North Yorkshire Councillor report – October 2026

Public to have say on home to school travel recommendations

Residents are being invited to share their views on proposed changes to how North Yorkshire Council provides home to school travel to eligible pupils with the launch of a consultation.

Parents, carers, schools and other stakeholders will be able to take part in the survey that launched today (Monday, September 21), following a post implementation review of the council's policy. The review was promised after a revised policy was introduced in September 2024, which changed the main eligibility for free home to school travel so that it applies only to a child's nearest school.

The current policy was launched to ensure the service is financially sustainable, fair to all families and in line with government guidance.

A series of 24 recommendations have been drawn up, with seven of the proposed changes due to be discussed at a full council meeting in November. The consultation, which will run until Wednesday, November 4, is focused on these seven recommendations.

North Yorkshire Council provides home to school transport for about 11,000 eligible pupils across England's largest county, with many families living in often deeply rural communities. The service costs more than £52 million each year and supports many children who travel long distances to school, particularly in rural areas.

The review assessed how the current policy is working through analysis of appeals, complaints, data and feedback from parents, carers, schools and other stakeholders. The recommendations that are forming the basis of the consultation include plans to update the policy to allow greater discretion for routes used to a child's nearest school.

The consultation is also seeking views on whether discretionary measures should be considered where two schools share the same drop-off point for council-run transport. Other proposals include allowing routes to be removed from a mapping system if it is deemed unreasonable for a pupil or vehicle to use them, and also making information clearer about how home to school distances are measured.

The consultation will also focus on five routes in particularly remote areas of North Yorkshire which the review recommended are removed from the mapping system as they can be affected by severe weather or impractical driving conditions.

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These routes are Fleet Moss Road, Keld to Kirkby Stephen, Buttertubs Pass, The Stang and Kidstone Pass. Other routes that are identified through the consultation will also be considered for removal from the mapping system if they are assessed as unsuitable.

The review's remaining 17 recommendations were discussed by the council's executive with a total of 10 recommendations approved by councillors.

The other seven were noted by members as they related to measures already in place in the current policy, such as continuing to base eligibility for home to school travel on a child's nearest suitable school with available places instead of using a catchment school. The executive also asked for shared drop-off points to be included in the consultation.

Any approved policy changes will not take effect before September 2027 and will apply to children starting in Reception and Year 7 in September 2028.

Parents and carers applying this academic year for a school place for their child to start in Reception or Year 7 in September 2027 are reminded that until any decisions are made, the current policy remains in place. Families should continue to make school preference decisions based on the existing policy.

People can take part in the consultation at www.northyorks.gov.uk/PIRsurvey up until the deadline of Wednesday, November 4.

Alternative formats will also be offered on request and paper copies will be available at the council's libraries for anyone who is unable to access the consultation online.

You can find out more about school admissions and how to apply at www.northyorks.gov.uk/starting-secondary-school ahead of a deadline of Saturday, October 31.

Plans to allow more people the chance to secure their own home

People with a learning or physical disability or mental health challenges will be given more support to secure permanent housing in a scheme funded through a tax on second homes.

The new approach has been heralded as providing a "step change" in the way that supported housing services are delivered in North Yorkshire and would also save millions of pounds of taxpayers' money by not using more costly accommodation options.

New contracts started on October 1st with two Yorkshire-based housing providers, Broadacres Housing Association and Horton Housing Association, and are being

funded through the council tax premium on second homes that was introduced in April last year. The premium effectively doubles council tax bills for second homeowners and raises more than £10 million annually.

A total of £1 million in funding from the council tax premium annually has been allocated to finance the upgraded supported housing service. It is hoped that the new Living Independently For Everyone (LIFE) model will see 300 people benefit annually within four years of its introduction which would be a 142 per cent increase on the current number.

Supported housing services provide short-term accommodation with help to allow people to develop the skills they need to manage their own tenancies and live independently. Support on offer includes tenancy management and budgeting as well as meaningful activities, social networks and helping improve health and wellbeing.

Demand is growing significantly with many people seeking support with mental health needs which are well beyond the scope of how the service was originally conceived. It is hoped the new approach will streamline assessments while providing extra support sooner for people with complex needs and those who are not ready to own or rent their own home. A wider range of accommodation is also planned, and the scheme will also seek to reduce the number of evictions.

