

Leaders Report 26th November 2008

Since the papers for the last Full Council were published the Executive has met five times, and the Executive has taken as a priority the response to the downturn in the national economy, and how local people and businesses can be helped through this difficult time. I would also like to thank officers for all the work that has gone into coping with the fire at York High School since my last report

1. Thriving City/One City

The Executive has set in motion a process through “Thriving City” which is engaging with local businesses, training providers and council teams to examine where judicious investment of resources could act to see York through the ‘credit crunch’. A key priority is to maintain the high levels of employment that we have come to expect in the city.

This report is part of the ongoing work to show that the City of York Council is taking a leadership role for actions that it can deliver towards the citywide response to the downturn in the national economy. There does need to be a clear understanding of what can be achieved by the Council, and those areas where there will need to be a collaborative approach through the Local Strategic Partnership, Economic Development Partnership, Business Forum, Retailers Forum and other partnerships which exist in the city.

The council is looking to match the £50,000 investment from Norwich Union to set up a scheme to support new business set up in York. A further £100,000 could be drawn from York Business Development Ltd, and York Professionals are in the process of seeking £50,000 of matched investment which will be delivered through business advice and guidance. Thus £50,000 investment from the Council could be turned into £250,000 through working with partners for the benefit of the city.

Progress has been made with the Kingsway West Project, and there will shortly be services brought into the community covered by the Super Output Area with doorstep and other activity to alert residents to the assistance that is being offered by a wide range of council departments, and partner agencies.



Business Forum Launch at the National Science Learning Centre, York University 08/10/08

The launch of the Business Forum on 8th October has been well received by businesses in the city, and it is important that the momentum of that initiative is

maintained. As identified in the report which came to Executive on 15th July in York the proportion of self employed people is set in York at 7.3%, against a national average of 9.3% (amounting to a 'shortfall' of between 2,500 and 3,000 in the city based on York's total employment). It is therefore important to ensure that all our pupils have training which includes business and enterprise so that this can help to develop the diversity of employment, and would address some of the findings of the Future York report. The proposals from the Executive would ensure that all of our Year 9 pupils had access to Enterprise Training through the "Green Griffin" project.

Many residents who are unable to access high street bank loans face the prospect of very high interest rates. Consolidation of existing debt presently accounts for 31% of all York Credit Union loans. The need for such support through their services is only likely to increase in the present economic climate.

The Executive considered plans to provide three new Community Savings Points in those areas of the city where the Credit Union's services are most needed (and in addition to the existing point at the City Council Finance Centre in Library Square).



The newly published annual competitiveness index named York as the 11th most competitive city in the country, which represents a rise of 32 places from 2006.

The council spends approximately £100 million per year in the discretionary purchasing of external goods and services. EU procurement legislation prevents the council from positively discriminating in favour of local suppliers, but does work to promote the availability of contracts with them and ensures that there is full visibility of tendering opportunities. The procurement team has been in contact with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that local businesses are aware of this facility, and are equipped to take advantage of tendering opportunities.

The booklet "York on a budget" is being revamped to include a wider range of helpful information and contacts, and it is proposed to produce 20,000 copies for York residents. This will help inform on money saving, how to budget, dealing with debt, and inform on the range of assistance and services available (such as Future Prospects and the Credit Union).

The council is supporting projects like the Minster Quarter, the launch of which saw a world premier for Sir John Tavener's composition the "Two Hadiths" at York Minster. By promoting York's specialist shops the retail sector can capitalise on York's unique selling points.

2. Efficiency

The council is taking steps to drive up energy efficiency, and generation of renewable power which was included in the outcome of the first performance review. This is putting in to operation the plans from the Carbon Management Programme agreed earlier in the year.



Wood pellet silo for Acomb Library



Wind Turbine eco Depot



Eco Business centre Clifton Moor heated by Ground Source Heat Pumps.



Improved roof insulation York High School (re-furbished from former Oaklands building)

3. Joint Needs Assessment.

In September the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for York was presented to the Executive which has been a thorough review of the Health Needs for the City and where we are going.

The age profile of the city's population will change in the period 2006-2020 with over 40% increases in the 70-74 years and 85 years+ age band which will have a significant impact on public services. Over the same period the ethnic mix within the city will change, and the council is taking steps to make sure that the support, prevention and treatment services are available to all. The current figures for older people helped to live at home per 1,000 population, aged 65 or over, was 87 in

2006/07 which is above the national average and helps to explain why York had a lower than average admission rate to permanent places in residential or nursing care.

