

## County Councillors report March 2023

As we move into the final weeks before LGR, this will be my last report in my role as a Craven District or North Yorkshire County Councillor. From 1<sup>st</sup> April the new North Yorkshire Council will finally begin its role as the local Government body for North Yorkshire.

While the change in terms of democratic structure will be quite substantial, in reality many of the front-line services residents utilise from day to day will only change in name with large numbers of existing officers remaining in the organisation.

As we enter into this new era of our local Governance I have no doubt that there will be some minor teething problems, but I'm reassured by a sense among both members and officers of a determination to make the changes work and an optimism for the potential opportunities to improve services the changes will present.

### Council Tax

Council tax is now the most important source of funding for council services in North Yorkshire, and each one per cent increase raises more than £4 million towards meeting rising costs and demand. The new council's budget will see a rise in council tax of 4.99 per cent, equating to an increase of £83.64 for an average Band D property.

- We have decided to increase CT by 2.99%, the maximum allowed before holding a referendum, and adding another year of the Adult Social Care levy of 2%
- We do not do this lightly, as we know there are many people in the County who will find it hard to pay any increase, but comes as we face substantial increases in demand for our services.
- Over the last 10 years our CT increases have been below inflation.
- However we must make sure that we have sufficient funds to deliver essential services, especially to people who are very vulnerable, like the elderly, and children who need safeguarding and have special needs. Over 50% of our total spend goes on these two areas now.
- Our budgets face the same cost pressures as many in both personal and business budgets – huge rises in energy costs, where our £7m spend pa could rise to £30m; increased transport costs, especially getting children to school; general inflationary pressures; special inflation in the building sector, especially roads and repairs – we can't buy bitumen from Russia any more, quite rightly, but that prohibition has forced world prices up.
- We have used £30m from our prudent reserves built up over many years to ensure we don't cut services, but we can only use them once.
- We have put in place mitigation measures to help cushion the impact on many people – CT discounts (even more generous than the schemes provided by our district colleagues), increasing our own Local Assistance Fund helping those in desperate need, using the government's extension to their Household Support Fund, supporting community

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organisations providing help and food banks, financial support to bodies like the Citizens Advice to help people who need advice on how to manage their financial circumstances.

- We expect savings to be made in the re-organisation of local government, but although some are immediate like £1m pa on the most senior staff, and £700k pa on reducing the number of councillors, it will take time to make other savings, like reducing offices and buildings, but they will be between £30m and £70m a year.

## **Work to tackle cost of living crisis will support those most in need**

The leader of North Yorkshire County Council has pledged to work in tandem with the Government to provide essential financial support to those most in need in the face of an immensely challenging budget and the cost of living crisis.

Work is already under way to ensure that support is available for households in the county which have been hit the hardest by soaring inflation of more than 10 per cent – the highest rate since the early 1980s.

The Government has now announced that councils in England are set to receive a share of a multi-million pound windfall to help the most vulnerable members of society cope with the cost of living.

The Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed that the Household Support Fund is being boosted by an extra £842 million from April 1, the date when the new North Yorkshire Council launches.

Tens of thousands of households in North Yorkshire have already benefited from the first three rounds of the fund, which has provided cash and food vouchers to those most in need as well as access to other support. The fourth round of the Household Support Fund in North Yorkshire is now starting to be developed, and details are due to be announced in the coming months.

The first phase of the Household Support Fund was launched in North Yorkshire at the end of 2021, before a second stage was rolled out in the summer of last year. A total of 20,624 households benefited under the first phase, while 39,023 received support in the second stage.

The third phase, which will come to an end on March 31, has seen letters sent to more than 23,000 eligible households in North Yorkshire with the offer of supermarket e-vouchers for up to £325 to pay for food and other essentials.

The county council has also put together a co-ordinated response to the cost of living crisis to highlight the support that is available. The council is working with Community Support Organisations (CSOs), which have extensive knowledge on locally-run projects. The CSOs can direct people to local support, such as food banks or food share schemes, community venues offering warm spaces or support groups.

Citizens Advice is also contracted by the council to deliver the Warm and Well project to help to ensure homes are properly heated to prevent poor health. The project was given an additional £260,000 in the most recent phase of the Household Support Fund.

Another initiative, the local assistance fund, has seen a dramatic increase in applications. The fund, which is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, provides vouchers for food and energy bills as well as clothing, electrical items and furniture to households struggling financially.

In the 2021/22 financial year, the scheme received 6,264 applications with 5,560 awards being made and grant funding of nearly £765,000. Those figures have risen in this financial year, with 10,725 applications and 9,766 awards made so far and grant spending of more than £1.3 million.

Councillors have also used their locality grants, which allow each member a budget of £10,000 per year to respond to local needs, to support community organisations that are helping households affected by the cost of living.

Finally a new policy will be adopted by North Yorkshire Council which means households in the greatest financial need will be given up to 100 per cent reductions on council tax bills. The move has brought together different approaches used by district and borough councils to provide a single policy across North Yorkshire.

For details of support available in North Yorkshire, visit [www.northyorks.gov.uk/cost-living-support](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/cost-living-support)

## **Social media contacts**

Finally for those who are on social media platforms, the following are the links for the new North Yorkshire Council.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/northyorksc>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/northyorksc>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/northyorksc/>

LinkedIn: <https://uk.linkedin.com/company/northyorksc>