

## Leader of the Council Report to Full Council 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024

### **Our city, Our community**

I would like to start this report by welcoming the new Right Honourable Lord Mayor of York, Councillor Margaret Wells to the first Full Council meeting of her term. I wish her and her civic party all the best for the coming year. It has been a joy and honour to have already attended a number of events with the Lord Mayor through the past weeks and to see the warm welcome she has received from our communities across York. I would also like to thank the previous Lord Mayor, Councillor Chris Cullwick, and his civic party for their service of the previous civic year. They worked tremendously hard for the people of York, did a fantastic job of representing us across the city and I know were highly valued by the numerous communities and organisations they visited in the period.

I would also like to mark and honour the recent passing of Honorary Alderman Brian Watson. Brian was a highly dedicated and respected public servant to York as a councillor for thirty-six years and then an Honorary Alderman. He will be sadly missed as was highlighted by the civic community of York, friends and family that attended his funeral at All Saints Church, High Ousegate in early July. I know we all send Marcia, his wife, and the rest of his family our most sincere condolences.

The past three months since early April have been dominated by two election periods. The election of the Mayor of York and North Yorkshire that took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 and the General Election that took place on 4<sup>th</sup> July. The business of the Council has continued through the period and I would like to send my thanks to all the Council staff who have worked ceaselessly to allow both of these hugely important elections to take place. The workload both for the Council's Electoral Services team and the broader officer corps cannot be underestimated particularly for a snap election such as that called unexpectedly at the end of May. We now have Mayor David Skaith (Labour), Rachael Maskell MP for York Central (Labour), Luke Charters MP for York Outer (Labour) and Councillor John Moroney (Hull Road, Labour) elected or re-elected to office. We move into a new era of a Labour government with a huge working majority in Westminster. The alignment of a Labour national government, Mayor for our region, Council and MPs brings an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate delivery on the big issues that matter most to our communities:

- The building of affordable homes to buy and rent alongside the essential infrastructure that make communities fantastic places to live.
- Improved access to health services including mental health services, GP appointments and access to dentists.
- Improved water quality in our local rivers
- Free breakfast clubs in primary schools
- Investment in climate emergency mitigations, secure, well paid jobs of the future.
- Tackling the cost of living crisis in our communities.

During this incredibly busy period I have also been honoured to attend events including the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Askham Bryan College, commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day at York Minster on 6<sup>th</sup> June, the York Pride launch and parade in mid-June and Armed Forces Week celebrations including flag flying at the Mansion House and Armed Forces Day 2024 Football Fest at the Community Stadium on 6<sup>th</sup> July. The breadth and depth of community celebration, commemoration and action is humbling, and I'd like to thank everyone who works so hard to make our great institutions, venues and events so inclusive and welcoming to residents of our city and visitors alike.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to make everyone aware of the fact that York will be hosting Yorkshire Day, in partnership with the Yorkshire Society on 1<sup>st</sup> August. This will bring almost 100 civic parties together in our city to celebrate Yorkshire in all it's finest regalia. Part of the celebrations will be a procession of Yorkshire's civic parties from the Mansion House to the Minster for a celebratory service. I look forward to welcoming, alongside the Lord Mayor, everyone to our fine city. I'm sure it will be a day to remember and one of the highlights of the summer.

## **Delivering for our city**

### **Blue Badge ban reversal and improvements to city centre access**

Further improvements to city centre access for Blue Badge holders were implemented on the Blake Street and Lendal loop in May. Parking bays for both Blue Badge holders, allowing parking for longer than three hours, and business loading are now available on both streets. This action has enabled both Mayor making and Annual Council held in May 2024 to take place at the Guildhall for the first time in a number of years. A widely celebrated improvement to the accessibility of our city.

