

Report to Full Council from the Leader of the Council

Although a report was prepared for the 26th March, it has been just over 6 months since my last formal Leader's Report to Full Council and during this time, a lot has changed. It has been an incredibly busy period for the Council since the pandemic has been declared and I would like to start my report by recording my thanks to the many Council staff, residents, businesses and councillors for all their hard work in responding to these difficult times and demonstrating what York does best in times of crisis – coming together to support one another.

Responding to COVID-19

It is easy to forget that, even before the pandemic was declared, York has been responding to Coronavirus since the first cases in the UK were declared in the city in January. However, since the Prime Minister's announcement on the 23rd March, placing the country under 'lockdown' restrictions, the Council has been working hard to support residents, businesses, and communities across the city in adapting to the evolving national guidance.

The impact across all aspects of life has been significant, changing the way our services are delivered. From March, thousands of Council staff have had to change how they work overnight, with many continuing to work from home, as per the current national guidance. Since March, services have had to be dialled down, and then dialled up, as the guidance changed. Our immediate response prioritised resources for our frontline services and support for the most vulnerable in the city, particularly via the creation of our community hubs, which have supported residents through a variety of different tasks, from delivery food parcels, to collecting medicine for those individuals isolating.

The Council also focused on providing support to local businesses through Government Grants and the Business Rates relief scheme, to ensure that money was in businesses' bank accounts as quickly as possible and help with cash flow. The speed of payments has been recognised nationally, with City of York being one of the fastest Council's to pay the grants in the UK. Over £110M has been paid out in direct grants or in business rates relief. This includes the local £1 million local

emergency fund the Council created to assist small or micro businesses who fell outside the criteria for Government support.

In addition to providing financial support to businesses, we also provided additional funding to support residents who were facing financial hardship due the effects of the pandemic. In March, the Council announced a £1.25 million investment in:

- An Emergency Hardship Fund for residents affected by Covid-19.
- A new Council tax Covid-19 Hardship Fund.

Despite some of the difficulties and challenges encountered during this period, there have been some statistics to highlight from our response, for example:

- The number of people joining local libraries has quadrupled, when compared to the month before.
- There have been 5,000 views per week for newspapers and magazines on the online Press Reader via Explore, following the Council's £17,000 grant to Explore to make the service free for local residents.
- Over 23,000 volunteer hours have been deployed across the city.
- Over £18,000 worth of food vouchers have been distributed.
- At least 2,100 children have been provided with free school meals.
- More than 1,500 emails to the Covid-19 mailbox have been responded to.
- Over 800 food parcels have been delivered to residents.
- The Council has helped more than 6,000 businesses.
- 5 direct mail shots have been sent to all 96,000 households.
- Over 3,000 calls have been responded to via our Covid-19 helpline.

More recently, councillors will be aware that York is now subject to Tier 2 restrictions, as part of the Government's three-tier lockdown strategy. The new restrictions will make aspects of life more difficult for some in the city, but following them is our best chance to slow the virus and thus, have the restrictions lifted as quickly as possible. It must be noted that the communication from the Government regarding the recent announcements has been frustrating, with decisions often leaked via social media before our public health team receive official confirmation. We have highlighted our concerns to the Government regarding this

poor communication and we hope that the process will be improved moving forward.

With the increased level of activity and support on offer during this period, it has been particularly challenging for the Council's finances, with a considerable fall in the Council's income, but significant increases in demand for Council services. It is estimated that the Council's budget gap is over £20 million, but we continue to keep this number under review. Alongside the LGA and other Council's across the Country, we are making the case to Government for further financial support, so we can continue to provide crucial services to our residents and support recovery.

Test and Trace:

A new walk-through coronavirus testing facility is to open for all those with symptoms to book appointments, based at the University of York. Testing is available only for those with coronavirus symptoms – a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste.

The new site is situated so as to be easily accessible without a car. Those being tested will be required to follow public health measures, including social distancing, not travelling by taxi or public transport, practising good personal hygiene and wearing a face covering throughout, including while travelling to and from the testing centre.

