



Councillor James Alexander
Labour Leader of City of York Council
Report to Full Council – March 2012

It has been three months since my last report to council. This is a long period of time in an ever changing landscape of local Government in flux.

2012, the Lord Mayor and Internationalisation

This year is a fantastic year for York. We have the Olympic torch, Paralympic torch, York 800, the queen visiting. This year will be a year of celebration and an opportunity to refocus the role of the Lord Mayor.

I wish to convene a meeting of current, future and previous Lord Mayor's to talk about the structures required to impart continuity in the role and ensure additional resources are given to the Lord Mayor in relation to economic development.

It has been clear over the passed year that the Lord Mayor plays a significant role in attracting influence and inward investment. It has also been clear to me that despite a good working relationship with the current Lord Mayor, in hindsight greater pre-planned co-ordination could have led to further opportunities for York. I have discussed this with the incumbent Lord Mayor and the next.

I am keen for the Economic Infrastructure Fund to fund a post from economic development to work directly with the Lord Mayor.

I am also asking for the Chief Executive to assess the possibility of taking on a military officer through the defence career partnership to assess our customs when dealing with international visitors. I also think the gifts we give to international visitors need to be improved. Gifts are so important to some cultures that we are trying to attract inward investment from.

Apprenticeships

Councillor Julie Gunnell and I have signed up to become apprenticeship ambassadors of the National Apprenticeship Service. This is a part of our commitment to increasing the number of apprentices in York. City of York council has recruited 34 apprentices since the change of control in May 2011. We want to encourage other organisations to also become ambassadors and encourage others to take on board apprentices.

The Chair of the York Business Forum, Adam Sinclair has signed up to become an ambassador. There are 33 ambassadors in Yorkshire and the Humber and I would like to beat this number in York alone.

This follows the Labour manifesto pledge to seek to increase apprenticeships.

Police Commissioners

I am alarmed at the news the election for police commissioner will have no free mail shot like Parliamentary and European elections. I have expressed my dismay at this to other council leaders in the region of both parties.

The Government expects people to look at a national website to see who the candidates are. This will severely affect the electoral turnout and in turn the mandate of him or her who is elected Police Commissioner for North Yorkshire. It will also affect the engagement of people in rural areas, with not access to broadband, the elderly who are less likely to use broadband and the poor who cannot afford it.

I am going to write to Theresa May expressing my concern and I will be asking other group leaders to co-sign this letter with me. This is an issue about democracy and not about party politics.

FTRs

Gone.

This follows the Labour election pledge to get rid of the ftr purple bus.

Organisational Review

Interviews are taking place for challenged assistant director posts. This is clearly a difficult time for some staff and it is right that we all pay tribute to their dedication and hard work despite being denigrated by the Government.

It is however right that we have looked to decrease management costs at a time of severe Government funding cuts.

City of York Council's First Phone Application

We will be launching soon the council's first phone application. This application will be multiplatform (Android, Apple OS, Windows and Blackberry etc.). It will be free and allow residents to report in grotspots across the city through a touch of a button. The image will then be uploaded to the council's website along with location and time of reporting. The council will then clean up the area and report when the job is closed.

The application comes out of my visit to Lewisham council with Councillor Janet Looker last summer. The programme has also been taken up by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

We will be the first in Yorkshire to develop this app. It will save money on pre-inspection costs, call centre costs and increase accountability of the service.

This shows we are becoming a forward thinking council.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

I am concerned at the lack of debate about LEPs in this council. I feel this is currently where a lot of the real business is done.

The Government is looking on LEPs with increasing importance. The Government also wants more joined up functions between LEP areas. This puts York in a difficult position as it straddles two LEPs.

Retail Strategy Group and Portas Report

Following the publication of the Portas report I asked for a meeting with retailers to discuss City of York Council's response. I also think we should bid towards the Government funding for high streets. However to put it into context the Government is giving £1m to high streets in the UK. This council is looking at least £2m for Reinvigorate York alone.

It has been agreed with retailers and interested parties that we extend the retail strategy group to include others and become a city centre team, much more focussed on the city centre, rather than just retail.

Eric Pickles

Will be addressing council leaders at the next meeting of Local Government Yorkshire and Humber. This meeting will have occurred before full council and I am happy to take questions on this meeting.

The Government's Budget

This will also have been announced by the time of full council and I am happy to take any questions on the affect upon residents in York.

Bill Woolley

Bill will be retiring soon and I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank him for his unparalleled service to this council and this city.

Minimum Wage

I am disappointed that the minimum wage has not increased for under 21s as it has done for over 21s. The cost of living is the same for both. The Government is increasingly denigrating young people and it is not on. If someone under the age of 21 does the same job as that over, they should be paid the same and Government legislation should reflect this.

I am going to ask the Chief Executive to ensure that this is considered as part of the work required to introduce the living wage. My understanding is that this council does not differentiate between the pay of substantive posts aged under 21 and above. This should continue.

It has been ten months of the Labour administration and already we are making a difference. We are honouring our manifesto pledges. We said before the election York deserves better and after winning, we are delivering it.

Councillor James Alexander
Labour Leader of City of York Council
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