The Executive is committed to ensuring that no community within York misses out from the economic success of the city, and the report identified that whilst the number of Super Output Areas in York which rank nationally in the bottom 20% in terms of deprivation has reduced from 11 to 8 in the period 2004 to 2007, there is one still in the bottom 10% of the country. This area is benefiting from the "Kingsway West Project" which is a multiagency response team looking to work with the local community to improve the opportunities, skills and employment levels in that area with lessons that can be replicated in other parts of the city. Figures from the Office of National Statistics recently revealed that 12,460 residents in York earns £13,197 annually or less, with £13,400 being the level at which people are deemed to be able to afford a basic quality of life.

In Education terms 67.5% of key stage 4 pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE. This is significantly higher than the England average of 60% and York was ranked 12th highest in the England which is a tribute to the efforts of pupils and staff in the city.

Access to NHS Dentists is still a major problem 48% of adults and 68% of children in the North Yorkshire and York PCT were seen by NHS dentists in the period up to December 2007, this is lower than the national average of 49% and 70% respectively. Access to NHS dentistry is a consistent theme of PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Services) enquiries.



Equality of provision of PCT services with other parts of England are difficult with the reduced per capita allocation of funding compared to other regions.

A fund of £10,000 has been established at promoting independence and wellbeing for York Residents. Groups will be able to apply during the course of the year for grants up to £1,000 which may be used to establish new day clubs, to set up leisure activities aimed at older people, or to provide low level health related activities.

4. Cycle City

Following the successful application to Cycle England York was selected to be a demonstration cycle town. Officers were thanked for their work in attracting funding which will see £3.68 million allocated to York over a two and a half year period. York has a high level of cycle usage, yet compared with continental Europe (or looking back to York's industrial heritage) there is more that could be done to increase this still further. Clearly the level of traffic is a deterrent, but in order to understand what would encourage residents who don't currently cycle to make the change. Clearly if a significant number of people can be persuaded to leave their car at home, and use this more environmentally friendly transport then they will not only be healthier, but their bank balance will be healthier too. There will be a consultation delivered to every household, and also on-line at;

http://www.york.gov.uk/consultation/consultation_Dtl.aspx?consult_Id=140&status=2&criteria=1

Indicative priorities include the 'Sub Station to Hub Station' at Wellington Row in conjunction with BikeRescue, free bikes to pilot schools, starting work on filling gaps in the network (Blossom St/Clifton Bridge/Fulford Road), Bike maintenance courses, joint work with the police on bicycle security (see below), and new maps. Encouraging more people to cycle is a key component of our strategy to reduce congestion on our roads.



5. Outer Ring Road

Traffic congestion is seen as a key priority of York residents measured in surveys, and the Executive has been working with officers to develop Access York 1 and Access York 2 to improve transport within the city. The latest phase has been to examine the cost effectiveness of options to improve the Outer Ring Road, and based on this evidence to promote to the Regional Transport Board the option which is most likely to bring forward funding for the city. The entire budget of the RTB for the period up to 2018/19 is £400 million to cover the whole region, therefore it is understandable that with estimates of dualling the ring road as coming in at £264 million at 2014 prices this would be unlikely to succeed.

The only options likely to gain central government funding involve improvements, at grade, to junctions along the ring road (basically bigger roundabouts). There is an outside chance that dualling the section between Wetherby Road and the A19 may cost in, but there would be a chance that such a scheme would fail the cost benefit assessment which is undertaken at regional level.

Critically the consultants have pointed out that local taxpayers will have to bear at least 10% of the costs of any upgrade. For a full dual carriageway design this could be in the order of £26 million. Assuming that the whole of the Councils transport budget was devoted to the scheme over a 4 year construction period then this would still leave over £14 million to be funded by Council Taxpayers. This would be the equivalent of a 28% increase in Council Tax levels.

The dualling of the whole of the northern by pass is neither affordable under present rules nor would it be likely to receive regional and national endorsement when compared to other bids for transport funding.



More junction improvements could be achieved like the Moor Lane roundabout.

However the report also concluded that it is imperative that major improvements are made particularly to the Wetherby Road to the A19 section in order to facilitate the economic growth that the York North West development will bring to the City. Coupled to grade level junction improvements a complementary package of measures to encourage the use of non car modes of transport is also supported. The list included:

- Reallocation of road space to cyclists and pedestrians, particularly at junctions to remove pinch points on the cycle network in accordance with the principles of the Cycling City status, and generally improve the walking environment.
- Provision of bus priorities on remaining routes e.g. A19 Shipton Road
- Expansion of the bus stop infrastructure programme
- Provision of sections of an Orbital bus route (including interchanges)
- Orbital Cycle Route adjacent to Ring Road (Strensall Rd to Wigginton Rd)
- Improved/additional pedestrian/cycle crossings over the Ouse
- Access restrictions to certain areas/routes.
- Extension to the 'footstreets'
- Expansion of 'virtual bus priority' using Bus Location and Information Sub-System
- Further development of demand management measures, such as Urban Traffic Management Control system to lock-in benefits of reduced traffic.
- Other improvements to ease the flow of public transport.

