



Council

23 March 2023

Report of the Executive Leader

For the Council, the beginning of 2023 has continued much in the same vein as the end of 2022, with significant national events continuing to have their impact on the city, whether that be the continued Cost of Living Crisis, or the ongoing war in Ukraine. As a city, we continue to face these challenges head on, whether that be supporting our financially vulnerable residents, to welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

As colleagues and residents will know, this will be my last Leader's Report to Full Council, and reflecting on the past four years, there is a great deal that has been achieved. Whether that be our collective response to the pandemic, progressing York Central, Devolution and the Local Plan to their furthest ever stages, or devolving millions in council funding to empower local communities.

Of course, York is well known for its demanding political environment, somewhat highlighted by the fact that I am now the longest serving Council Leader since 2008. However, it was never the politics that motivated me to stand for council elections back in 2003, but the opportunity to deliver real positive change and help my community. I am grateful for this opportunity and the trust my colleagues and residents have placed in me over the last two decades.

I have the utmost confidence that York is well placed to continue playing a leading role as a historic city at the forefront of innovation. I have full confidence that my colleagues will make the most of these opportunities and I know that York will continue to go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

It has been a privilege to serve this city as Leader of the Council, and I would like to thank councillors of all parties, Council Staff, city partners, local residents and businesses for all contributing to the success of York. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank councillors from all parties who are not seeking re-election in May – I know that the past four years has thrown up its challenges, but your dedication and public service for our communities has been an invaluable contribution to the city.

2023/24 Council Budget:

Following the debate and vote at February's Budget Council meeting, I am pleased that this administration's budget proposals have been approved for the 2023/24 financial year. We all recognise that the past five years have not been kind to Local

Government, with successive government cuts to funding, a pandemic, war in Europe and unprecedented economic turmoil.

Unfortunately, that gloomy picture does not look set to change anytime soon, with inflation and energy prices still at record levels, and a Government that is failing to tackle the issues by delaying much needed reforms to the fairer funding of councils, adult social care and more.

The services we provide as a Council have never been more important, and that is why the 2023/24 Council Budget will ensure the council's finances are on a stable footing, avoiding situations that have been seen elsewhere in Croydon, Northamptonshire, and Thurrock. An additional £19 million will now be added to the revenue budget to protect and support those vital services, maintaining the excellent progress that has been achieved against the council plan. This funding will be used to help residents remain in their homes for longer, support the critical work of our social workers, and continue momentum on key infrastructure projects, such as York Central and dualling of the York Outer Ring Road.

The budget also launches a range of new measures to support local communities, including additional support for the financially vulnerable during the cost-of-living crisis, funding to tackle anti-social behaviour, funding for a new specialist Youth Support Worker, £100K to promote better mental health and support those residents with autism, and further funding to incentivise the use of local public transport.

The capital programme will see significant levels of investment maintained in our city, including £38 million to progress York Central, £57 million to dual the York Outer Ring Road and £17 million to help deliver the station frontage scheme. Beyond these hugely important projects, the capital programme will also see over £100 million worth of investment to deliver new housing in the city and £45 million spent on improving our existing infrastructure, including our roads and flood defences.

Colleagues will know that here in York, sadly, we remain one of the 20 lowest funded authorities in the country, despite continued calls to address this injustice. Nonetheless, our teams achieve so much for the city, whether that be planting 50,000 new trees, or delivering a new centre of excellence for disabled young people in the city. I am proud of the work that we do as a Council, but with the ever-growing financial instability of the public sector, we must all collectively lobby the Government to address this issue and provide the funding local government so desperately needs.

Devolution:

Similarly, following the vote at Budget Council a few weeks back, the next steps in the devolution process will now be taken by submitting the Scheme and consultation feedback to the Government. This in turn will enable the Government to proceed with the draft order needed to create the Combined Authority for later this year.

As I have mentioned on previous occasions, devolution could help strengthen our city's local economy at a time when it is needed most, from skills development and supporting small businesses, to the £22 million investment package to build new homes on brownfield land and deliver affordable homes.

Given the importance of the matter, considerable effort was put into undertaking the consultation on the proposed governance arrangements which underpin the deal. In total, an impressive 300 information and advocacy sessions were hosted across a range of meetings and engagement events, including several drop-in sessions held at our Explore Centres across the city.

We can see from the consultation feedback that over half of respondents support the proposed governance arrangements needed to unlock the deal, with many highlighting the importance of additional funding as a reason for their support. At the same time, I sympathise with those who have raised concern about the power concentrated in the mayoral role. Nonetheless, we must be pragmatic to achieve the best for local communities and quite simply, to secure that needed investment in our city, devolution is the only game in town.

