

## **Deputy Leader Portfolio Report May 2013**

The Council has many 'faces' but it also has areas that do not always receive as much attention as others, yet they are an important part of the Council and play an important role in the City

Like all areas of the Council Democratic Services, Electoral Services and the Mansion House are under pressure from reduced funding.

### **Democratic Services**

The team have a varied role in the Council both in and out facing, working with Councillors, Council Officers and the residents of the City. The team is, compared with 10 years ago, smaller and has a more varied role than previously. Democratic Services were one of the last to move to West Offices so that public meetings could still be supported when they were being held in the Guildhall.

### **Council Chamber**

After a meeting during 2012 I became aware that the audio system, including the induction loop, have not been maintained for many years and was at the end of its life. Add to this I and a number of members had expressed concerned about cables being strewn across the floor for use during presentation and those needed to support members in meetings.

The work to install a new system now means that our Chamber is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century both for members use and residents who come to take part in and listen to Council. There was some delay in the installation as a Conservation assessment had to take place with regard to the supply of electricity and power points, the renewal of control panels on the desks and the mounting of new speakers.

### **Membersphere App**

To be launched in June 2013, the App will allow Members to access and share information interactively and electronically, as well as to complete appropriate tasks without having to go to multiple pages on the Council Intranet.

### **Councillor Training & Support**

A core training programme continues to be delivered for members but again this area has had to take a percentage of the overall Council savings due to reduced Government funding. Democracy Services

continue to work with Councillors to introduce a unique and accredited course on 'Democracy & Local Government' devised with the University of York

### Scrutiny

A work planning culture, involving all Members, has been embedded within scrutiny over the last two years. In the last year, this has particularly led to increased participation across Members in scrutiny review and overview work. Another work planning event is again planned this year – 15 May 2013.

All the Committees have had packed work plans this year and are starting to think about their priorities for the coming new Municipal Year.

Much progress has been made to develop a real interest in and commitment to scrutiny across all Members, officers and external partners. More work needs to be done and a report is currently being considered within Groups looking at various options.

### Local Democracy Week

A full programme of activities to engage residents of all ages with the democratic process was arranged during October 2012. Yet again, Democratic & Electoral Services will be leading on a varied programme of corporate initiatives and activities for October 2013.

## **Electoral Services**

### Police and Crime Commissioner Election

The Electoral Services team were heavily involved in the arrangements for the Police and Crime Commissioner election in November 2012. The unusual time of year for this election increased workload as it meant that the Annual Canvass had to be started early in July and finished during the arrangements for the PCC Elections. These were challenges that the Officers had not encountered before but were coped with well by the small core team.

The Returning Officer, for York, was nominated as the Police Area Returning Officer for North Yorkshire and whilst this can be considered a mark of distinction, the position required undertaking the challenge of coordinating the eight local authorities in North Yorkshire in regard to election day and count arrangements, in addition to solely dealing with

candidates, their nominations papers and final declaration of result. As a mark of appreciation the Electoral Services Manager who acted as Project Manager for the PARO was awarded 'Employee of the Month for December' by City of York Council.

With the Electoral Services Team dealing with arrangements for City of York Council area and North Yorkshire, the volume of telephone calls were more than usually expected and far more varied than normally received, support was given by the Customer Contact Centre that received training and FAQ sheets to assist.

### Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Further Electoral Review.

A new Electoral Review was instigated by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to review the number of elected members and wards. The year long review has required the Electoral Services Team to produce substantial amounts of data and information to both the LGBCE and public at the same time as the Police and Crime Commissioner Election and Postal Vote refresh.

If the outcome of the review recommends changes this will result in an increased workload for the team as any change in Ward structure will require the Register of Electors to be amended in streets that are included in the new wards and any new wards will require a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations.

### Postal Voter signature refresh

The Regulations that introduced the need for Returning Officers to check signatures and date of births on returned postal vote statements, also requires the Electoral Registration Officer to collect a new signature every five years.

Each January the Electoral Services Team undertakes a six week process to contact those electors who have had postal vote arrangements for five years. The refresh in 2013 had 85% of the electors submit a new signature, ensuring they have a postal vote arrangement in place for the next five years. Those who did not submit a new signature, have a new application form sent to allow them to arrange a new postal vote in the future.

