

Report of the Deputy Council Leader, Cabinet Member for Homes & Safer Communities (including Democratic Services)

This report gives an overview of work within my portfolio areas.

Civic Services

Mansion House – Upon taking on the responsibility for the Mansion House, in 2012, I discussed with Officers how the House could be more accessible through longer opening hours and used more as a venue for events which would raise income towards running costs. The last year has been one of considerable success:

- Increased visitor numbers, 6000 in 2013/14 (from under 1000 in 2006) due to extended opening
- ‘Aero Girls’. First curated exhibition - over 1000 visitors in a week.
- First ever use for theatre productions, *Blood and Chocolate* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
- Increased use of the Mansion House (tours, talks, wedding, dinners etc)
- In partnership with the Centre for Life Long Learning (University of York), the Mansion House developed the first civic history course.

Mansion House & Heritage Lottery Fund Bid - Earlier this year the Council named De Matos Ryan as the architects for the next stage of the restoration programme of the Mansion House, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The ‘*Opening Doors*’ project involves restoring the 18th century kitchens; improving displays, conservation and access to the civic collection of gold and silver ware; developing an integrated environmental and conservation plan for the structure; and preparing an oral history project, involving people past and present with a connection to the building. Other aims include improved interpretation, education, conservation and access to the gold and silver collections incorporating displays about the people behind the objects and installing an effective conservation heating system to minimise long-term damage to the contents and fabric of the building and reduce its carbon foot print. The bid was submitted on the 21st November and if successful the House would close in autumn 2015 with works taking up to a year.

Democratic Services

The Council Chamber was brought into the 21st Century during the last Civic year. Work included the installation of an electronic voting system and renewal of the Hearing Loop which, like the audio system, was at the end of its life. Other work included working with Policy and ICT to secure webcasting/recording of meetings and making progress on a modern and,

understandable Constitution

This year's work plan includes planning to meet the training and other needs of new Members in 2015.

Webcasting - Labour first proposed webcasting over 6 years ago, now public meetings are either webcasted or audio recorded. The figures for on-demand viewing between 1st June 2014 and 12th November 2014 are (N.B. YouTube figures do not include live views only on-demand).

1 June 2014 to 12 November 2014

- Total views: **6,793**
- Estimated minutes watched: **57,365 (956 hrs)**
- Number of videos: **79**
- Average number of views per video: **86**

Constitution - Our Constitution follows a model developed in 2000. Regular amendments have been made to reflect changes in practice and law but the document has never been comprehensively revised and is showing its age.

In late 2012 I requested a full review and that the document should be clearer and easier for the public and for Councillors to refer to with regard to the law and procedures. Work is still underway. An easy read summary of the Constitution has been approved by Council and other proposed changes are still to come forward. I hope the new chair of Audit & Governance ensures that the new Constitution is not delayed by politics

Electoral Services

Annual Canvass – In summer 2013 the Electoral Services Team undertook preparation for the 2014 European Parliamentary Election. Due to changes from the Conservative Liberal Democrat Government the *Annual Canvass for the Register of Electors* was carried out later than normal and presented a challenge of ensuring the register was up to date for the election. Unfortunately the later timing did impact responses with 88% of properties replying compared to 90% the previous year.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER) – the transitional phase of IER was entered in to in June 2014 and will fully replace the current Household registration system, dating from 1918, after the 2015 General Election.

The new system requires electors to register individually and provide identification to verify their application; date of birth and National Insurance number. For the forthcoming year transitional arrangements allow data matching against the records held by the *Department for Work and Pensions*.

A data matching trial conducted last year showed around a 70% match of electors. Electors who pass the data match will be automatically transferred to the new Register of Electors, those who do not will need to provide additional identification to remain registered to vote after the transitional period. The latest information for York is that the electorate is 155,923 which is down from the last register by 1265

Safer Communities

River Safety - I would like to start by addressing the issue of River Safety and will go in to some detail as I believe all accept the importance of the work due to tragic incidents that have taken place this year. A River Safety Working Group has been set up and held its first meeting on 27th May 2014. Group membership is:

North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, City of York Council CCTV, University of York, University of York St. John, APEX Radio Systems Ltd and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

In September a joint media briefing was held prior to which I spent some time with Jackie Roberts and Steve Pearson, the parents of Megan and Tyler. The briefing contained three powerful films made by the families; these were funded by Julia Mulligan, the Police and Crime Commissioner.

I outlined what has, is and will be done along the river banks based on recommendations from RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) who the Council commissioned to produce a report around river safety.

Provision of rescue equipment

- 35 lifebelts on the Ouse and 14 on the Foss have been replaced with new belts with floating ropes, and information on the use of life rings and raising the alarm was due to be completed by November 2014.
- Programme of inspections will be updated and implemented

Physical improvements

- The upgrading of Post & Chain fencing and edge protection along the Ouse at Wellington Row, the Blue Bridge area and Queen Staith by the end of December 2014. New fencing near Navigation Road, on the Foss, was scheduled, weather permitting by late November 2014.
- Council will survey and update existing grab rails/install new – especially on canalised sections between Lendal and Ouse Bridge and sections of the Foss. Survey work began in October and it is hoped work will be completed by Spring 2015 – dependent on the weather/river levels.
- Minor renovation works on handrails and painting will be reviewed and refreshed as part of our ongoing work programme.