We are aware of the difficulties some people are having in accessing a test and the addition of a walk-in testing centre is crucial in increasing testing capacity in the city. Together with our partners, we continue to make the case to Government for increased resources and additional capacity in our local testing system. This week (w/c 19th October), we have formally requested an additional walk-in testing site to be created in the west of the city, to provide more easily accessible testing for all our residents.

Improving the capacity of testing is critical to delivering an effective test and trace system, and ultimately, in reducing the spread of the virus.

1 Year Recovery and Renewal Strategy

Beyond our initial response to the pandemic, the Council has developed a 1 Year Recovery and Renewal Strategy, focussing on the short-term recovery of the city. The Strategy describes the key areas of focus for the Council over the coming year, which will enable us to prioritise key aspects of recovery for the city and to build back better.

Within the plan, there is a One-Year Transport and Place Strategy, which ensures that the city can safely support visitors as the economy reopens, as well as continue to promote more sustainable methods of transport, as part of our work to tackle the climate emergency. The strategy also looks to combine the efforts of the council, partner organisations, the voluntary sector, communities, and residents to continue providing crucial support to vulnerable residents.

As part of the strategy, members will have seen the Let's Be York signage created around the city, which aims to communicate clear public health messages and build the confidence of residents to once again, shop and support our local businesses. As part of the Let's Be York campaign, a number of packs have been created and distributed to businesses to put in their premises, so they can help protect visitors and staff, with the resource packs being made available free online for any local business to download.

City of York Council are supporting the campaign with investment of £100K for targeted marketing activity, which is designed to support local businesses and cultural attractions, to boost resident and visitor experience. The investment will include targeted advertising, including digital, radio and press initiatives, and the curation of a unique programme of events throughout the autumn of 2020. The strategy focuses on building confidence in the city as a safe and welcoming place for residents to enjoy, as well as promoting York's special character.

10 Year City Plan

In addition to the 1 Year Recovery and Renewal Strategy, we recognised that to build back better, the Council could not achieve this alone. We recognised the need to develop a longer-term strategy that the Council and its partners could collectively own in order to improve the lives of everyone who lives, works, or studies in the city.

To create this strategy and ensure its success, we know that we must build on the strengths that are unique to York. From our city's history and culture, to utilising the expertise in our innovative biotech industry, and seizing the once in a lifetime regeneration opportunity in York Central; there are opportunities in York that many other cities and towns would envy.

The plan will represent the distinctive qualities of York and focus on a number of key challenges that can best be addressed at a city level. These are likely to include the linking of our education, skills and innovation sectors to support employment, further develop the city's response to climate change and ensuring a 'people focused' city, utilising York's unique culture and heritage, and promoting a public health approach.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Councillors will know that the Government have made it clear they would first prefer smaller devolved deals, rather than a One Yorkshire proposal. Since then, devolution deals have been agreed for South Yorkshire and, in March this year, a deal was agreed for West Yorkshire. A York and North Yorkshire devolution deal is the only possible deal for York on the table at present and throughout this period of time, all Yorkshire local authorities, through the creation of a Yorkshire Leaders Board, have continued to work together to promote shared interests and lobby for additional investment in the region.

Acknowledging this reality, we have worked together with all the other North Yorkshire local authorities to identify the "Asks" which would lead towards a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire. In July, Executive approved a set of "Asks" for a devolution deal, with the intention that these would be submitted to Government to allow the commencement of negotiation of a potential devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire. The Asks incorporate the devolution of significant powers to the region and around £2.4bn of investment to support inclusive economic growth and social and environmental wellbeing over a 30 year period. Any devolution deal must be right for York and be of direct benefit to our residents, communities, and businesses.

Since Executive's approval of the Asks, there have been some further announcements from Government which impact on both the possibilities

for devolution and the future of local government in York and North Yorkshire.