## Individual Electoral Registration

From 2015 a new system of registering to vote will be introduced, under the current system of electoral registration an annual household canvass form is sent to each address, which is completed by one individual on behalf of everyone living at the property. From 2014 this system of registration will be replaced by one of Individual Electoral Registration (IER), with individuals making an application to register individually and providing personal identifiers such as date of birth and National Insurance Number.

The Electoral Services team have begun preparation to ensure the introduction is smooth and as few current electors as possible will have to register to vote under the new system. As part of the transition, data will be matched with the Department of Works and Pension (DWP); the team have begun to check that current empty properties and non-responding properties from the annual canvass have a chance to register if occupied. Those currently registered and that match with the DWP data will automatically be carried on the new registration system. Those who do not are not immediately removed and their voting rights will still in place for the 2015 Parliamentary and Local Elections and then they will be removed after these elections.

## Annual Canvass

Due to the PCC Election in November 2012, the Annual Canvass was brought forward by Ministerial direction. The Annual Canvass started in July (compared to September normally) with the Register of Electors published on 16 October (compared to 1 December), which was during the election timetable after the nomination period had started.

The team had to deal with both election arrangements and compiling an accurate Register of Electors for use in the election on extremely tight legal deadlines. With the early date to publish, the team put extra efforts in to ensuring groups such as students, who were only just starting their academic year, armed forces personnel and electors wishing to arrange postal votes were entered and able to vote.

Despite the early start and clash with election arrangements, the Annual Canvass was successful with 90% of properties confirming by form, Internet or text the details of electors.

## Mansion House

The Mansion House as well as being the 'home' of the Lord Mayor is an important building to the City. However it also has to be recognised that it is an old building that has high revenue and capital funding needs to not only keep it in a condition that is deemed appropriate but to make improvements that are long over due.

Over the year I have learnt a number of interesting aspects about the House including why the temperature seems a little cool to the maintenance needs of the building. The knowledge of the Officers is vital for Council to understand the needs of the House.

During the year I have discussed with Officers, and implementation is starting to happen, about how income can be maximised through increased opening and the introduction of more 'specialist' visits and events. The 'House' now has its own web page and it is on this that the use of the 'House' for functions is advertised. Working with Officers I am exploring how enhanced packages can be offered which will increase the income and I hope that some of these will come forward in the coming year

We are already starting to see some positives in the changes made. The 'House' has seen increasing visitor numbers with tours, educational visits and special events and in turn this has led to increased income. A consequence of this is that there has been diversity in the range of products available for visitors to purchase from the Mansion House shop which is now working in partnership with the York Archaeological Trust who are selling Mansion House stock at their locations. There is already evidence that changes are working as the Mansion House has achieved income in excess of targets for its second consecutive year.

To ensure that the future of the use of the Mansion House does not become 'stale' a marketing strategy is being developed which will include looking to use the building in more innovative ways, such as a theatre production which has already taken place. This builds on the houses appearance in television drama

