

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL15th May 2019**STATEMENT FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES,
LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT,
SCRUTINY, AREA COMMITTEES, PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND
LOCALITY BUDGETS****COUNTY COUNCILLOR DAVID CHANCE****STRONGER COMMUNITIES****Area Constituency Committee Showcase**

This year, to build on the success of the Community Showcase in 2018, and to coincide with the new Area Constituency Committees, I asked the Stronger Communities Team to invite a local group or project they had supported, to attend each meeting and share their story with Members. The groups valued the opportunity to speak to Members and it is right that we continue to recognise and celebrate the important work local community groups undertake to help others and add to the richness of local life.

Suicide Prevention Grants Programme

The Stronger Communities Programme were asked to manage a grants budget on behalf of both Darlington; and Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby Clinical Commissioning Groups for projects that support suicide prevention. 15 grants, totalling just over £70,000 were awarded to projects across the two areas. This follows on from the success of the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area - Essential Life Skills Fund in 2018, and the increasing reputation of Stronger Communities in managing voluntary sector investment programmes.

Supported Volunteering Event

Encouraging and enabling a diverse range of people to be able to give and connect through supported volunteering, is an important part of community life. In May, the Stronger Communities Team hosted a Supported Volunteering Event, to understand and learn from those organisations promoting inclusive practice about how, and in what circumstances, it would be achievable to replicate this throughout the County. More than 20 organisations attended and fed back at the event, and it is hoped that a supported volunteering framework will be published later this year.

Co-investment Model for Prevention

National policy is placing an increasing emphasis throughout the Health Service on prevention, and particularly, community centred social prescribing models. North Yorkshire has a well-established prevention approach, and is in a strong position to capitalise on this national change. In order to prevent duplication and to make best use of resources, the Stronger Communities Programme are working with Living Well and Public Health to package the existing prevention approach into a coherent offer, one in which Health commissioners locally can co-invest.

North Yorkshire in 2030 – Support for Refugees

I was invited to attend a workshop organised by the Stronger Communities Team in March, in which a range of partners came together to start to plan how best communities and organisations can support refugees in North Yorkshire over the coming years; helping them to develop a sense of belonging and provide an opportunity to contribute to community life. The depth of commitment demonstrated at the workshop provided reassurance that North Yorkshire will continue to be a welcoming place for those refugee families who have settled in the County.

The refugee families that have been resettled in North Yorkshire continue to work hard to adapt and integrate, despite their traumatic pasts and the culture shock they are inevitably experiencing. Six of the 50 families resettled in North Yorkshire have left, with the most common reason for leaving being due to the family wanting to move closer to relatives resettled elsewhere in the UK rather than because they do not like living in a rural area.

All of the families resettled have now been here for more than 24 months and so the focus is on getting more of the adults of working age into employment and continuing to improve their understanding of the English language. To date 14 adults are in employment. Jobs include amongst factory work, cleaners, car mechanics, barbering, school caretaker's assistant and working at a horse racing stables. One man has set up his own business. A number of the adults have construction experience and so work placements are being explored to this end with a range of employers. Many more adults are volunteering to gain useful experience before entering the world of work. Through the Home Office grant, the County Council has employed an Employability Advisor to work with the refugee adults to get them into employment. The Advisor is assisting with CV writing, securing work placements and providing briefing sessions on the world of work in the UK. Wheels to Work is being used to provide clients with transport for up to three months until they can afford to get their own transport in those parts of the county where public transport is limited but where there are job-ready adults and work placements have been identified. Driving Theory test sessions have also been provided to enable the adults to start driving again once they can afford to buy a car.

The Home Office is expected to be writing out to local authorities by early summer to seek local authority support to resettle refugee families beyond May 2020 (when the current Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Programme comes to an end). This would be part of an ongoing programme though likely to be smaller scale in nature.

Performance Management

As previously reported, we have continued to develop our performance management processes and reporting. The quarterly performance report received by Executive is now clearly aligned to the Political priorities set out in the Council Plan.

Indeed the Council Plan now contains specific performance indicators aligned to the Ambitions and Priorities set within it. These will form the basis of our performance monitoring from quarter one 2019/20 and will be reviewed annually.

Performance continues to be closely monitored by Executive and Scrutiny. Each ambition will continue to be reported to Members Seminars once per year on a rolling basis.

We believe this degree of transparency and rigour is important, even in an organisation with such an enviable track record of delivery as ours.

LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The County Council has created and has been operating a separate legal company called First North Law. The initial business plan for the Company seeks to expand the success of the Council's in house legal team in providing advice to educational establishments within North Yorkshire to providing legal advice across the Country. The Company has therefore sought to sell its legal helpline across the Country and has currently been successful in attracting new clients in York, Teesside, Wakefield, Lancashire, Cumbria and Leeds. The Company will therefore look at marketing this service further and also look at breaking into new legal markets.

Area Constituency Committees

The committees are now established and have in place work programmes that: respond to local issues of strategic importance to the Council; and enable closer and complementary working with the Council's five thematic overview and scrutiny committees. North Yorkshire's MPs have been invited to the September round of committee meetings. This will help deepen the relationship with our MPs, enabling key issues to be flagged at Westminster.

School Admission Appeals

The appeals team in Democratic Services will shortly be entering the 'bulk appeals' season. This relates to applications for September admissions and not the ongoing in-year moves between schools. Early indications are that the number of secondary school admissions appeals is higher than last year. The number of primary school admissions appeals will be known in June.

Overview and scrutiny

We still await new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local government. In the interim, we are taking the opportunity to look at how we work and whether there are any opportunities for improvement. Scrutiny Board continues to play a key role in this.

Democratic Services

A round of 'political awareness' training for key officers in the Council was undertaken in February and March. This training was delivered as part of a broader programme of work being done by Democratic Services to ensure that officers involved in major change projects: are fully versed in the decision making processes of the Council; know when to engage with County Councillors, particularly on issues of local concern; and aware of the role and value of overview and scrutiny, especially pre-decision scrutiny.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR LOCALITY BUDGETS

Members have been notified that the first date on which they can submit recommendations this year is Monday 13 May 2019, and the last date is 31 January 2020.

I'm particularly keen to encourage members to use their recommendations to lever in additional funding and volunteers to local projects in the county.

A report on the expenditure and operation of Locality Budgets in the 2018/19 financial year will be presented to Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2019.

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF)

Following a procurement exercise, a new provider (Family Fund Business Services, based in York) took responsibility for day to day management of the service from the start of April. The transition has been successfully completed. Recent research by the Children's Society show that NYLAF is one of the top performing schemes in the country.

DAVID CHANCE