

## **Report to Full Council from the Leader of the Council 15 July 2021**

---

With the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021 marking the 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday of our NHS, the city, our key workers and York's communities are continuing to grapple with the biggest public health crisis seen in our modern history. There is much we can be proud of when looking at how our city has responded to the pandemic, but with the number of positive cases increasing once again and the lack of clarity some aspects of national guidance, the Council is once again having to focus efforts to reduce the spread of the virus.

Despite the concerning increase in infection rates, the continued positive reaction from Council staff, key workers, volunteers, residents and businesses is something that will see us through this crisis. Having already passed National Thank You day on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, I would like to take the opportunity in this report to echo that thanks to everyone in the city who continues to do what they can to keep our city safe.

### **Responding to COVID-19:**

Since my last report to Full Council in March, we have seen a further relaxation of restrictions by reaching stage 3 in the Roadmap out of Lockdown, but still wait clarity from the Government on aspects of social distancing guidance, following the postponement of stage 4 and increased rates of positive cases across the UK.

As many colleagues will have read in the local and national media, the emergence of the Delta variant, combined with the relaxation of some national restrictions, has seen a significant increase in York's rate of positive cases. To illustrate, at the end of May, York's number of positive cases per 100,000 of the population was 26.6. A month later at the end of June, York's number of positive cases per 100,000 was 383.6.

Of course, this increase in the number of cases is concerning and that is why the Council has taken a number of actions to help reduce the spread of the virus. One of the main actions taken has been to increase the city's testing capacity, so we can identify hotspots in the city and ensure targeted testing is offered to those communities. Recently, Council officers have been visiting communities directly to offer free testing kits in an effort to halt the spread of the virus.

Despite the increase in positive cases, the rollout of the vaccination programme continues to proceed and is being received positively. As of the 27<sup>th</sup> June, 78.5% of York's population have received their first dose of the vaccine, and over half of the city's population have received both doses. To further support the rollout, a number of pop-up vaccination sites have been setup across the city, including York St. John, where those eligible for the vaccine can simply turn up to receive their vaccination on the day.

In those wards where vaccine take-up has been low, health partners have been adapting their approaches to encourage vaccination take up, including the use of pop-up sites. Following that work, we are now seeing an increase in take-up, particularly in wards where more younger people are present. We continue to monitor vaccination rates in wards with less than an 80% take up over the last 2 weeks, so we can target support to those areas.

Regardless of the progress being made in vaccinating the local population, we must continue to be vigilant and do what we can to slow the spread of the virus by being regularly tested and following guidance where it applies. It is worth noting that locally, demand for NHS services is outstripping supply, despite additional virtual and physical appointments being made available. Demand for mental health support has also significantly increased, so whilst there are many positives to take, we must recognise that this remains a challenging period for the city, particularly for those working in our health services.

It remains a difficult time for many local businesses and residents, and in response, the Council has been continuing to process financial support to affected businesses and those facing financial hardship. From May, the Council has been distributing the Additional Restriction Grant funding to local businesses, which means that the Council has now processed over £180 million in grants and rate relief during the pandemic. Our Covid Local Support Grant was also recently extended to provide free school meals over the May half term, following a £50,000 investment.

As ever, the Council will continue to what it can to support residents and businesses by adapting our services where required, providing support and information, or lobbying the Government for additional funding for York's communities. Should anyone need support, then please do

contact the Council on telephone: **01904 551550**, or email:  
[covid19help@york.gov.uk](mailto:covid19help@york.gov.uk).

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

As many colleagues will be aware, the Government consultation to consider the two proposals to remove 2-tier local government in North Yorkshire concluded on the 19<sup>th</sup> April. The Government's 8-week consultation asked key stakeholders to express a view on the two proposals submitted, as well as provided local residents, businesses and organisations a chance to express their views on local government reorganisation in York and North Yorkshire.

Responding to the consultation, as agreed by Full Council, the Council shared evidence about the benefits of retaining City of York Council on its existing footprint, and the subsequent risks of any merger. As part of this submission, the strength of existing partnership working and the potential for a Strategic Partnership to support efficient service delivery alongside a new North Yorkshire unitary authority was also highlighted to the Government.

Throughout the consultation, we invited residents to Back York and sign a petition asking the House of Commons to listen closely to York's residents and businesses. I am pleased to say that over 3,200 people signed the petition, which was presented to the House of Commons on 15<sup>th</sup> April, and I am grateful to colleagues for their support in promoting this campaign.

## **Local Plan**

The Council has submitted further information about the definition of the city's green belt to the Planning Inspector team currently examining the local plan. When carefully considering the boundaries previously identified in 2018, the Council has concluded that it would be appropriate to propose modifications to the boundaries originally identified. The work has concluded that the previously submitted Green Belt boundary proposals were generally sound and conformed to National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPF), with a small number of exceptions where it is considered appropriate to make revisions.

Following this work, a consultation on the proposed modifications is now underway. The consultation runs between Tuesday 25 May and Wednesday 7 July 2021 and those wishing to take part in the consultation can do so by visiting the Council's website or by requesting a consultation form by emailing: [localplan@york.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@york.gov.uk).

I would like to thank the council's planning officers and government inspectors who have managed to progress this plan, despite the difficult circumstances of the last 15 months.

### **York Central and Great British Railways**

With site clearance works underway at York Central, significant progress continues to be made on taking the project forward and ultimately, attracting new investment and high value jobs to the city.