This is undoubtedly a historic moment for our city. This deal could unlock 30 years of vital investment needed to improve economic prosperity and long-term opportunities for all our residents and businesses, and I am pleased that we are one step closer to achieving those goals.

The Local Plan:

Following years of hard work, we have reached the last significant step before we can adopt a Local Plan for the first time in 60 years.

A consultation on the final modifications of the Local Plan is now underway before the final plan is then submitted to the inspectorate for their approval in the coming months. The 6-week Local Plan Proposed Main Modifications Consultation outlines the minor modifications to the Local Plan requested by the inspector, to allow it to be adopted.

This consultation concludes on the 27th of March and provides the opportunity for people to have their say on whether the proposed modifications make the Local Plan 'Legally Compliant' and 'Sound'.

As we have previously stated, we feel strongly that this is a robust and sound plan, which will ensure York is able to deliver the housing, jobs, growth, and facilities our city needs, whilst also protecting the city's unique character, green belt and natural beauty. An incredible amount of work has been undertaken to reach this point, so I would like to thank the inspectors for their work and feedback, as well as all planning experts, officers and residents who have invested their time in developing the plan to this stage.

York Central:

I am incredibly proud of the progress we have made in delivering York Central – a scheme talked about for longer than I have been a councillor. Following years of inaction, we now have diggers on site to unlock £700 million of investment and the opportunities of what is one of the most important brownfield sites in the country. York Central will see us transform our city, delivering world class business space, housing, and public spaces – unlocking a £1.2 billion boost to our economy.

Earlier this month, four public events were held to show how feedback received during the November engagement sessions is now being incorporated into the emerging York Central designs and shaping the ongoing plans for the new public square. The sessions were also used to gather more feedback that can be implemented in later phases of the development.

The Government's interest in locating a significant Government Hub on the York Central site is a vote of confidence in the project and these positive discussions with Government officials will help bring well-paid jobs to York and create new career pathways needed to retain talent and support our young people in their new careers. Only a few weeks ago, it was confirmed that the York Central site will see a total of 2,600 civil servants located there and I am excited to see what more the York Central scheme will achieve in the years to come.

York Station Frontage:

Linked to York Central is the York Station Frontage Scheme, which has recently had a further £10.5 million of funding released by WYCA to enable the project to move on to the next phase. Colleagues will have seen that over the past year, utility companies have been carrying out enabling works, such as essential utility diversions around Queen Street Bridge. These works are almost complete, and this funding confirmation will enable the project to move into the next stages, with a contractor set to be appointed in the coming months.

This funding will help us unlock improvements that will allow for easier and safer access to and around the station, as well as providing better public spaces and an improved gateway to our city.

Purple Flag:

This administration's objective of securing Purple Flag status for the city was an important milestone reached back in February 2022, and we want to continue building on this work to provide a safe and family friendly experience for everyone enjoying our city.

York is proud of its welcoming and vibrant evening and night-time economy. As one of the safest cities in the UK, visitors return year after year to enjoy everything that York has to offer, and this was endorsed by the Purple Flag award, which saw our

city centre's safety, cleanliness and vibrancy recognised by the independent assessors.

More recently, Purple Flag partner packs and resources have been made available for businesses across the city. The pack includes free posters, social media graphics and stickers, and is designed to help local businesses reinforce how visitors can keep the city safe and welcoming, whilst being considerate of others, including their staff. Businesses can promote the Purple Flag accreditation by using, personalising, and displaying the material provided.

Most groups are respectful to the city and the people who live and work here. However, we recognise the impact some larger groups can have on residents and families enjoying the city centre. That is why the Council continues to work with partners across the city, particularly via the York Safer Partnership and Purple Flag, to ensure the safety of our residents and visitors. Whether that be via our licensing, public health enforcement, or community safety teams, there is a great deal of work taking place to maintain progress.

Social Care Recruitment Campaign:

Nationally, local authorities up and down the country are faced with mounting workforce challenges in social care, with representatives from government, employers and professional bodies, recently committing to tackle the severe recruitment and retention pressures being faced across the country.

Here in York, we have invited experienced and newly qualified children's social workers from across the region to find out more about the benefits of working at City of York Council through a new recruitment campaign. Earlier this month, our Children's Social Work teams hosted a drop-in recruitment event to provide social workers with an opportunity to chat to team managers and social workers about working in York and the excellent opportunities available.

There Council has also been promoting the 'Step up to Social Work' programme, which provides a unique opportunity to receive support while training to start a new career in social work. The 14-month training programme provides hands-on experience of working in a real-life social work role through placements in local authorities, including York, whilst undertaking the qualification. Once individuals successfully complete the course, they'll be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, enabling them to apply to register and practice as a social worker. Applications close at midday on the 24th March 2023.

