Pickett, Professor of Epidemiology from the University of York and the University's Champion for Research on Justice and Equality. After hearing from speakers, attendees took part in interactive sessions where we were encouraged to work together on new and innovative solutions, covering a range of areas including housing insecurity, cost of fuel and transport, mental health, social prescribing and digital inclusion.

At the same time, the Council has been processing financial support to those facing hardship through the Household Support Fund and working with partners to offer support and advice to anyone with concerns about their financial situation. From checking eligibility for benefits, to providing help with applying for a Green Energy Funding grant from the council - our staff and partners have been having numerous important conversations about money with residents and businesses, providing that all important reassurance and advice during difficult times.

Asylum Seekers

Many people will have seen that York is once again welcoming and providing safe haven to asylum seekers who have been placed in the city via the Home Office's Asylum Seeker Accommodation Scheme.

Many of the men, women and children arriving in York have been through extremely difficult experiences prior to seeking asylum and I'm pleased that working together with our partners, our city is able to provide respite and safety to those individuals and families. By extending our hand to them in welcome, we respect their legal right to seek asylum and will do what we can to ensure that they have the support they need as they await the outcome of their applications with the Home Office. Having recently attended one of the city's regular multi-agency zoom meetings, I am confident that the city is pulling together to ensure every arrangement including health and education will be covered for these families.

I would like to thank all partners involved in providing the on-going support so urgently needed, as well as kind-hearted residents who have been making donations.

Passivhaus homes

I am delighted that following the excellent award winning work of the Council's Housing Delivery Programme, we have secured Homes England funding to increase affordable housing delivery from 40% to 60% at two of our Housing Delivery Programme sites.

Originally, 40% affordable housing was planned for the 34 homes at Duncombe Barracks in Clifton, and the 78 homes at Burnholme in Heworth. This was over twice the level required by our planning guidelines. However, this new funding now means that 60%, 3-times the recommended levels of affordable homes, can be delivered across both

sites. Of the 60% affordable housing, 20% of the homes will be allocated for social rent, and 40% will be for shared ownership, where eligible people can buy between a 35-75% share. Work to bring forward a further 85 zero energy homes at Ordnance Lane (which already has planning permission) will follow on from these two sites, delivering at least a further 40% affordable homes.

The funding secured from Homes England will go a long way in helping to meet our aspirations outlined in the Climate Change Action Plan, as these homes will be zero-carbon in use (a real financial bonus as energy prices escalate) This additional funding opens the door to even more people on lower incomes to benefit from the high quality and reduced energy use of Passivhaus-standard housing, and I look forward to seeing the continued progress being made at both sites.

Funding for independent retailers

Independent retailers in the city have received a £25,000 funding boost to help with promotion during the Christmas trading period and to attract more customers in the New Year, following investment from the Council's Independent Retail Fund.

Traders' associations and groups in Acomb, Goodramgate, Haxby and Wigginton, and Bishopthorpe Road will benefit from the funding pot to support small and micro businesses. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, we have focused efforts on supporting the city's small and independent sector, in total allocating over £9 million in discretionary and local funding, alongside other crucial advice and support.

This latest funding will hopefully support efforts to attract shoppers during the current festive season and at Easter in 2023. This will include Christmas markets and Christmas lights displays, small music festivals and Easter-related celebrations.

Christmas is a particularly great time to support our local businesses, so I would strongly encourage all residents and visitors to support the city's fantastic business community and shop local, whether in your neighbourhood or elsewhere within York.

York Central

Colleagues will know that infrastructure works at York Central have been progressing well, with appointed contractor John Sisk & Son carrying out numerous site works over the past few months.

This includes works that have been needed to the western edge of Millennium Green, to prepare for a new road junction which will come off Water End and join the new bridge over the East Coast Mainline. In addition to this, a new pedestrian and cycle bridge will be delivered next to the Severus Bridge on Water End, in order to maintain the capacity, and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. In time, a new embankment will be built at Millennium Green, with new saplings, established trees and shrubs planted along the side of the railway line.

During the course of December, there will be continued work on removing contaminated material from the site and to continue ground preparation for the new road. The council is also consulting on the riverside path changes, to reduce frequency of flooding and increase lighting and safety. We know this is an important route for residents and we want to hear about any concerns and local priorities, so views can be factored into the designs and plans for this path funded through the council's capital programme.

Children's foil competition this Christmas

Primary school students across the city are being invited to take part in a competition highlighting the opportunity to recycle aluminium foil through the kerbside collections this Christmas.

Recent changes to recycling now means that we can collect foil from residents in their kerbside recycling collections (along with a much wider range of plastics such as margarine tubs and yoghurt pots). To celebrate and promote this change, we have teamed up with the not-for-profit organisation, Alupro, to hold a Christmas foil competition.

The competition is challenging young people to create Christmas themed A4 posters with used and washed aluminium foil. The poster design can be anything to do with Christmas and must contain foil to be included in our prize draw. The winners, announced in February, will receive prizes worth £50, and their school will receive £500 in vouchers to spend on sustainable supplies and activities. There will also be similar prizes available to runners up in second and third place.

This competition is an excellent way to raise awareness of what can be recycled at the kerbside. We know residents are already doing a fantastic job of recycling in York, but this change gives an opportunity to further and boost recycling rates especially after Christmas when there's additional packaging and food / drink containers to dispose of.

On that note I wish everyone a peaceful and sustainable festive break, ready for a busy new year.