At 5.15pm on Friday 9 October, the Secretary of State wrote to York and North Yorkshire Council Leaders to invite submissions of proposals to replace 2-tier (County and District) Local Authority structures with new unitary models. Whilst York, as an existing unitary authority, does not need to change to meet this requirement, it is likely that proposals will be put forward from other authorities which include York in new structures. Given these exceptionally challenging timescales it was, therefore, necessary to list an urgent item at the meeting of the Executive on the 22nd October, in order to then bring the decision to Full Council.

To reduce the 2-tier county and district structures in North Yorkshire, there are only two options being put forward. The first, the council's preferred option, would mean York remains on its existing footprint and North Yorkshire creates a new single council, serving the whole of North Yorkshire and based on its recognised geography and identity. The second, proposed by the district authorities, is an east/west split that would see York merge with Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby, covering a geography that would stretch 65 miles north/south, and 45 miles east/west.

Following consultation and the analysis undertaken in the Executive report, we believe proposals that cause as little disruption as possible to allow City of York Council to concentrate on recovery at this critical time is the right way forward. For this reason, the best way to support strong recovery, secure devolution quickly, and support the Levelling-Up agenda in York and North Yorkshire, is with City of York continuing as a unitary authority. Any other model of local government would fail to effectively represent York's history, communities and the unique characteristics of the city.

Any change to City of York Council in order to include surrounding rural and coastal areas would either increase the cost to residents, or stretch services further, thus making it harder to meet York's own unique challenges. Ultimately, any decision that affects York's residents, businesses and communities, should be made in York.

Senior Management Restructure

Following a meeting of the Staffing Matters and Urgency Committee, it has been agreed that City of York Council will shift to a new Chief Operating Officer model, in order to focus on the delivery of Council services for residents and businesses in York, provide value for money and generate further efficiency savings.

Currently, City of York Council operates under a Chief Executive model. Instead, the Chief Operating Officer and Head of Paid Service role provides a greater focus on operational delivery and service coordination. The Chief Operating Officer model was also been recommended to City of York Council by the Local Government Association (LGA), following a review of the Council's current structures. The LGA commented that the model, which is currently used by Leicester City Council, is "the best option for the Council at this time".

By moving to a Chief Operating Officer model, the Council is forecast to save circa £95K per year, and the Chief Operating Officer's pay is capped at £145,931 on the highest pay level, as opposed to the Chief Executive role, which can rise to £153,891.

The decision comes following a period of consultation with affected staff, councillors, key stakeholders in the city and trade unions.

Local Plan

The Council have now completed the technical work required to provide an update on household growth and housing need in the city in response to the Inspector's July letter, regarding the latest household projections released by the Office for National Statistics this year. Using the recent publication of updated household projections, including taking into account the latest demographic and economic trends, the Council has determined that the housing need in York has not changed materially since the last assessment in January 2019.

The previous report identified a need for 790 dwellings per annum (dpa) and the economic-led need within this new report is as high as 788 dpa. We therefore continue to support our proposed modification to the plan for a housing requirement of 822 dpa (790 dpa objectively assessed

housing need plus a shortfall of 32 dpa), as highlighted during the public hearing sessions in December 2019.

The Council also continues to work on a response to the concerns expressed in a letter on 12 June 2020 regarding the methodology for determining Green Belt boundaries. The Council is updating the Green Belt Topic Paper Addendum and its Annexes to simplify and clarify the methodology. That work has not, at this stage, revealed any need for significant changes to the proposed Green Belt boundaries.

York Central

In August 2020, the Government confirmed the arrangements for the £77.1 of funding to progress the York Central scheme, which will be awarded to Homes England and Network Rail as the major landowners on the site. Under the arrangement, City of York Council will be reimbursed for the money it has committed to keep the project moving.

The funding is a major piece in a £155m funding package put together by the council working with fellow York Central Partnership members Homes England, Network Rail and National Railway Museum to fund the infrastructure works to unlock the brownfield site. The first phase of this work will include the access road bridge and spine road through the site, a pedestrian bridge on Water End and a rail link to the National Railway Museum.

