

North Yorkshire Councillor annual report 2024/25

Foreword

It has been a year of change since my last annual report, with a new Government in Westminster changing the national political scene and the first Mayor heading up the new York and North Yorkshire combined authority. While neither post is of my own political hue, I along with my North Yorkshire colleagues are doing all we can to work collaboratively to seek the best outcomes for residents. That said, the initial engagements around the Government settlement grant and housing targets have felt to be decidedly political and motivated more by doctrine than fact and good sense. But the challenge is set and we will do all we can to meet that.

Finance

As I have already alluded to, the financial settlement from central government this year has made an already challenging financial position incredibly difficult.

It is in a large part due to previous years of financial prudence that we're able to use financial reserves to give the council the breathing space needed to realign our future budgets to deliver the necessary savings while protecting key services.

Not only has the complete withdrawal of the rural settlement grant - over £14m annually - been a major shock, but also the increased costs associated with minimum wage increases, public sector pay and national insurance increases. We were assured of financial support from government to help mitigate these pay-related pressures, but that response has been inadequate.

This, coupled with the ever-increasing costs of adult social care and SEND provision to name just two of the higher value budget items, have meant that in order to protect delivery of services and the continued financial stability of the council, domestic rates have been increased once more by 4.99%, along with a review of fees and charges across the board. This is far from where we had envisaged being, but numerous factors outside the control of the council have meant our collective cloth has had to be cut accordingly.

Communities

I have continued to promote a range of schemes to support communities and residents, delivered through the NYC network, published in my monthly

North Yorkshire Councillor report.

As in previous years I have been able to allocate grants to local groups to help fund initiatives across a range of projects. This funding pot was £10k again this year, but due to the afore mentioned financial pressures, this will be reduced to £5k in the coming year. Once again, not what I would like to see, but given there are 90 councillors, this will mean a budget saving of £450k/pa. I will however endeavour to make what funds are available as effective as possible. I will be looking for applicant contributions as ever, but also encouraging match funding where possible from other funding streams.

Projects this year have included:

Giggleswick Parish Council -

£1440 towards interpretation board project on Harrison Playing fields.

Rathmell Reading Room -

£1500 towards replacement windows.

Lawkland Young Farmers -

£950 towards the purchase of sports equipment and meeting support.

Horton Parish Council -

£850 towards the installation of a new parish noticeboard.

Play Langcliffe Community Fundraising Group -

£1,500 towards the purchase of new play equipment for the playground in Langcliffe.

Settle Cricket Club -

£1,000 towards funding the ground and practice area renovation works and purchase new netting systems.

Settle District u3a -

£600 towards the installation of court markings for Badminton and Netball at St John's Church in Settle.

A late application is currently being proceeded for funds towards the Giggleswick Gardening Group who volunteer to maintain the church grounds.

Committee work

I have continued chairing the Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny (TEEE O&S).

Summary of issues addressed, engagement and updates received over the last 12 months:

Notice of Motions at Full Council

The Committee considered the following Notices of Motion:

- Support for Climate and Nature Bill – a Motion asking the Council to support in principle the Climate and Nature Bill.
- Active Travel Strategy – a Motion asking the Council to develop and implement an Active Travel Strategy by December 2025.

Updates, Presentations and Briefings

- National Highways Update – provided by the A66 Project Team Director from National Highways setting out the structure of the organisation, comprising teams in strategy, operations and major projects.
- NY Highways Performance and Progress – the Head of Highways Operations gave an update on the progress and performance of North Yorkshire Highways on gully cleaning and maintenance over the last 12 months.
- Climate Change Strategy Performance – the Climate Change Strategy Manager gave bi-annual updates.
- Development of a Tree and Woodland Policy – the Head of Parks and Grounds and the Tree and Woodland Manager provided a progress update on the development of North Yorkshire Council's first Tree and Woodlands Policy.
- The Committee held informal briefings with officers on the North Yorkshire Destination Management Plan and the commercial operation of Allerton Waste Recovery Park to develop their knowledge and understanding in these areas.

Reviews

- Six and Twelve Month Reviews of Motion on Water Quality for improvements in health, wildlife, biodiversity and economy – the Principal Environmental Policy and Project Officer has continued to update the Committee on progress with actioning the water quality motion that was agreed by Full Council in November 2023.
- Review of Household Waste Collection Options – officers from the

Waste Team and Environmental Services attended to seek views on the plans for the future harmonisation of waste and recycling services across North Yorkshire.

- Review of Household Recycling and Waste Collection Guidance – the Waste Team updated the Committee on the future harmonisation of waste and recycling guidance across North Yorkshire.
- Review of North Yorkshire Council's Response to January 2025 wintry weather – following heavy snow, widespread ice and torrential downpours in early January 2025, parts of North Yorkshire experienced treacherous conditions. Officers are set to review the response of the council to ensure lessons are learnt for future events.

The Committee's planned work programme for 2025/26

Annual Reports, Updates and Performance Reviews

- Air Quality Management Areas – Annual Status Report 2024/25
- Bi-annual Climate Change Strategy Performance
- National Highways – a report on major project delivery and route and maintenance activity from National Highways
- North Yorkshire Destination Management Plan Annual Review
- Public Conveniences
- Attendance of water companies at meeting
- Vertical Farming and Development of Land at Allerton Waste Recovery Park
- Highways Verge Management
- HGV Weight Orders / Enforcement / Rest Area Provision

I sit on the Skipton & Ripon Area Constituency Committee, representing our part of the county and from whose membership is formed the Planning Committee responsible in the former Craven area outside the National Park. We have covered a variety of subjects in the past twelve months, including the emerging Economic development strategy for the county, specifically the elements relating to this constituency. This meant we were able to give a £25k seed funding towards a much larger grant application which has secured investment in the Hoffman Kiln Interpretation Trail, adjacent to the Langcliffe Business Park. A previous development started

by Craven District Council, the Langcliffe Business Park is now nearing full occupancy which, in the current financial climate nationally, is encouraging and speaks to the resilience of trade in mid Craven.

I also sat on the Boundary Review Committee, looking at the size and shape of the county's wards, and the number of councillors, for the upcoming Boundary Commission Review. The draft report is out for consultation so please look and comment on this link [Nort HYPERLINK "https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/north-yorkshire" h Yorkshire | LGBCE](https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/north-yorkshire)

Home to school transport policy

As part of the council's ongoing review of service provision, the decision was made to alter the county's policy regarding free transport to school for children. This has meant that where previously it was free to a school in your catchment area, it is now only free to your nearest available placement school. While it is estimated this will deliver up to £4m/pa savings, I feel this wasn't the only consideration despite it reflecting the national guidance from the DoE. While myself and others voted against the change, we were unable to stop the proposal. I did however get the assurance of a review once the policy had run for a year to gauge if the effects and cost savings have been as predicted, so changes can be made to the policy if deemed necessary.