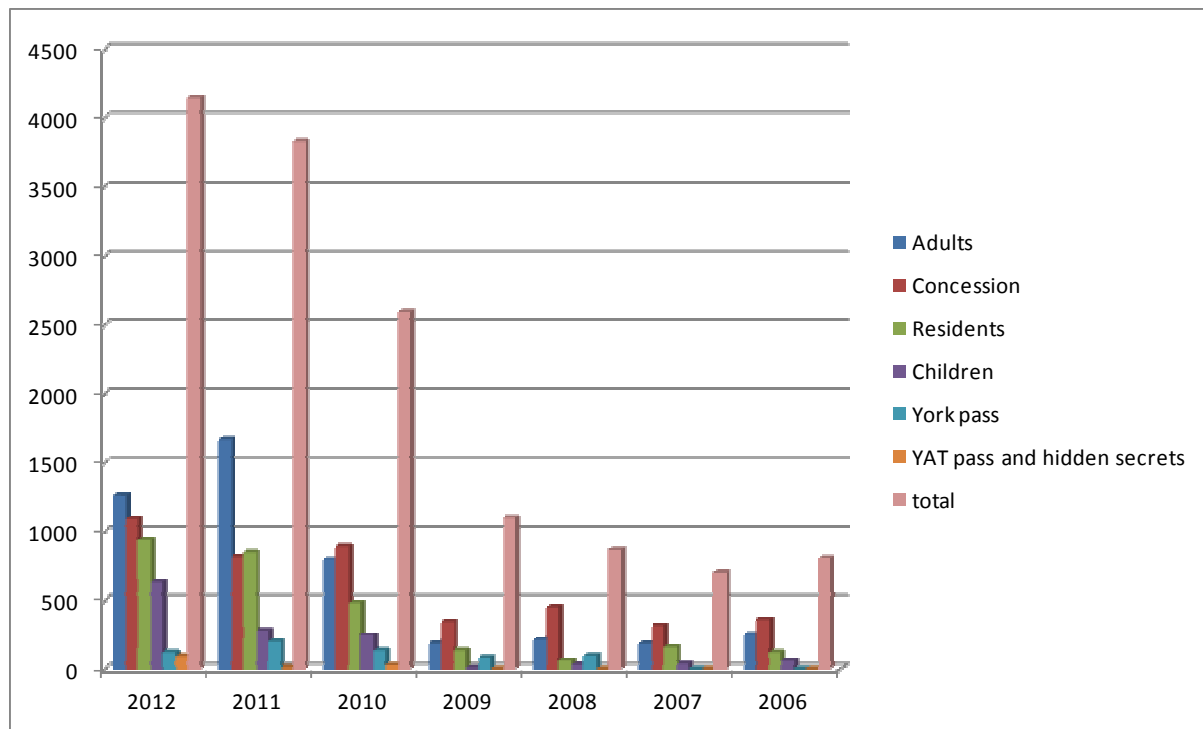


Table 1: Increase in Mansion House visitor numbers

The Mansion House staff are also:

- developing a client base for the house through private hires
- working with Officers for Culture & Arts and being part of relevant festivals in the City
- re-publishing the 'Lords of the City'
- supporting the Lord Mayor in developing an economic role, demonstrated by its continuing membership of York professionals and recent business trips fronted by the Lord Mayor

In 2012/13, the team has:

- Successfully managed the Royal Visit
- Received a new Cap of Maintenance - presented by the Queen and the first since 1915
- Established an ambassadorial role for the Lord Mayor in connection with economic activities

Significantly, a bid is being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund, along with grant bids to restore kitchens, display the 'Houses' silver, under take further conservation work, building works and educational projects. By building on the foundations that have already been established, the 'Opening Doors' project will aim to:

- Increase and enhance public access and community involvement in the Mansion House
- Develop greater educational provision for adult and children visitor groups
- Improved interpretation of the history and usage of the building
- Deliver improved conservation of the house and its collections
- Achieve financial sustainability

To achieve these goals, the project will focus on four key areas:

- The restoration of the kitchens, one to a fully working 18th Century kitchen and the other to a modern kitchen. This work will assist in interpreting and exploring the lives of those who have worked in the house over the centuries and will give the ability to illustrate three centuries of eating in the house – the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Display of the Gold and Silver collection, including improved interpretation, conservation and access, which will provide the means to learn about the people behind the objects, the York Silver Smiths the donors and patrons.
- Development of an integrated environmental and conservation plan to cover the contents and structure requirements of the building, including the installation of an effective conservation heating system to minimise long-term damage to the contents and fabric of the building and reduce its carbon footprint
- An Oral history project, collecting memories from those who have been associated with the house such as the butlers, cleaners, cooks along with present and former Lord Mayors and Sheriffs.

Total cost of the project is approximately £1.2 million, with circa £1 million being requested from the HLF. The Council will be required to make a small percentage contribution and other grant providers are also being contacted including the Gold Smiths Company, Silver Society and the Pilgrim Trust. Officers will also be working in partnership with a number of local groups, such as York Archaeological Trust, York Civic Trust and the Centre of Life Long Learning at the University of York.