6. Waste Minimisation and Waste Strategy

The Executive approved a target for Household Waste Recycling of 50% to be achieved by December 2010. This will be achieved through a three phase roll out of kerbside collections across the city, spreading alternate weekly collections (based on the Groves Pilot) and measures to improve the performance of existing recycling schemes to maximise collections. There will be feasibility reports on food waste

collections, local business recycling, a wider range of plastics to be collected, and doorstep collection of materials like batteries and CDs. A new Minimisation Strategy was also adopted by the Executive.



7. Attendance Reports

The attendance management update showed that since October 2007 there has been a reduction in absence equivalent to a £1million saving of staff time. The new contract for Occupational Health is with York Hospital Foundation Trust and has already seen further improvements to the service.

8. Transforming Community Transport Services

The Executive has taken a keen interest in the partnership working on Community Transport Services with an aim to improve efficiency, and full utilisation of council vehicles. This has ensured that a service which is currently overspending its budget by £281,000 per year, will be brought into budget, and produce annual savings of just over £1/2 million a year by 2010. In the light of rising fuel charges this has been an important exercise to protect future council resources for community services rather than being consumed in fuel costs. It also links with the Council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions.

Key to the operation has been the need to closely engage with customers, users and their families of the range of council transport systems. This is an aspect which needs to be ongoing, and in the case of the Dial-a-ride service the Executive will receive more information on the changes to timings of services. The service is also an item for consideration by the Review Reports agreed by all party leaders at the start of the municipal year. This will have specific regard to the links with remote /rural communities

9. Headquarters

The Executive received a report which detailed the opening up to competition of the Headquarters project. This will ensure that there is a test of the value to the public

purchase of the final option which is decided upon. Consultants reviewed the data for new proposals that have emerged over the last four years since the exercise was first done. As some residents may feel that an out of city centre option would result in a cheaper solution, this was reviewed again.

Key components remain that the project will not exceed the budget that had been agreed in June 2008 of £43.8 million for the whole project, and could, under current economic circumstances, come in at a lower price.

The key driver for the Headquarters Project remain – a scattered series of offices housing council departments with all the problems that creates for staff, and residents in contacting the council. The residents of the city deserve a building which meets their needs effectively, and this can be achieved with a saving of council resources which could be utilised in service delivery. This is not a process that can be rushed, as there does need to be careful consideration of options that have become available since the project was started 4 years ago. The changed situation in the building industry will also have a bearing on potentially reducing costs.

The key project benefits are:

- Rationalisation of the council's current administration accommodation portfolio which is anticipated to cost over £140m over the next 30 years.
- A fully integrated York Customer Centre providing customers a single contact centre to enable all services to be accessed in one place, quickly, simply and effectively.
- A modern office environment, which supports an open interactive culture and facilitates flexible working styles, aids recruitment, staff retention and contributes toward reducing staff absence.
- Compliance with current legislation in terms of Disability Discrimination Act in providing buildings and services that are accessible to everyone.
- An accommodation solution that is sustainable in terms of economic, social and environmental impact, supported through three main targets: A score of "Excellent" under the British Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Model (BREEAM), to better Building Regulations CO2 emissions requirement by 30% and to include 20% on site renewable energy generation.
- A building that is effective and efficient to enable the delivery of excellent customer services and unlock the efficiency gains identified as part of the Gershon agenda.
- Inward investment to the city to a value approximately £50m.
- The opportunity to release a number of important historic buildings, for example, St Leonard's for restoration and more appropriate use.
- Contribute towards the Council's overall value for money assessment.

The work that has been done by RMJM to develop options on the Hungate site since the withdrawal of the planning application has been done at their own expense. The designs that have been developed have more external walls by being a number of distinct buildings effectively joined together, and as such would cost more to construct.

If we are to properly assess the new options, and their attributes (value for money, accessibility, sustainability) then we need to maintain a benchmark against which to make these judgements. Due to procurement law, in order to develop options other than the Hungate site we will need to develop a competition. This process will create an element of competition which would be to the benefit of council tax payers in

developing the best final option. Officers are being required to work within the budget agreed at the Executive on 17th June 2008. There was not the option to go to procurement earlier as there needed to be viable alternative options, which is now the case.

The Executive approved a procurement process, and the appointment of the Director of City Strategy as Project Champion.

Andrew Waller