This confirmation backs the approach we took to provide early investment and continued commitment from the Council, even during the pandemic. The funding is a vital step to unlocking a £1.16bn boost to our economy, and delivering a new generation of jobs, particularly as we work towards the city's economic recovery.

Castle Gateway

In light of the impact of the pandemic, we have reviewed the project plan and business case for the regeneration of Castle Gateway and agreed to continue our commitment to the key public benefits of the masterplan. In turn, this means we will now bring forward the design of the public space around Clifford's Tower, in order to give York the best chance of having a 'ready-to-go' project positioned to secure external funding and investment in the city.

We will also press ahead with finding a construction partner to deliver the apartments at Castle Mills, which will help to fund the regeneration scheme, including a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Foss; the riverside park at the rear of the Castle Museum; and the pedestrian/cycle crossing over the inner-ring road.

This does also mean that the Council will be delaying procuring a construction partner for the St George's Field multi-storey, until more is understood about the impact of Covid-19 on the city. This will also allow for continued engagement and consultation over accessibility, and the development of the Local Transport Plan. However, we are committed to replacing any parking before Castle Car Park closes.

Our Big Conversation

With the growing challenges and opportunities in the city, we have launched Our Big Conversation consultation programme, which seeks to gauge voices from a variety of different stakeholders and residents across the city, to inform the Council's approach over coming years.

Our Big Conversation will take place over the next 12 months and will give residents, businesses and communities the opportunity to shape our response to the big challenges facing York, such as:

- our response and recovery after the Coronavirus pandemic
- the climate emergency
- how we move around the city
- defining an exciting future for our city centre and district centres
- where we live and work, what jobs are available
- how we make sure York's economy works for all residents

Throughout the year, the Council will be holding conversations online and offline, including regular survey, live online sessions (as seen recently on Facebook live), community conversations with local networks and business round tables.

York Outer Ring Road Consultation

The Council is currently asking residents, businesses and visitors for their views on the proposed upgrade of the York Outer Ring Road from

A19 Shipton Road to the A1036 Little Hopgrove. This follows the announcement last year that the Department for Transport has approved York's £25 million scheme to dual the Outer Ring Road from the A19 Shipton Road to the A1036 Little Hopgrove progressing to final business case stage.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority have also approved £38 million to upgrade seven roundabouts along the ring road. Wetherby Road roundabout was the first to be upgraded and was completed in 2019.

New Community Woodland

The Council has agreed proposals to create a new community woodland within York's boundary – which could see 50,000 trees planted by 2023.

Using part of the existing £3m Northern Forest budget, agreed at our most recent Budget Council in February 2020, the Council has purchased 154 acres of farmland between Knapton and Rufforth on the outer ring road, with a further 10 acres on the inner ring road, to create the new woodland. This will also enable the council to become involved in projects further afield, specifically the planting of 200 hectares in the Upper Swale, Ure and Ouse - so protecting York against severe flooding events.

Harnessing existing knowledge and expertise is an important part of the programme, in order to access and gain a wide range of advice throughout the various stages of the woodland design process, whilst also developing a lasting legacy for the next 150 years. To deliver this, the council will be working with numerous groups, including the Woodland Trust, the Stockholm Institute, the Wildlife Trust, the University of York, St Nicholas Trust and the Wood Meadow Trust, as well as many other experts.

Whilst it will take some time for the land to be developed into a community and leisure space, planting is expected to start this winter or early next spring, once plans have been approved by the Forestry Commission. In the meantime, other preparatory works, including a permit application and resident engagement, will be taking place, alongside wildflower planting on up to 35 acres of the site.

New Skills & Employment Board

A new City Skills and Employment Board will be created to support residents and businesses in York to manage the economic impact of Coronavirus. This decision has been taken to respond to the emerging impact of the pandemic on the city's economy, and to recognise that the city's current skills and employment offer – which is based on very high levels of employment – will not be sufficient to address the acute needs and increased demand expected over the next 12-18 months.

