

North Yorkshire Councillor's Report September 2024.

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL FINANCES.

I am frequently asked what the financial benefits are to date of the Unitary Council which came into being on 1st April 2023. The answer is in the current year £40 million, and this will be on a recurring basis. This is the saving to the council taxpayer in the revenue account or 'current account' in plain English.

Other financial benefits will feed through as time goes on from property rationalisation. We are currently looking across the entire county at the property portfolio and where buildings are surplus to requirements because of staff streamlining for example. It should be remembered that if a property is sold, the proceeds are ring fenced in the capital account, so cannot be used to prop up the revenue account.

However, we still have a massive funding deficit which is caused by pressures way beyond those caused by inflation. SEND, ie Special Education Needs Children is by far the biggest financial issue which we have as an authority. HAS, ie. Health and Adult Services is another department with a huge and ever-increasing budget. But as I have said on my occasions before, we are committed to protecting the most vulnerable in society.

Our Home to School Transport budget was £19 million in 2019 and has increased to £41 million in the current year. This is why we had to make the difficult decision regarding this issue earlier in the year where we will only pay for transport to the nearest suitable school for children entering the system.

So the savings from LGR ie. the Unitary will not be sufficient to cover the deficit going forwards and more difficult decisions will have to be made. Historically, Labour governments have tended to look more favourably on inner city authorities than 'shire counties' such as North Yorkshire. I don't think from what we have heard to date that the present government will be any different.

HOUSING.

The government have given North Yorkshire a target of building 4,232 new dwellings per annum as a minimum over the next 5 years. We have been averaging 1,100 per annum recently. This is the biggest increase in target for any county in the country. Cornwall has the second biggest target, meanwhile Sadiq Khan has had his target decreased. Other counties in the south east have also had their targets reduced.

Our 20 year plan will need to find 89,000 new homes. 30,000 have already been identified in the emerging local plan so we have a long way to go. It should be remembered that the two National Parks in the county are not included in the geographical area as they have their own planning authorities.

Experian say there are likely to be 10,000 new jobs created in the county over the next 20 years. However, we will need 90,000 new jobs to cater for 89,000 new homes.

There has recently been a net migration into the county of 4,500 people per annum. This will have to increase to 9,000 to accommodate requirements. Realistically, the only way of achieving these targets will be to create new settlements. But the problem here is that it will take 5 years before a spade is even put in the ground. Infrastructure, or the lack of it, is the big problem across the county.

What action Government will take if we fail to meet the 5 year target we don't know, but I think this is almost certain to be the case.

Some green belt areas are to be redefined as grey belt areas. This again is very worrying but I have to say I can see the real concerns of residents of villages like Melsonby, Barton and Middleton Tyas who had housing imposed on them during the last time we went through this hoop. There will be real pressures this time because we have 90 councillors and if we take say 5 out because they cover the National Parks then there will be a requirement for 50 new houses as an average per annum per councillor's division. Whilst I appreciate there may be a concentration of building in towns like Harrogate and Scarborough, anything like 50 new builds per annum in my division is a very big ask. Look at Northallerton where thousands of properties have been built or are ongoing in recent years. How many more can it take?

Land banks with planning permission granted have become the norm and we think that methods of curbing this practice need to be put in place.

Another question which is causing us concern is the question of whether we have sufficient building firms in the county to cope with all this new development. The answer must be doubtful, very doubtful.

The other consideration which has caused problems for potential developers in the area is Nitrate Vulnerability. This applies to all villages on the north side of the A66 as they are in the Tees catchment area. I think it is fair comment to say that this was a major stumbling block for the applicant for 45 houses in Melsonby last year. The application was withdrawn but I think we can be reasonably certain that legislation will be introduced to prevent this sort of thing occurring in the future.

It is not possible for me to attend as many PCs as I would like to attend because there are 27 in my division so these reports which I am sending out on a regular basis are hopefully keeping you up to date with events. If you would like to be added to my circulation list to receive them by email directly, please forward your email address to:

Cllr.angus.thompson@northyorks.gov.uk.

Best wishes,

Angus Thompson.