There will also be increased collaboration between the council and partner organisations to help people to secure sustainable long-term housing.

There are currently 158 people often with complex needs who are living in bed and breakfast accommodation in North Yorkshire. Figures show that by helping people with these complex needs through supported housing rather than bed and breakfast accommodation would save £2 million each year while providing far better outcomes for the individuals involved.

The LIFE supported housing model is centred on the benefits of having one local authority spanning the county following the launch of North Yorkshire Council in April 2023.

Responsibilities for housing and social care were spread across the previous eight councils before they were merged to create the new authority three years ago.

The new model will see Horton Housing Association providing support in the west of the county while Broadacres Housing Association has responsibility for the east of North Yorkshire.

Public urged to help shape priorities for key council services

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Residents and businesses are being urged to help to shape North Yorkshire Council's financial plans and outline their priorities for key services amid major financial pressures on the authority's budget. The council is responsible for a wide range of essential services from social care, education, housing and leisure to roads, transport, waste collection and recycling.

However, the authority is facing intense financial pressures in a situation mirrored across the local government sector. The deeply rural parts of North Yorkshire mean that providing services to often remote communities increases costs significantly, and there is growing demand for adult social care and support for children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities.

A countywide consultation called Let's Talk Money has been launched on October 1st to gather the public's views and pinpoint the key priorities for the council's budget for the next financial year and the Council Plan for 2027/28. The now annual Let's Talk Money survey gives residents and businesses the opportunity to have a say on what priorities should be targeted to provide services to North Yorkshire residents.

The County Councils Network, which represents 39 local authorities including North Yorkshire Council, warned this week of the mounting financial pressures nationally. It said that county and rural unitary councils are on course to spend £7 billion more a year on services by 2028, unless the Government acts with a comprehensive package of investment and reform in this month's Autumn Budget.

As I have previously outlined, North Yorkshire Council has been faced with the loss of more than £40 million in funding from the Government over just the past two financial years. With Ministers placeing a heavy reliance on the county's taxpayers to finance the authority's budget, with central Government saying it expects council tax to rise by 4.99 per cent over three years to help plug funding gaps. However, the funding settlement from Westminster does not take into account increasing inflation, which is adding further pressure on the council's finances.

Among the greatest pressures on the council's budget is the need to provide vital support for vulnerable people across the county, with 34 per cent of the authority's £1.4 billion annual budget being spent on adult social care.

Despite the financial challenges, a series of major projects are being undertaken across North Yorkshire. A total of £40 million of investment has been secured to transform leisure services and plans have been approved to deliver a minimum of 500 new council homes by 2029, with over £40 million invested in existing properties.

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A new model for waste recycling is being introduced to allow more waste to be diverted from landfill. Key transport projects that are critical to the region include the multi-million pound project to create a new stretch of the A59 at Kex Gill to prevent disruption caused by landslips. The new stretch of road opened to traffic in August.

The Let's Talk Money survey is asking people to say how important the council's key priorities of affordable homes, promoting health and wellbeing, providing education and social care support, reducing the impact of climate change, supporting the local economy and transport are to them. This year's Let's Talk Money survey is asking for the public's views on the second homes council tax premium.

The public are also being asked if they are prepared to support an increase in council tax and a precept to pay for adult social care. A total of 77 per cent of people who responded to last year's survey said that they would support a rise in council tax to help deliver critical services.

More than 2,700 responses were received during last year's survey, and the five most important services were highways and transportation, education, waste and environment, children's social care, and adult social care. These five services account for 60 per cent of the council's budget.

The results of the consultation will be included in a report on the proposed budget for the 2027/28 financial year which will be considered by the council's executive in January before a final decision will be made at a full council meeting the following month.

The online survey is available at www.northyorks.gov.uk/LetsTalk and closes on Thursday, November 26.

Alternative formats of the consultation and supporting information are available on request by emailing LetsTalk@northyorks.gov.uk or calling 0300 131 2 131 and saying 'Let's Talk Money' when prompted. Paper copies will also be available from all libraries in North Yorkshire. More information about the current Council Plan is available at www.northyorks.gov.uk/councilplan

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