

Leader's statement, Full Council, December 3

We're in the midst of unprecedented times, with the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic being felt by Ryedale citizens, businesses and council staff. The future is uncertain, and while we are working hard to support Ryedale, local government reorganisation will bring about even more change, whether we like or not.

There is lots to do and eyes are on us as councillors to stay focussed on the key priorities and to fulfil the duties expected of us. It remains my genuine hope that we can put aside our political differences to work together to do what residents, businesses and council staff need. Petty squabbles, procrastination and political games risk nothing over than damaging the reputation of this council and undermining our splendid work so far.

Covid-19

Our priority throughout this pandemic is to support the citizens of Ryedale, especially those whose lives and livelihoods are most at risk as a result of Covid-19. We are, for example, supporting homeowners and tenants who face financial difficulties and doing what we can to prevent homelessness.

The second national lockdown has also dealt a cruel blow to the district's businesses who were already struggling to get back on their feet after the first. Our business team has been advising on wider business support and are working around-the-clock to process the latest government grants to help eligible businesses stay afloat and protect jobs. It is expected that 1,200 applications will be made for the mandatory grants alone.

Community help

Once again, Ryedale communities are pulling together to help those who are struggling. Our officers working with volunteers, partners, organisations and networks across the district. There's a tremendous amount of work going on to make sure that our most vulnerable are supported, that our citizens are following the guidance to keep one another safe and that things continue to run smoothly. It is partnership working at its very best.

New projects

Whilst responding to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic remains a top priority, the council is not standing still. We continue to innovate and improve the way we do business and improve the quality of life for citizens of Ryedale.

A refreshed website will make it easier for people to find the information they need, a WiFi scheme in the market towns of Pickering, Malton and Helmsley will improve connectivity, and two new Community Civil Enforcement Officers are now in post to support communities and tackle antisocial behaviour to ensure that Ryedale remains a beautiful, clean and safe place to live, work and visit.

Local Government Reorganisation

Following a series of extraordinary council meetings, Craven, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Scarborough, Selby - and, of course, Ryedale - submitted an outline bid to Government on November 9, making the case for why an 'East and West' model is the best way to reorganise local government in the region. Thank you to the 21 Ryedale councillors who

united together, across political lines, to support submission of our bid. I know that for many this was a tough decision.

The model would see Craven, Harrogate, Richmondshire and Hambleton join together to form a unitary council in the west, and Selby, City of York, Ryedale and Scarborough join together to form a unitary council in the east.

Public support for this model is growing. New independent market research has revealed that two thirds of residents prefer an 'East and West' model of local government for the North Yorkshire and York region. What is more, Ryedale Unison has confirmed there is overwhelming support from our staff.

We are still gathering evidence to support our model and will be submitting the full proposal on December 9. The help, support and assistance of councillors from all groups is appreciated as we engage with the public on this matter. While there is lots going on, it is important that we use our time, effort and resources to achieve the best outcome we can.

Thank you

I wish to say a public thank you to each and every member of our workforce. Their hard work, determination and resilience during what has been perhaps the toughest year in the history of local government has been remarkable. It is worth remembering that we are a small team at Ryedale, with less than 200 workers delivering everything we do.

It must be acknowledged that there are creaks in the system as the workload increases. I continue to champion our staff throughout this difficult time, and I hope that other councillors can do so too. Wherever possible, it is vital that we relieve the burden on them rather than add to it.

And finally, I would like to wish all councillors and your families a very Merry Christmas and a healthy, prosperous 2021.