Any new social workers coming in will be working with our passionate and exceptional social care teams, all of whom make an incredible contribution to the city and our communities.

May 2023 Elections and Voter-ID:

With the 4th May and York's local elections fast approaching, it will be the first time that residents will be required by the Government to show ID to vote.

Like many colleagues, I hold significant concerns about these changes, which I feel will disenfranchise some voters in the city. In tiresome but typical fashion, there has also been very little information or support provided by the Government, making the delivery of the upcoming local elections uniquely challenging for our staff.

It's incredibly important that everyone understands what types of ID they can use to vote, and how to apply for free ID if it is needed. Residents who do not have one of the accepted forms of ID can apply for a free voter card. This can be done online, or by requesting and completing a paper application form and sending this to our Electoral Services Team.

For anyone needing help with applying for the free voter certificate or to seek any further information on the upcoming changes, then please contact: electoral.services@york.gov.uk or call 01904 551007.

Housing Delivery Programme:

The award-winning Housing Delivery Programme continues to make great strides, with proposals approved to deliver more zero-carbon Passivhaus homes and increase the number of affordable homes at Ordnance Lane.

To date, the Housing Delivery Programme is in the process of delivering 472 homes. Of these, 363 are being delivered by the council at Lowfield Green, Burnholme Green, Duncombe Square and through the Second-Hand Shared Ownership scheme, of which 64% are affordable. A further 109 homes are being facilitated on smaller schemes, including self-build plots and community housing schemes. The next scheme at Ordnance Lane has planning permission for 85 zero-carbon homes, and grant funding of £2.43 million has been secured to prepare the site for construction.

Following initial consultations with residents in Walmgate, it has been agreed to proceed with further design work and further consultation for more zero-carbon, affordable housing on the site of the former Willow House. The plans propose the inclusion of some garaging in the nearby area to enhance the design and to increase the number of affordable homes.

Over 100 homes are now occupied on the Lowfield Green site. Plans for the 2 remaining vacant plots will be progressed to deliver more affordable and accessible homes on the site, and to deliver further homes designed for people aged over 55.

The success of the Housing Delivery Programme is owed to our residents, who have been involved at the earliest stages to understand their views and to help create a

vision that is making great strides towards to delivering new sustainable and affordable homes.

Early Years Strategic Plan:

A new Early Years Strategic Plan, created by the city's Early Years Partnership Board, will recognise the importance of how a young person's early experiences will have a profound impact on well-being, health, educational achievement and economic prosperity in the city.

The plan sets key outcomes through which the council and health, education and childcare providers can support families, including through a focus on maternal mental health, parent and child bonding and communication, speech and language.

Through projects like Look Say Sing Play and our Early Talk for York speech and language programme, we can give professionals and families the tools they need to support children in those formative years of life. The strategic plan and associated outcomes will help us to work even more closely with partners to help shape the long-term futures of children in the city.

50,000 Trees Planted:

Back in 2019, this administration committed to planting 50,000 new trees by time of the next elections, with some people in the city suggesting it could not be done. Fast forward to today and I am delighted to confirm that the 50,000th tree at the new York Community Woodland has now been planted.

Spanning 78 hectares, the York Community Woodland area is under the long-term management of Forestry England, who aim to see the number of trees planted increase to 210,000 over the next few years.

The woodland will support our city's efforts to tackle the impacts of climate change and increase biodiversity. It will also contribute to York's new goal of increasing the city's tree canopy cover from 10.8% to 13% by 2050, the equivalent of 21 hectares of new canopy cover each year.

Marking the 1-Year Anniversary of the War in Ukraine:

A year on from the dreadful events of February 2022, we continue to stand with the people of Ukraine in their fight against Putin's unjust invasion of the Ukraine. Since this illegal and atrocious war began a year ago, thousands have been killed and millions more displaced, with 114,400 Ukrainians finding refuge in the UK alone under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

As a City of Sanctuary, York has once again played its part in welcoming people fleeing the horrors of war, and we are deeply grateful to the 180 York residents who have opened their homes to over 300 Ukrainians fleeing the war. I also want to take this opportunity to thank our staff and partners for providing that all important wrap

around support to individuals and families, whether that be helping access our local schools, or accessing employment.

Celebrating the Kings Coronation:

With His Majesty King Charles III's Coronation soon approaching on the 6th May, we know that many residents across the city will want to come together to mark this occasion.

To help residents, businesses and local communities celebrate this historic event, a digital hub has been made available to provide all the guidance and information residents need for community street parties being held. The council is also waiving some of the cost for community street parties being held on the day. For any Groups wanting to plan a road closure for their community street party, further information will be available online. Information will be added to our Coronation page as more details are confirmed over the weeks.