

## Report to Full Council of the Deputy Leader of the Council

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### Responding to Covid-19:

Covid continues to present challenges to the city and council operations, despite the very successful roll out of a vaccination programme and continuation of many practices we have established to limit the spread of the virus and ensure that council services can continue to be provided to all those who depend on them. The Council has already issued reminders to staff regarding infection control measures, including working at home where possible, wearing face coverings in Council buildings, and taking lateral flow tests twice a week.

In response to the emergence of the Omicron variant, the Council's Winter campaign has been stepped up to encourage everyone in our city to take additional measures to reduce the spread of the virus. This campaign has already seen the provision of hundreds of free face coverings for distribution in retail spaces, with the hashtag 'Together York' labelled on the front of them.

As everyone will know, the Government has announced a series of new measures in response to Omicron, including face coverings being compulsory in shops and other settings such as banks, post offices and hairdressers, as well as on public transport - unless individuals are exempt from doing so. All secondary pupils and staff have to wear face coverings in communal areas of school. Staff in primary schools are required to wear them in communal areas. Our Public Health Team continue to support local businesses, schools and other organisations with the latest guidance. We will continue to work closely with partners to keep infection rates as low as possible and allow businesses to continue to operate safely within government guidelines. The recent 'Uprising' protest within the city centre was successfully managed with significant police resource that ensured protesters were able to express their views while also keeping residents and visitors who were not part of the protest safe and city centre businesses safely operating as normal.

### **Bootham Park:**

This week, the Executive is considering proposals to secure public access to the grounds of the former Bootham Park Hospital site along with an updated access lease.

Last year, following the extensive public consultation, we agreed to a number of priorities including beneficial public use of the parkland in front of the hospital building and improved pedestrian and cycle routes through the site.

Since then, we have been working closely with health partners NHS Property Services, their preferred development partner Enterprise Retirement Living Limited, and the York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to influence future development on the site which will be subject to a planning application in 2022

Feedback from local residents has shaped the scheme to date and if approved, it would see nearly £2 million of investment in public spaces in the area, with continued public access to the grounds and the safeguarding of the key cycle route that connects Wiggington Rd and the Hospital through to Scarborough Bridge and York Station.

Related to this, work is due to start in January to relocate the signalised pedestrian crossing at the junction of St Marys so that it provides a signal controlled link across Bootham for pedestrians and cyclists into and out of the site. This combined with a new cycle/pedestrian ramp down at the other end of St Mary's to the Marygate car park will complete the 'missing link from Scarborough Bridge.

### **Recommissioning of Care Services:**

Proposals to recommission support services for children, young people and adult carers, have been agreed, in order to renew our emphasis on prevention, early intervention and self-care.

We, along with Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group, currently commission York Carers' Centre to deliver a wide range of support services to adult and young carers in the city. The Carers Hub provides a highly-visible referral point where carers can be offered early-stage assessments and preventative support in order to reduce and delay the need for more complex interventions.

The proposals which have been agreed will ensure the continuation and extension of the successful Carers' Hub model, which will be recommissioned through an open tender exercise. Depending on submissions, the new contract will be awarded to either a single external provider or a consortium, to deliver carers' support from April 2022. The successful bidder will have to demonstrate that they can deliver professional, sustainable and integrated support for unpaid carers, understanding the needs of carers of all ages and from all backgrounds.

### **Winter Support Funding:**

Work is taking place with local community organisations to help set up and deliver a new winter fuel voucher scheme with the council. As part of this, £20,000 will be allocated to eligible, lower income households in York.

Over £1 million has been secured from the Government's Household Support Fund to progress this work. In York, it is expected to be allocated to most households already in receipt of welfare benefits, although anyone in need of help with food, energy and water bills can apply.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children, and the fund should also primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. Payment will be made directly into bank accounts or with vouchers, where appropriate.

### **Council Properties and Community Groups:**

A series of local community groups are due to take on or extend leases for multiple public spaces and community facilities in York, in order to secure their future.

These changes include a new lease for the sports and recreation facilities in Rowntree Park and extending the existing lease for the Poppleton Community Centre.

