

County Councillor report

Local elections

90 councillors have been elected to represent 89 new divisions. The newly elected councillors will serve the final 11 months of the county council and then for a further four years on the new North Yorkshire Council when it launches on 1 April next year, making decisions that affect everyone living and working in the county. During the course of the next few months there will be many decisions to be taken that will set the shape of the new council.

Covid update

On the covid front, the data is showing that North Yorkshire is still relatively high compared to the rest of the country. The England average is that 4% of the population are testing positive for covid, in North Yorkshire the figure is 5.2%. This is however a significant reduction from the figure of 2 weeks ago which stood at 8.7% of the North Yorkshire population with covid. The numbers of people in hospital beds in the hospitals that serve North Yorkshire with covid has decreased as well in the last couple of weeks. There are still over 300 people with covid in the hospitals that serve North Yorkshire. Not all of these are North Yorkshire people and the majority of people with covid are not in hospital because of covid but the infection has been found whilst tested within the hospital environment. There are however 18 people in intensive care beds who have covid.

County Council summary 21-22

- Our proposal to move from 8 councils to one single unitary council was accepted by gov't without modification, and will be more efficient with less duplication, and less expensive. It will be more accountable with only one councillor responsible for all services (in all divisions except one in Selby where there will be two elected members).
- We are committed, along with our District Council partners, to make the transition as smooth as possible, so that on the day of change in May 2023, all services will be safe and legal, and residents should notice no change in delivery.
- The election on May 5th this year will be to the new authority, with 90 Members in 89 wards serving as County Councillors for one final year, then Unitary councillors for 4 years. District Councils will continue for one final year.
- Your elections are being aligned with this timetable, so you will be elected for 5 years; thereafter elections will be held every 4 years. There will be no charge for this year's elections, and it is an aspiration of many in the new council that PC's should not be charged for regular elections as this is often a large % cost to the precept.
- Working together we have come through another year of the pandemic. We could not have done it without our partners, but also our amazing volunteers, both organised ones and individuals.

- Almost half of our annual spending goes into Adult Social Care and looking after vulnerable children. These are often “hidden” services.
- We had serious shortfalls in staff in social care, both us and in private providers because of isolations due to covid, but even before the pandemic we had many vacancies in the sector. We have launched a recruitment campaign called Make Care Matter, promoting how worthwhile these jobs are, how vacancies are readily available, and how there are career opportunities available to young people.
- We continue to maintain the largest road network in England, which is challenging, and continue to grit a higher % of roads than any other authority. We are trialling a new pot-hole filler which could mean speedier and cheaper work in the future.
- We do not support a blanket 20mph speed policy, but will work with local communities and the Police to introduce or support relevant speed limits that drivers will respect and follow.
- We have invested over £100m in the County’s digital infrastructure. Our Superfast North Yorkshire project has brought high quality broadband to some 200,000 households and businesses, especially in rural areas which would not otherwise have been reached by commercial suppliers. Classic market failure so often a feature of rural life. The current phase of SFNY expansion will achieve 97% coverage of the County (by population not geography). We have also installed a Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) throughout the County and free public wi-fi in 20 of our towns. We are working closely with mobile network operators to try to ensure that 4G coverage is raised from 60% of the County up to 95% (by geography, not population).
- Our Trading Standards unit continues to protect consumers with high profile court cases against cowboy builders which serves as a deterrent to others.
- We have set an aspiration for the County Council to be net zero by 2030. This is for our own activities but we will support and encourage others in NY to do the same.
- We set up a unique Rural Commission, bringing together a panel of experts, who gave their time freely, to look afresh at our well-known problem areas to come up with new ideas that we can test and introduce where appropriate.
- We have set up and continue to manage commercial companies delivering rural broadband, waste disposal, legal services, audit, house building and services to schools, which even faced with the challenges of the pandemic have delivered value to the Council taxpayer which equates to approximately 2% of Council Tax.
- We have set the final budget of this County Council, at 1.99% council tax, and 2% ASC levy. This is well below the rate of inflation, which is high this year as we all know, but over the last 15 years we have continued to set CT rises below inflation, striking the balance of providing finance for the services we need to deliver, whilst recognising the ability of people to pay.