### **Human Rights and Equalities Board is reinstated**

The Human Rights and Equalities Board (HREB) held its first meeting in April. This followed on from a period of rebuilding relationships since my administration took over in May 2023. Relationships with city partners had been damaged by the decisions made by the previous administration around the Blue Badge ban in the city centre. Executive members have worked with the Human Rights City Network Executive to re-write the HREB Terms of reference to ensure there is now a mechanism for the Network to escalate an issue should they believe that a decision or action by the Council is incompatible with Human Rights. The first piece of work by the HREB has been to consider the York Human Rights Indicator Report 2023 released in the spring. City of York officers and partners across the city are now building an action plan to tackle the recommendations outlined within the report.

### **York's Transport Strategy**

Earlier in the year the Council consulted with over 2000 residents, businesses and visitors on York's Transport Strategy. It was the largest transport engagement exercise in the city for over a decade and the findings have been invaluable. We were pleased to receive widespread support for our ten policy focus areas, and consensus for a transport strategy which enables active travel and public transport and reduces car dependency.

Buses were a big topic of conversation and it is clear that people really want to use the bus but need more reliable and frequent services. Traffic congestion was the top concern, closely followed by air quality, the impact of traffic on climate change and road safety.

The views expressed during the consultation have fed directly into the final version of the transport strategy – due to come to Executive on 18<sup>th</sup> July – and we are very grateful to everyone who gave up their time to talk to us. We were left in no doubt about the importance of transport in York, people's passion for improving it and the difficulties many people currently experience travelling around, into and out of York.

### **Children, Young People and Education**

Cllr. Webb was thrilled to attend the Children's Services Celebration Day Event in recognition of all good the practice currently carried out by staff, day in, day out. This is an example of my administration's commitment to supporting and recognising the hard work of staff and the ever-improving position of the Council's children's services.

The Council is currently developing a local youth strategy and York Youth Partnership. We recognise the value good, local youth provision has and by supporting different providers to work together when appropriate we are aiming to strengthen the sector in York.

We are also excited by the new Labour Government's manifesto commitment to create new Young Futures programme with a network of hubs across the country, reaching every community.

York has secured 'up to' £260k of funding from March 2024 to March 2026 for the Changemakers programme. The programme is run in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and four local authorities – Merton, Stockport, Wirral and City of York and is designed to build evidence based programmes for parenting interventions that have positive impacts for children.

Congratulations to Huntington Secondary School for their success in securing the first Silver Award for Healthy Schools Award in the City. This shows a real commitment to the health and wellbeing of the young people in their communities.

Door 84, a local community and youth hub have been working with York St John University to investigate how they can best serve young people and the wider community in the future. As part of this project, several young people who attend evening youth sessions at Door 84 interviewed local leaders and stakeholders about the importance of youth services and community services, and how Door 84 can best operate in this arena. I was pleased to be interviewed by the young people along with several other Labour councillors.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Action Plan**

Executive members and officers have worked with the York Travellers Trust to co-produce an action plan that builds on previous work that was carried out through the Gypsy and Traveller Strategy. The action plan was approved at Executive on 9<sup>th</sup> May. It is an important piece of work that aims to ensure that Council Services consider the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities and make their services accessible to them.

A specific example of actions in this area was the launch of the Gypsy and Traveller Experiences of Education in York report.

I would like to extend my thanks to the young people, families, and staff at York Travellers Trust for their hard work in producing it. It is obviously

hard reading for the Council and other organisations across York but as an administration we have committed to support vulnerable groups and protect and promote people's rights. We will work to see this issue fed through into the City's wider work on anti-racism.

### **Combined Authority and Regional**

Following the election of Mayor, David Skaith in early May I would like to welcome him to his role. Cllr Kilbane and I are very much looking forward to working with Mayor Skaith and our North Yorkshire Council colleagues, Cllrs Les and Dadd in our roles on the Mayoral Combined Authority. We have built strong working partnerships over the past year and are now ready and looking forward to delivering for the people of York and North Yorkshire.

