

Report of the Leader of the Council

It is a great pleasure to give this first report as leader of the new joint administration. As we have made clear the focus of the administration will be different to the previous administration. We will prioritise frontline services and delivering the sort of services residents rightly expect from their council, whilst ensuring council tax remains low and we will also listen to residents and engage with what they want.

We will work closely with council colleagues over the months and years ahead to deliver all the things we want to and we will not lose sight of the fact they are our best resource and the excellence of the overwhelming majority of what the council does is due to their hardwork. Although satisfaction with the council remains high too often people have thought less of our work due to the incompetence of the previous administration.

The new Executive system and policy committees will give a way for all councillors to feed into the process, although there will still be the accountability with Executive members' portfolios. Due to the backlog of decisions we have faced, not all decisions can initially go through this process; however we look forward to the full workings of the Policy and Scrutiny committees later in the year. It is also pleasing that Cllrs Williams and D'Agorne have agreed to take seats at the Executive table and I look forward to their further contributions, whether critical or supportive.

Our Emergency Budget will be discussed later tonight and this will show how our priorities differ to those of Labour. Whichever party took power nationally this year it was clear government funding to councils would continue to decline and we must increasingly plan for the long-term as we continue to face funding pressures. The focus should be on the best way to get the best value services, whether provided as a council or in partnership with other organisations, it is important to also look at how we can boost income sources.

The Local Plan is one of the huge priority issues for the new administration. York needs a Local Plan and we will deliver one, but it will be one that takes residents with us and this will be done by ensuring strong protection for the Greenbelt and working with communities. This includes consideration of Neighbourhood Plans

and I welcome the fact it looks like these are spreading further into the city, led by the Micklegate councillors. The previous housing numbers have all been proved to be too high and we look forward to an evidence based plan.

Devolution is the topical, rapidly changing and huge opportunity for councils as the government has focused on giving powers to regions. This in itself raises numerous questions in terms of the powers councils want, the spending implications of these, but first of all the areas which wish to join together. Some parts of the country have clearer defined areas of economic geography than others and York's is in many ways in this position. We have strong historic links to parts of our region like North Yorkshire in particular but much of our jobs focus centres around the Leeds City Region. There are clearly other links with areas like Hull as a port or the likes of the new potash mine in North Yorkshire. A number of models are being explored and it is entirely right that, as this administration has committed to, we will consult with residents and businesses on the best option. Whilst the pace of devolution is rapid it is vital we do not rush into the wrong option as these changes will be significant and long-term.

The executive has faced a number of early decisions which have generated significant public interest, including Reynards Garage and the sale of Oliver House. Although neither were easy the fact they were not called in hopefully reflects the view of other councillors that they were correct. The campaign led by YorSpace rightly highlighted the issue we have in York with finding housing that people can afford and this is something we will address.

Cllr Williams has said that he will provide a constructive opposition and whilst there have been few signs of this in Labour Group press releases to date, it is early days! I hope and believe we can work together and having outlined some of the things we will change it is worth mentioning some things we will build on. For example as council leader I have been pleased to be involved in the recent launch of Sky and TalkTalk's CityFibre project to roll out and also at the recent, ever growing, York Pride festival. These very differing events combine strong officer working with very worthwhile ventures and were certainly things the previous administration took a strong lead on.

Where Labour got things right we will continue them and where they got things wrong we will change them. In all cases we should see how we can work together to achieve the most for our great city. My door and that of the group is always open to all.