As many will have already seen, we are working closely with partners across the city and the Government to secure a significant Government presence on the York Central site. With the recent announcement of new Cabinet Office jobs to be created and located in York, we remain positive.

More recently, together with support from colleagues in North Yorkshire County Council and York and North Yorkshire LEP, we have written to the Secretary of State for Transport, and Minister of State for Rail, to urge the Government to locate the newly established Great British Railways' and its headquarters here in York.

The rail sector continues to play a part in major part in our local economy and region, accounting for around 5,000 jobs, representing 10% of the national rail industry and two thirds of all rail jobs in the region. York is already home to Network Rail who manage the East Coast Main Line from York, as well as LNER, Northern, Grand Central, the Siemens train servicing and cleaning depot, the National Railway Museum and many varied rail consultancy businesses, contractors and specialists, from signalling and electrification experts, to civil engineers and railway operatives. There is no doubt that York would be the ideal home for the newly established GBR headquarters.

### **Castle Gateway**

At the beginning of May, the Council shared the emerging plans for new public spaces around the Castle Gateway. The draft sketch from designers BDP shows how the area could meet resident's ambitions for the public space to replace Castle Car Park, while still meeting the current and future needs of the museum, the courts and the Coppergate Centre.

We have worked with local partners My Future York to put residents' views at the heart of the plans to transform the car park, Eye of York and the wider area. The plans that have been published are ideas in response to what residents have told us and moving forward, we want residents to continue to shape these proposals. The feedback we receive will allow us to create detailed proposals and options to be developed and shared with the public through the spring, with a planning application to be submitted in the summer.

Residents are encouraged to join the conversation on social media or through the next phase of My Castle Gateway events.

### **Good Business Charter**

Following agreement at the last meeting of the Executive, York will become the UK's first Good Business Charter city, with City of York Council formally agreeing to become a signatory of the Good Business charter.

The Good Business Charter is an initiative of the charity Good Business Foundation, and aims to encourage businesses to adopt a holistic approach to their social, environmental and economic impacts. Organisations signing up to the Charter agree to ten key commitments, including:

1. Real Living Wage
2. Fairer Hours and Contracts
3. Employee Well-being
4. Employee representation
5. Diversity and inclusion
6. Environmental responsibility
7. Pay fair tax
8. Commitment to customers
9. Ethical sourcing

## 10. Fair payment to suppliers

By becoming a signatory on the Charter, the Council will work together with local partners, including the University of York, Aviva, Federation of Small Businesses, TUC, CBI and other business networks to take the work of the charter forward and promote its benefits to other organisations. By doing so, we hope that it will help York to promote responsible business practices and provide a practical framework which enables York to build back better.

I would like to thank all partners involved for their efforts in promoting the benefits Good Business Charter, and I welcome colleagues support in taking this work further in the months and years to come.

### **Our Big Conversation**

The Council has launched the next step of the 'Our Big Conversation' consultation, with local residents, businesses and communities being asked to share their views on carbon reduction, future transport priorities and York's local economy.

Our Big Conversation is the Council's city-wide consultation on how we best tackle some of the big challenges facing the city, and that is why the responses we receive from this consultation will help shape the city for generations to come. Views shared during this iteration of Our Big Conversation will be used to inform the development of the Local Transport Plan, Economic Development Strategy and Carbon Reduction Plan, which will be published for consultation Winter 2021.

To support this work, we have been working with partners across the city to ensure a variety of voices are featured. To ensure as many residents as possible are given the opportunity to take part in this city-wide conversation, a special edition of Our City has been landing on doormats, featuring a paper survey that can be returned via a free post envelope.

### **Community Renewal Fund**

The Council has selected 9 bids to be put forward to the £220m UK Community Renewal Fund. The fund has been set up to help support local areas pilot innovative new approaches and programmes that

support communities, local businesses, create new jobs and support people into employment.

Of course, it is disappointing that York has not been classed as one of the Government's 100 'priority places' across the UK, despite the promise of levelling up. Unfortunately, this means that it is less likely that the submitted projects will be selected by the Government to take forward, however, we feel confident that the project proposals are ambitious and offer fresh ideas, which is hoped will play to their advantage.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inclusion Review**

The Council has been seeking residents' views on a series of broad proposals to ensure that the right provision is available to help all children and young people with SEND fulfil their individual potential.

With the numbers of children and young people with SEND expected to continue to increase over the next couple of years, it is essential that we take stock of what is working well, how we might want to deliver provision differently or what we need to improve. We want to ensure that we have the right range of provision in the city, which best meets the varied and complex needs of all the young people in York.

The consultation has been available online and paper copies were also provided at Explore Library and Gateway Centres. I would like to thank everyone for taking the time to share their views on this incredibly important matter, which will help us shape future provision in the city.

### **Armed Forces Day**

I was pleased to join partners across the city and the UK to celebrate the work of our Armed Forces on Saturday 26 June.

As part of the national celebrations, the national Armed Forces Day flag was flown above the Mansion House throughout Armed Forces week. Many organisations across York also showed their support for Armed Forces personnel in a variety of different ways, including offering a variety of discounts to armed forces personnel during the week 21-27 June.



York is proud of its military history and of our armed forces personnel, veterans and reservists. Armed Forces Day gives us all an opportunity to say our thanks for all their work, including their most recent efforts in the fight against coronavirus. The Council is committed to working across the city to support its armed forces community, setting out its support through the Armed Forces Covenant.