



Councillor Christopher Pearson

Executive Member for Housing, Health, & Culture

Report to Council on 18 February 2021

Housing

The Housing Team continue to offer support to tenants throughout the pandemic, and particularly during these periods of lockdown when we know the vulnerable and elderly can feel particularly isolated. We have been making welfare calls to all our elderly and vulnerable tenants and providing a signposting service to any relevant support that may be available to them. This has proved to be a very successful project and we have received a lot of positive feedback from our tenants. We have also continued to advertise and allocate all our available properties through North Yorkshire Home Choice throughout the lockdown in order to meet housing need across the district.

We have recommenced formal recovery action where appropriate in line with new Government guidance and legislation and we continue to support tenants who are experiencing difficulties paying their rent because of a loss of earnings or due to self-isolation or illness. The Team provide advice and assistance on Universal Credit and on wider benefits and support to help tenants maximise their income to help prevent rent arrears building up.

The Housing Options Team has continued to offer support to those presenting as homeless throughout the pandemic. In December 2020 we have seen a significant increase in the number of customers requesting homelessness assistance (74) in comparison to December 2019 (33). The Service has also seen an increase of those who have presented as homelessness with more complex needs such as mental and physical health needs, substance misuse issues and are known to the criminal justice system. The more complex needs someone has, the more difficulty in obtaining accommodation which is sustainable. However, the service continues to work with specialist services to ensure a holistic support package is available for those who need it.

In the private rented sector, we have recently taken over the management of a sub-standard House in Multiple Occupation under an Interim Management Order (IMO). An IMO is a rarely used enforcement tool that allows local authorities to intervene when the health and safety of privately renting tenants is at significant risk. This is the first IMO to be issued in North Yorkshire and is normally only an option for larger unitary local authorities. It is hoped that if successful, the project will safeguard the availability of safe and secure accommodation for vulnerable single people for whom other housing options are often limited.

Non-Urgent Housing Repair

We are currently undertaking a review of all the reported repairs in the system to establish the level of work needed and the nature of each reported repair to identify whether any need to be revisited in terms of priority or have become urgent. Planning to deal with the backlog is currently difficult as we don't yet know what restrictions the Government will lift or when. This means we cannot, as yet, put contractors on stand-by to support reinstatement of routine repairs although we are in regular dialogue regarding their capacity to support us once we are able to move forward.

Void Properties

In the last couple of months we have allocated 25 refurbishment voids to our major works contractors of which 16 have been returned and we are reviewing those still within the system to determine which of those properties we can also sub-contract out. Our internal labour resource continues to focus on the standard and major voids on our books and whilst it has been possible to re-assign staff from our routine repairs work to the voids, social distancing guidelines impact on our ability to undertake the work. In addition cleaning and sanitisation requirements when different trade staff are required also means works are taking longer to complete.

Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy Advisory Board (VEAB) continue to meet monthly, with 12 members from across the District, representing accommodation providers, visitor attractions and hospitality businesses. The group are currently looking at ways in which the sector can be supported and are organising a virtual networking event in February.

The Tourism Development Officer continues to work closely with individual businesses during this difficult time for the sector, to help with queries concerning business grants, and anything else they may need support with. We are currently offering free webinars for Tourism businesses in the District, as part of a series of industry support events, funded by the Reopening High Streets Safely fund.

Cultural development framework

Partners who have been involved in developing our cultural development framework are now putting final comments to the work. There are 5 strategic priorities developing which will put people at the heart of our regeneration and cultural sector work. The framework will be completed ready for delivery to commence April 2021 and will give the 3-5 year forward plan for investing £600,000 of the Programme For Growth funding members agreed for this work. The intention then is to attract investment funding of a further £600k into this area.

Christmas at Home Campaign and The Christmas Spirits Trail

Following the success of the Monster Villain Halloween trail (with 86 participants), we brought the Christmas version to the high streets of Selby, Tadcaster and Sherburn. The Christmas at Home campaign, which included local press advertising, a digital campaign, social media activity and activity with STAG Mumbler, ran throughout the month of December. It was targeted at Selby District residents and the hyper-local audience. There was also an interactive Christmas trail in each of the three towns – The Christmas Spirits Trail which ran throughout December. All activity directed people to the dedicated section on the SDC website: www.selby.gov.uk/christmas.

Advertising resulted in nearly 600,000 impressions, a reach of over 20,000 via social media channels and 3,000 visits to the dedicated 'Christmas at Home - at the Heart of Yorkshire' page on the website. In addition to this, information about The Christmas Spirits

Trail was included in Welcome to Yorkshire's consumer e-newsletter, which was sent to a database of over 87,000 subscribers. Window stickers with various "Christmas spirits" were placed in shop windows throughout each of the three towns and families were encouraged to collect them all, using their individual QR codes. Over 320 people took part in the trails.

Welcome to Yorkshire

The new Welcome to Yorkshire 'Walkshire' campaign was launched on 1st January. It contains local walks such as Skipwith Common, Towton Battlefield and the White Rose Way through Tadcaster. We will continue to upload information about walks in the District to the campaign. It is a year-long campaign so there is further opportunity to add content during the next few months.

There will be a webinar available for all members to gain further updates on all the visitor economy and culture work from the last year in March.

Selby High Street Heritage Action Zone Cultural Programme

Work on the Minecraft build of the Abbey and Abbots Staith is almost complete and the project team has been able to test the work, which is extremely accurate and very high quality. Work on the participatory workshops is underway and local heritage objects will be promoted with a public vote on inclusion in the work as 3D scans. The public vote will go live in February.

An application for funding for a three year cultural programme to accompany the HAZ was submitted in December and we expect to hear the outcome imminently. If we have been successful, further development of the programme will begin immediately, so we can start delivery in April.

The project has received wider attention in the HAZ national programme and Selby District Council were asked to present the Minecraft project (Selby Block Party) to the other 67 High Street HAZs as part of a national seminar on best practice in engaging young people. It was well-received, with several other High Street HAZs saying that they would like to do something similar in their own programme.

There will be a member webinar on the High Street Heritage Action Zone on 23rd February.

Waste and recycling

Our waste and recycling services have been largely maintained with careful management of staff who have had to self isolate and reduced our collection capacity for short periods since my last report to Council. However, I am happy to report that the service has had minimal disruption and coped with the usual post Christmas tonnage increases as well as collecting Christmas trees from households during the same period. We are currently forecasting a recycling tonnage increase of 1,200 tonnes for the first full year of the new collection service which is about a 20% increase from the previous years recycling tonnages.

Fly-tipping Enforcement

Selby District Council Enforcement has been expanded to help support Covid-19 compliance and to increase the Council's ability to tackle Fly-Tipping. The Team has recruited an additional Enforcement Officer, a very experienced officer started in their new role in November.

Alongside the additional multiagency Covid compliance work the team have been involved with, the team are also successfully hunting down fly-tippers and successfully working with private landowners to clear and prevent further fly-tipping on their land. Since 1st April 2020 to date:

- 10 Fixed penalties have been issued for Fly-tipping
- 9 Fixed penalties issued for Householder Duty of Care,
- 19 Fixed penalties for littering
- 2 Fixed penalties for Dog Fouling and 4 warning letters. investigated
- 23 Abandoned vehicles removed or resolved

The team have additional equipment that has been deployed in fly-tip hot-spots and continue to work with the Police, Environment Agency and other local authorities to track down the gangs of organised fly-tippers that blight our region.

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