The agreements come as part of the latest update to council properties in York, ensuring local communities can benefit from the facilities and support for years to come.

### **Castle Gateway:**

Plans to progress the Castle Gateway scheme are due to take the next step, with a planning application set to be submitted in the coming weeks.

Designs for the space around the Eye of York tested the different options with residents in August 2021 and in response, our design consultants BDP have developed designs that include:

- retaining the central oak tree;
- preserving the circular form of the space;
- and providing more biodiversity, performance spaces and seating in the area

The design also recognises the potential of the Female Prison steps and podium as a place for performance, with the planting design allowing lines of sight from the grassed area to enjoy music or theatre against the backdrop of the portico of the building.

All of this work helps move us closer to achieving the vision of a world class public space for this area and the area next to Cliffords Tower, as part of the Castle Gateway programme.

### **Transport for the North – Rail developments**

On Nov 24<sup>th</sup> I represented the City of York at a key Board Meeting in Leeds where the Metro Mayors, council leaders and representatives of the Local Enterprise Partnerships gave a unanimous response to the Government's Integrated Rail Plan stating that it failed in terms of capacity, connectivity and disruption. In proposing the motion Mayor Andy Burnham said that the board has always given priority to east-west connectivity, with proposals for electrification and new lines/stations to decarbonise the system and address bottlenecks on the network. "History would not look kindly on the Board if it just accepted this was all the North was going to get. After discussing these proposals for years, last week a different solution was imposed on us without discussion" he said. During the meeting it emerged that business leaders in Liverpool would prefer not to have the half measures proposed than 7 or more years of delays and disruption and the Hull representative said that it was a 'Beeching moment' with no rail electrification to connect Hull before 2040 condemning their local economy and missing key opportunities for all weather electric freight connections East- West across the Pennines (as an alternative to the congested M62)

While there was no specific mention of the HQ for GB Railways, Transport for the North is supportive of bids for this to be in the North and as an Executive we are working with partners to ensure we can put forward the strongest possible bid for this to be located in the City of York, building on the strong rail industry presence and skills base already within the city.

### **Active Travel Programme**

Whilst I share the frustration of campaigners and ward members who are eager to see progress delivering the cycle schemes with an overall budget of £3.1m (for which we secured £600k of government funding in 2020) I can now announce that last month 5 project officers commenced work focussed entirely on these projects. I will be able to give regular

progress reports to my Decision Sessions during 2022, starting with the one on Jan 18<sup>th</sup>

Although separately funded via the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Transforming Cities Fund, the Tadcaster Rd scheme completed public consultation in September and is progressing alongside the highway maintenance work which will continue into 2022. As a result of considering representations in the public consultation, some elements will be identified in a 'phase 2' element, subject to approval at my January Decision Session.

### **Local Transport Plan**

As reported in a paper to the Executive Member for Transport Decision Session in May 2021, LTP4 will build on work already done for My City Centre and the Local Plan and will complement the developing strategies for Carbon Reduction/ Climate Change and Economic Recovery. The engagement strategy set out at that time has already led to significant resident feedback, helping to shape a policy that builds on LTP3 adopted in 2011. Further work on these 3 strategies will lead to their adoption in the first half of 2022. In the case of the LTP4, its final form will be influenced by government direction expected in February, with a requirement for local transport authorities to adopt LTP policy documents focussing on delivering the decarbonisation strategy for Transport and demonstrating as the basis for funding bids how the measures will help to achieve carbon reduction as well as active travel and transport objectives.

### **'Digital' Residents Parking**

Since the system went 'live' in September this year I have been working closely with officers to resolve difficulties that have been experienced by residents making use of the system, and help us to move towards a position where the benefits of the transition can be fully realised. As with any new IT system there have been some unforeseen challenges which I believe we have now mostly overcome, moving us towards the position where we are able to ensure that a relatively small number of residents need to be provided with support to renew or apply for permits. Below is just one detailed response (end of October) I have been provided with to give

members some context. I realise that the detail is complex and beyond what most need to know, but I hope it serves to illustrate the commitment from this administration to deliver system which caters for the needs of all residents living in or visiting residents parking areas across the city. This is having some impact on the roll out of new respark zones as it is clearly important for us to be confident that necessary changes have been completed before we add additional new permit applications. At the present time I believe this should be resolved by Jan 2022.

