

North Yorkshire Councillors report – December 2025

As the year draws to a close, Local Government once again waits in anticipation of yet another challenging financial settlement from Central Government for the year ahead.

After the withdrawal of the Rural settlement grant of over £14m along with increased costs of employment and higher than expected inflationary pressures, many difficult decisions have been made to return a balanced budget for the last year. We now find ourselves once again having to reassess the level of service the Council can provide in terms of discretionary services, while delivering our statutory duties within increasingly tight fiscal constraints.

Needless to say we have always sought to deliver cost efficient services and value for money, but this has still meant difficult decisions needing to be made over Home to school transport and ward grants to name just a couple. And with a similar level of cost pressures ahead, hard choices will need to be made. The one positive being our ability to call on carefully built reserves and the cost efficiencies delivered by Local Government reorganisation.

Finally I would like thank all my fellow Councillors for their continued help and cooperation in representing our residents and look forward to a continued strong working relationship in the coming year.

Wishing all a Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Cllr. David Staveley

Funding of £3 million to help boost special needs education

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in North Yorkshire are being supported through a £3 million investment to learn locally, thrive and reach their future aspirations in a caring and nurturing environment. Despite the financial challenges facing local authorities, North Yorkshire Council is continuing to support families, children and young people with SEND by increasing the number of specialist school places across the county, ensuring every child or young person has the best opportunities for their education.

The start of the academic year has seen the opening of post-16 specialist provision in Skipton. The town's former Ings Primary School, which closed in 2017, has been given a new lease of life after undergoing a £1 million renovation programme.

The pressures on SEND services have seen the number of children with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs) in North Yorkshire rise sharply from 1,700 in 2015 to more than 6,000 in 2025.

The investment in creating dedicated spaces for children with specialist needs reflects our determination to ensure that every child – regardless of background and need – can thrive in a supportive and well-resourced learning environment within their local communities, recognising the demand for special school places and the pressures facing families.

The Post-16 Brooklands School in Broughton Road offers places for students aged 16 to 19 in refurbished classrooms and work-related learning areas.

The facility boasts Changing Places toilets for anyone with accessibility issues, dedicated space for music and movement and a fully-fitted kitchen, dining room and designated independence areas where students can learn key life skills such as cooking, baking, making a cup of tea or coffee, ironing, making a bed and using a washing machine. All classrooms have been refurnished and there are dedicated outdoor spaces where pupils can experience horticulture.

The facility offers a curriculum tailored to meet the individual needs of our pupils' future aspirations. Pupils have a wide range of complex needs, but Brooklands is a bridge to adulthood including higher education or employment, helping students develop independence, life skills and confidence.

The opening of Post-16 Brooklands School and the expansion of Springwater School follow the announcement that The Lighthouse School has been appointed to run a new specialist secondary school in Harrogate for children with autism following a £2.4 million investment by the authority. In addition, construction has started to build a specialist school in Osgodby, near Selby.

North Yorkshire Council's aspiration is for all pupils to have access to the resources and support needed to fulfil their potential. The SEND school places being created across the county will ensure that even more children and young people with additional needs can benefit from excellent facilities and high-quality learning environments close to their homes, reducing travel times.

Families in need welcome extended holiday activities scheme

As the festive season draws near, parents and carers in North Yorkshire are encouraged to book places on a holiday activities programme designed to support thousands of eligible children offering enriching activities with food during the school holidays.

The Department for Education has announced that the holiday activities and food programme (HAF), which funds the FEAST scheme in North Yorkshire, has been extended for three years until March 2029. Bookings for the Christmas holiday programme, which runs from December 20 to January 4, went live from November 17th. The programme is administered by North Yorkshire Council in the county, and since 2021 over £5.5m in funding has been allocated by the Government to support activities locally.

Delivered at schools, community venues and leisure centres across the county, FEAST offers a wide range of fun and engaging sessions including activities from sports, forest schools and outdoor adventures to computer programming, dance, gymnastics and animal care.

This summer, 54 activity providers in North Yorkshire offered more than 37,000 funded places across 87 locations for children and young people aged five to 16 who receive benefits-related free school meals.

FEAST activities are open to children aged five to 16. Everyone is welcome to join, with free places for children and young people who receive benefits-related free school meals.