The Board will include representatives from York Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Institute of Directors, York Professionals (business support network), vocational training providers, private sector training and skills providers, TUC, Jobcentre Plus and Department for Work and Pensions, as well as from City of York Council.

Board members will be asked to oversee the creation of a new Adult Learning and Skills Strategy, in order to set out how York can develop skills and employment opportunities that support a sustained economic recovery from the pandemic.

Electric Bus Fleet

The first of 21 new all-electric double-deckers have entered service on the York Park & Ride network, starting with the Askham Bar corridor to the south west of the city.

The Metrodecker EVs, manufactured by Optare in Yorkshire, have been brought into operation this summer, replacing existing diesel vehicles in an investment totalling £9.3m and expanding the fully electric fleet on York Park & Ride to 33 buses.

This work builds on the £1.6 million investment already made to deliver York's Clean Air Zone, the first voluntary Clean Air Zone in the UK. The new buses will play an essential part in delivering our bus-based Clean Air Zone, whilst at the same time providing an enhanced experience for users.

E-Scooter Trial

A year-long e-scooter trial will take place in the city, with the first e-scooters to be deployed at the University of York, offering residents a new and sustainable mode of transport for getting around the city. This follows a highly competitive tender process involving over 15 other applicants, with the Council selecting TIER as the sole operator, because of the company's approach to safety, ability to ensure orderly parking and its sustainability credentials.

City Walls and Tower Two

Works to stabilise part of the York's historic walls at Tower Two are currently being undertaken by the Council's ancient monuments team, in collaboration with York Archaeological Trust.

Over the last five years, the condition of Tower Two has deteriorated with cracks and bulges appearing on the external face of the tower and more recently, the condition has begun to worsen faster than expected. This section of the walls remains safe, but work is needed swiftly to stop further deterioration.

As I am sure many reading this report will agree, York's city walls are finest in England, making them one of our most treasured historical assets. That is why it is incredibly important that we continue to maintain and repair the walls, so residents and visitors can enjoy them for many years to come.

The Beehive – New Centre of Excellence for disabled children

York's new Centre of Excellence for disabled children has received a new name: 'The Beehive'. The Beehive will provide short overnight breaks for children with complex disabilities in the city. Young people and their families will be able to receive specialist support from a wide range of professionals, including clinical psychologists, all in one building for the first time.

The 'bee theme' will be installed throughout the new facility, including bee-friendly names for the bedroom areas and honeycomb-like hexagons incorporated into the decorative features. Children and young

people using the facility will also be given a fluffy bee toy to take home with them as a visual reminder of their 'home away from home'.

It's hoped that this new theme and the attention to detail will help the children settle into the new building more easily, something which is particularly important for young people with learning disabilities or autism.

Back York

As part of the development of the 10-Year Plan, it has been agreed that the plan will be supported by a new corporate lobbying campaign, working with partners across the region to make the case for York. Whilst we continue to face significant financial challenges, we must, as a city, urge the Government to Back York by seizing the opportunities that are unique to York and make us an exemplar of recovery.

To build back better and lead recovery in the North of England, the Government must release the funding needed to unlock York's potential and build on the work already taking place in the city. With additional funding, we could:

- Make further funding available to support local businesses in adapting to the crisis.
- Enhance York's world-renowned culture and heritage by making extra funding available to support local museums, libraries and more.
- Scale up the support on offer to residents facing financial hardship, particularly through the use of the York Financial Assistance Scheme.
- Provide much needed funding for small charities and voluntary sector organisations who do not have the resources to fundraise themselves.
- Speed up the delivery of critical regeneration projects and citywide infrastructure schemes, from York Central, to the dualling of York Outer Ring Road.

As part of the campaign, the council has submitted its submission to the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review. As part of the submission, we have repeated the calls of the Back York campaign to secure additional investment in the city, as part of the wider levelling-up

agenda, as well as offer our support to work with the Government in relocating a Government department to York.

The campaign will support and link up with the work of other organisations and Councils who are lobbying for further funding for local authorities, including the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, IPPR North, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and more.