1. The Digital Strategy to move customer transactions online was agreed by Executive in 2014. This was a subject of Scrutiny in the last administration and the committee were content with the approach. Formed part of the Digital Services Programme.
2. Parking related transaction level in the customer centre was one of the main drivers (approx. 25% of Council's transactions);
3. The old system was life expired, lacked adequate reporting tools and had limited functionality. There was a desire to create a better customer experience and more efficient processes with online presence and mobile technology. To demonstrate eligibility in the old process, the customer would have to scan and submit hard copies of evidence. The CTAX look up in the new system automates this process. Importantly the system doesn't meet PCN (IT security) compliance and had to be replaced;
4. The proposed project was identified as part of the Digital Services Programme, agreed by the Digital Services Board and supported by the Place Directorate Management team;
5. The project spans several services areas. All have been committed to project delivery. This has involved service staff being dedicated to the project for extended periods. The project team is made up of the operational areas that are responsible for the delivery of the processes. Customer Services (inc. the web team), Business Support, Parking Services (back office and enforcement) and ICT. The Senior Responsible Officer (project board chair) is from the Parking Services management team in the Place Directorate and the project is managed by ICT;
6. The project team undertook a procurement process to purchase a new system. A framework designed to procure Civil enforcement systems was used. The contract was awarded for the Taranto

system (used in many local authorities including Manchester and Sheffield);

7. The project has spanned a 2 year period including developing the specification, procurement, configuration (very complex process), testing (extensive testing has been undertaken on the iterations of the system as it's been configured), training and go live was in September 2021. This was moved back several times (originally December 2020) to take into account outside work demand on the service areas involved. This included Covid pandemic response (e.g. a key project member was redeployed);
8. The majority of customers so far have 'transitioned' without issue. Some have used the call team in customer services to guide and have e-mailed and this has added to demand;
9. Between go live and now, several broad issues have been identified (issues identified can be mapped to these);
  - a) Issues relating to the customer journey – the system reflects the design of the CYC website which was co-designed by residents. The functionality in the customer portal is native to the Taranto system and is configured to enable CYC processes.

**Work will be undertaken immediately to review and improve the customer journey on the website, including a review of how guidance on the pages can be made clearer to customers;**
  - b) Issues relating to how the introduction of the system was communicated – at the time of go live it was felt that providing some concise information by letter would provide enough guidance to start customers on the website. The majority would then be guided by the information on the website. For those who are unable to engage with this, a series of offline processes were designed. It's clear that more detail could have been provided in the letter and there were some duplicate letters, which was largely down to how permits were stored in the old system. Also, the ongoing process in the new system differs from the approach when transferring to the new system. For example, in the first instance a customer must wait for their existing permit to expire to renew then are given 2 weeks to update. Once the customer is in the system, future renewals can be made to 4



weeks in advance. This guidance is on the website but is going to be made clearer.

**Alongside the updating of the website, there will be communication to customers;**

- c) Areas of the system that are not easy to use – several areas/processes in the system have been identified as not having a fault, but are complicated for the user. An example is the sequencing of the visitor permit ordering, authorisation card and resident parking permit;

**The team will work on the guidance in the system to make this clearer;**

- d) Data related issues – the data in the system has been transferred from the legacy Imperial system. This was inevitable in a life expired system and was very difficult to test. The authorisation issues are likely to be caused in some way by this (e.g. a mismatch in formatting between address leading to the CTAX look up not fast- tracking eligibility);

**Lessons are being learned over the next year as more residents switch from paper permits in order to improve the experience for new users of the system. Any short term issues will be addressed as a matter of urgency;**

- e) Faults in the Taranto system – The main issues are payments not being posted back to Taranto. This results in a permit not being created. Refunds are being given to customer in these cases. Also, irregular charges when a VRM change is enacted. **There are a handful of these cases but these are being treated as urgent matters and will continue to be until the issue is resolved;**

**Cllr Andy D'Agorne**

**Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Transport**