- The Council is discussing with the Emergency Services the possible use of 'emergency-only' lighting near to and under Ouse Bridge.

Education and Campaigns

- From September York schools, as part of the National Curriculum, will include water safety and aquatic skills in their curriculum.
- During Drowning Prevention Week (21–29 June 2014) the Council funded water safety lessons and awareness sessions at Energise
- The national campaign *Don't Drink and Drown* was launched by the Royal Lifesaving Society at the University of York during Fresher's Week.
- Training is being given to Door Staff, Street Angels and others working/volunteering near river banks, in how to deploy life belts, to ask for Fire and Rescue when dialling 999 and how to raise alarm
- Developed by York St John University Students' Union the excellent Plan **Safe, Drink Safe, Home Safe** campaign was launched in the Spring. This has been adopted by the *City's River Safety Group*. The campaign aims to give clear, practical advice on planning a great, safe night out and journey home.
- Council has advised University of York Student Union on its NightSafe Service. Launched during Freshers Week its trained Volunteer Students patrol the City Centre and river side areas on Student Club nights.

Safer York Partnership – Crime statistics for year end 2013-14 show reported crime fell by 550, a 5% reduction in total crime on the previous year. This is the eighth year in a row that overall crime has fallen within the City. All reduction targets were met in 2013/14 except shoplifting which has seen a 5% rise – reflecting the national increase in shoplifting of food.

Anti Social Behavioural (ASB) The Hub - The Council committed £115k from the Delivery and Innovation Fund towards the Hub and was successful in bidding to the *Police Innovation Fund*, for £58k.

Launched in May 2014 *The Hub* consists of North Yorkshire Police Force Officers and several Council departments. Situated at West Offices the Hub holds daily meetings to discuss ASB incidents and to decide which is the most relevant agency to deal with them.

AVANTE - I asked Officers to refresh group membership as I felt some key players were missing. Representatives from the Taxi Associations have joined and we are recruiting a member from the Licensed Victuallers Association.

Work has included the *Cumulative Impact Zone* - dealing with issues around noise and premises selling off sales alcohol in the City Centre, and the *Alcohol*

Restriction Zone - launched in April which deals with the problem of those drinking cheap alcohol from off licenses before/between bars.

Domestic Abuse Strategy Board - In the summer of 2013 I asked Officers to set up a *York Domestic Violence Strategy Board* due to a view that York's issues were becoming lost in the North Yorkshire Board's work. A decision was taken in July 2014 that whilst the York Board would sign up to the refreshed North Yorkshire Strategy, due to cross boundary issues, York would have its own strategy as many issues were not either historically or currently recognised or addressed.

Two successful campaigns have been run during the last year. The pre Christmas (2013) campaign and the World Cup Campaign 'Give Violence the Red Card' - both led to rises in referrals. The Christmas 2014 campaign has been launched and York City Football Club will be including it in their programmes over Christmas. The Board is working on a campaign plan for the next year centred around major sporting events and Christmas, and a *Reclaim the Night March* will be held annually (late February 2015)

The 25th November was the '*United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women*'. On that day I sent a letter to all male Councillors, Directors and Assistant Directors and asked that they consider signing up to White Ribbon. The Board is aiming to roll the 'pledge' out to partners and major employers during the next year. For more on White Ribbon:

<http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/node/302>

During the next year we will be looking at the continuing challenge of funding, the complexities of 'need', and will look at issues such as Forced Marriages, Sexual Assaults, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and new legislation.

Section 136 Suite & Triage Service – The North Yorkshire Police Force area was the last in the country to have a Section 136 Suite. Over 100 people have used the 'Suite' since its launch in February 2014.

In October I signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the new *Street Triage Scheme* set up by the Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, North Yorkshire Police and the NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group, with funding from City of York and North Yorkshire County Council. The service will cost £200,000 a year and will see York-based mental health professionals join officers at incidents where they can be of use.

Food Safety Unit - Officers monitor and enforce food safety and standards in over 1,800 food premises. In the last year nine premises received a hygiene

rating of zero and were required to make improvements. During the year, 757 inspections have taken place with 875 food complaints.

Environmental Protection Unit (EPU) - During 2013/14 the EPU received 1609 complaints about noise including loud music, parties, shouting, domestic noise, noise from pubs/clubs and dog barking. 22 noise abatement notices were served, there were 6 breaches of abatement notices and 2 seizures of noise generating equipment.

Housing.

Work continues in a challenging climate due to benefit changes, lower incomes and the rising cost of living.

Homeless applications 2014/15 - Staff have worked to stop residents becoming homeless by focusing on early intervention.