On 9th May the Council hosted a City Leaders meeting inviting the Mayor to meet over 60 organisations and their representatives across the city. It was a hugely positive gathering with a wide range of discussions carried out outlining and concreting the priorities of the city. A pipeline of projects for York has now been created, taking into account the feedback from our City Leaders, our City of York Council scrutiny committee members, officers and Executive members. This has been a good example of cross city partnership and cross party elected member work. The finalised list of projects will be taken to my Executive Member Decision Making Session on 17<sup>th</sup> July before submission to the Combined Authority.

The Mayoral Combined Authority meetings including Scrutiny and Overview and Audit and Governance are now starting. I look forward to seeing us to build further on our strong working partnerships to see implementation of strategic transport, economic development, net zero and housing projects across all areas of York and North Yorkshire, from north to south and east to west.

### **Poverty Truth Commission**

I have been honoured to work with colleagues across the city as a Civic Commissioner on the York Poverty Truth Commission since May 2023. In April the commission entered phase 3 with the holding of a next steps and celebration event at the Priory Street Centre.

The community commissioners, those living or that have lived in poverty chose the issue '**To be treated with kindness, understanding,**

**honesty and respect when accessing services'**, as the one that would make the most difference to them whilst experiencing poverty.

The outcome of discussions between the commissioners, both civic and community, was the Charter for Organisational Standards – Together promoting dignity and respect for those facing poverty.

City of York Council is a signatory to the Charter and has committed to implementing the standards throughout our organisation's communications and contact with residents. This work is ongoing and will be monitored over the coming months. Please take the time to visit the Poverty Truth Commission's website at [York Poverty Truth Commission - York CVS](#) to read more about the Commission and our commitment to their work and Organisational Standards.

### **Local Plan Update**

The final Local Plan consultation will be live by the date of July's Full Council. The consultation covers the policy for Gypsy and Traveller provision. The consultation has been set by the Local Plan Inspectors and will be live for six weeks. We expect this will be the last outstanding issue before we can progress to adopting the plan in the autumn. Unfortunately, the York Local Plan is by several years, the longest running in planning history which means no sooner will it be adopted but will already be in need of review. We look forward to working with the new Labour government on their planning reforms to get the housing but equally importantly, the infrastructure in place so that we don't have soulless deserts but new, thriving communities.

To be able to meet the challenges that will be imposed, we also need to ensure that the planning system works and is streamlined to avoid long delays in applications. The planning department has been restructured and we are already seeing improvements. We have also agreed to develop a compact between the planning department and the West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce Property Forum so that all sides can work together in a constructive and productive manner. This should be ready for approval by the autumn.

### **Queen Street Bridge**

The fantastic work over two weekends to construct a diversion road and demolish the main spans of Queen Street bridge was completed on time and to plan. We thank all residents who switched to sustainable forms of

transport on those weekends. You helped keep the roads free for those who needed to use them during the closure of Queen St and the city centre remained busy and open for business. We understand the considerable disruption the improvement works will inevitably cause and thank all those affected by them for their forbearance.

The demolition so far has created significant space which is really evident for everyone to see. Our contractors Sisk are currently installing a piling retaining wall to support the corner section of the city walls so that the remaining part of the bridge can be removed, and the final road layout be created. They are also busy planning the next phase of works in detail and will confirm when further road closures are needed to move onto the exciting phase of creating a new welcoming entrance to our city from the station, with more accessible and better sustainable transport links.

### **Council Budget 2025-26 Consultation**

The Council continues to face unprecedented financial challenges and needs to make budget cuts of £30m over the next three years. This is despite York being one of the lowest funded councils in England and spending nearly £700 less per resident, per year than the average council. Over the next weeks the Council will launch its biggest budget consultation ever, asking residents, community groups, businesses and city leaders to identify those services they rely on most. By taking part in the consultation, residents will have the power to influence our priorities and ensure we keep targeting support where it is most needed.

Cllr Douglas, Leader

8 July 2024