

## County Councillors report February 2022

### Devolution for North Yorkshire and York moves nearer

The Government yesterday launched one of its flag ship policies with a White Paper on levelling up. It set out a range of policy initiatives to even up issues ranging from educational attainment, wages, broadband connectivity, transport, innovation investment and many other areas. There will no doubt be a political debate about how much of what was announced is brand new and of course where the funding will come from to deliver the ambitions set out. One important element that was clear and did refer to North Yorkshire was a commitment in black and white for the Government to invite North Yorkshire and York to enter into negotiations with the Government with a view to forming a devolution deal for the area based on a Mayoral Combined Authority.

This was one of the drivers behind the move to create a single unitary council going back nearly 2 years ago. We were told then by Government that in order to be able to have a devolution deal we had to simplify the structure of local government, not least because a devolution deal includes putting in place a Combined Authority which is in effect another tier of local government across North Yorkshire and York to implement the devolution deal and to co-ordinate issues such as strategic transport and economic development. So having now got a decision around a single unitary council for North Yorkshire the Government has followed through with its commitment and started the process of working up, with us, a devolution deal for the county and the City of York. It is important to stress that whilst one of these things led to the other, devolution and process of becoming a unitary council are in themselves separate.

Quite how all of this will look will depend on the negotiations with Government and the decision taken by Councillors elected in May in North Yorkshire and those Councillors who are part of the City of York Council. In terms of the timescale for this happening we believe it would be possible to have elections for a Mayor, subject to all the proper processes of consultation and agreement, in May 2024 with the creation of the Combined Authority probably towards the latter part of 2023.

We will want to try and achieve new funding and the ability for local decision making in a range of areas including the following –

- Transport
- Digital connectivity
- Enabling housing development
- Funding for economic development and help with specific economic development projects
- Skills and business support
- Tourism and arts funding
- Help to progress our environmental ambitions and achieving a net zero carbon North Yorkshire

## Covid update

In terms of the latest position with covid across the county. I think the headline is that generally things haven't changed significantly. The data in the table below looks a little bit different because there is a new way of measuring covid rates. The main change of which is to include individuals who have been re-infected by the virus provided that there is 90 days between any first infection and a subsequent infection. So all of the figures have gone up by around about 100 as we can see from the table below.

Area	Total cases			7-day rate per 100,000		
	02-Feb	01-Feb	New cases	02-Feb	01-Feb	Change
Craven	13411	13359	52	871.5	922.3	-50.8
Hambleton	20820	20698	122	1114.7	1150.7	-36.0
Harrogate	41020	40681	339	1305.7	1295.8	9.9
Richmondshire	12137	12048	89	947.3	960.4	-13.0
Ryedale	10796	10736	60	729.5	745.8	-16.3
Scarborough	24647	24512	135	890.1	948.9	-58.8
Selby	24016	23903	113	1032.9	1111.2	-78.3
North Yorkshire	<b>146,847</b>	<b>145,937</b>	<b>910</b>	1041.3	1073.2	-31.9
England				1047.6	1071.7	-24.1

The situation in terms of hospital bed occupancy with covid patients has improved a little. There are now 357 beds occupied with covid patients in the hospitals that serve North Yorkshire (not all of these are North Yorkshire people), there are 11 people in intensive care amongst this number. One piece of positive news that we are seeing is that the very large number of primary aged children who have been off ill with covid in recent weeks seems to have turned a corner. The numbers are still high but it now seems to be a downward trend which is encouraging. Primary school children are the largest cohort that have not been included within the vaccination programme.

## Road signage – Mearbeck

You may have noticed two new signs have been erected at either side of the northern Mearbeck turning on the A65, warning of the sequence of corners and the potential for farm traffic on the road. This was as a result of representations made by residents of Mearbeck who have become increasingly concerned by the increased use of both the existing junction and the junction at the opposite side of the road which now accesses a working farm complex. With traffic moving

between the two frequently on a section of road with restricted sight lines, the potential for an accident was all too apparent. And while I appreciate this section of road is not now in the Parish of Long Preston, I know many residents will frequently travel along the road.