- 45 presentations, 23 acceptances (13/14 - 57 presentations, 31 accepted)
- 69 in temporary accommodation (13/14 - 90 in temporary)

Waiting List - Last year all members of the scheme took part in a refresh of applications which resulted in those not replying being removed from the Waiting List. Others, due to changes in circumstances (based on new government criteria) were removed from the list. The current Waiting List position at year end and Q2 end is:

Register by Local Authority & Band @ 01.10.14					
	Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total of Band
Craven	0	28	168	340	536
Hambleton	6	70	319	482	877
Richmondshire	0	44	173	201	418
Ryedale	0	55	272	338	665
Scarborough	2	232	581	1102	1917
Selby	2	38	249	277	566
York	2	178	763	404	1348
Total of Local Authority	12	645	2525	3144	6327

There have been significant reductions in Bronze Band across the region. During consultation many in *Bronze* reported that the previous policy gave unrealistic expectation of being allocated a home. There is a view that, whilst numbers are down actual need is not, as many are not registering/re-registering due to the idea that there is no possibility of obtaining a home.

Arrears – Each year officers are asked to reduce rent arrears. It was felt that this year it would be difficult due to the Bedroom Tax and other Benefit changes. However, early intervention work that I set in motion last year seems

to be working with the Council having the lowest rent arrears for 12 years. Last year saw a collection rate of 98.04% which is a 5 year high.

- Current arrears £771,812 (£911,943 at the same point last year)
- Former arrears £309,496 (£342,185 last year)

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)– Changes by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Government to benefits have resulted in a 350% increase in DHP applications compared to same period (Mar-Sep) in 12/13. Below includes the full year 13/14 and this year up to 30/09/14:

	Apps made	Apps paid
12/13	268	201
13/14	876	587
14/15 (to 30/9/14)	425	350

Capital Works Programme 2013/14 & 2014/15 –The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funds the repair and maintenance costs of our homes. The HRA Business Plan, approved in September 2014, sets out that over 5 years £74.5m will be spent on responsive repairs/maintenance and improvements to the Council’s housing stock.

Capital Works Done 13/14	No of Homes
Doors fitted on external painting & repairs	78
External Painting Programme	1022
Heating Referrals - Npower	410
Loft Conversions	7
Roofing	60
Sound proofing	67
Tenants Choice - Main Programme	218
Tenants Choice - Rewires Only	33
Tenants Choice - Voids by Forrest	48
Window Replacements	700

Capital Works 14/15	Planned No of Homes	28/10/14 completed
Airey Houses - non traditional	16	0
Doors fitted on external painting & repairs	30	19
External Painting Programme	1200	1180
Heating Referrals - Npower	400	168
Loft Conversions	16	10
Roofing	60	0
Soundproofing	60	14
Tenants Choice - Main Programme	230	218
Tenants Choice - Voids by Forrest/Gentoo		25
Window Replacements	300	187

Housing & Building Services Customer Service Excellence Award – I am delighted to report that the Housing and Building Services Teams have received this recognition and thank them for their work which has been recognised through this award. The team received the award after inspection in September 2014 which certifies the service as giving customer service excellence, commitment to help the harder-to-reach and vulnerable customers and for providing a seamless service for highly vulnerable younger residents.

The Glebe - The Glebe was a winner in the *National Housing for Older People Awards 2014*. I would like to thank all staff at The Glebe and to those residents who voted for their service.

Council House building programme

Beckfield Lane - Work on Beckfield Lane is under way and on target for completion in February 2015, providing 18 council homes and 9 family houses for market sale. The scheme is being built by Gentoo, and Hudson Moody is marketing the for sale houses. 9 of the 18 council homes will be apartments, aimed at over-55s who are down-sizing.

The Pack of Cards, Lindsey Avenue has been demolished and the site cleared so that work can begin and the *White Swan*, Piccadilly handover is scheduled next month. Planning permission has been granted for Fenwick Street, Hewley Avenue, Chaloners Road and Newbury Avenue.

Housing Week 2014 - City of York Council's third Housing Week ran from 3-7 November 2014. This year's focus was on the increasing need for more and better housing solutions in York. It included workshops and information sessions on 'Older Peoples Housing Options, Homelessness, Social Care, the first *Student Good Landlord Awards*, and Tenants and Residents events.

Empty Homes – the dedicated Officer working on empty homes brought forward our first Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) in Bradley Drive. This was an action that the Council felt necessary after years of owner inaction and of the Council not having relevant policies to bring the house back in to use

Interestingly, owners of other properties suitable for CPO have, since the Bradley Drive action, been more proactive. Officers are ensuring that where an owner has agreed certain actions they keep to the agreed programme and will take action if they do not.

- 102 Empty Homes were brought back in to use at the end of 2013/14
- Long Term Empties in 2013 were 194. Of these 141 had been empty 6mths-2yrs. 106 owners have confirmed their properties as being empty with 72 giving reasons.

Housing Accreditation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) – YorProperty is a voluntary accreditation scheme for private landlords and agents, which

recognises and promotes good quality, well-managed private sector accommodation and provides recognition to landlords and agents who take a responsible approach to letting their properties. It helps tenants identify properties which meet the standards set out in the Scheme.

The Scheme, developed in consultation with and supported by the University of York, York St. John and individual landlords and letting agents has so far attracted 100 landlords/letting agents with a portfolio of 420 properties.

Cllr Tracey Simpson-Laing Council 2014