



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

It has been three months since my last report to council.....another three months of delivering for the people of York.

**LGA Conference and Cuts**

I recently attended the LGA conference where it was clear that the major concern for the leadership in most councils across the whole political spectrum is the speed and depth of government cuts. LB Barnet has predicted that in the coming years they will only be able to afford to provide adult social care and this alone. No other services. This is because the cuts being actioned coupled with demographic changes will not allow finances to do anything else. The LGA's own research predicts a national funding gap of £16.5 billion a year by 2019/20 for local authorities. This is a 29% shortfall between councils' income and their spending pressures.

If the next comprehensive spending review exhibits the level of cuts we are expecting to this council, we will find it difficult to keep popular services going. We have already had to take some tough decisions and we face the prospect of some services having to cease in the future with further redundancies.

And before the Liberal Democrats complain that this is the Tories, I would like to remind them that the Tories would not be in power right now if it was not for the Liberal Democrats putting them there. Every time they complain about local service cuts it reminds the public who the root cause of this is: The ideological Conservative party they now support.

**Leeds City Region Amalgamated Authority**

I have been in negotiation with Greg Clark MP, Minister for Cities and City Region leaders to form an amalgamated authority that works in collaboration regarding transport and skills. This grouping of West Riding authorities and York will work more closely over the coming years.

The model is similar to that exhibited by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

The model will boost economic growth and begins a process of devolution of decision-making and spending power to the region. This is something this administration supports. Because it will deliver our priorities for the city – access to jobs for the people

of York. However when put to a vote previously, the opposition voted against, once again demonstrating that the opposition is out of touch with what matters to the people of York.

I have exchanged a number of letters with Greg Clark and met with him on a number of occasions too. It is clear this administration is working positively with Government ministers to get the best deal for York.

The Conservatives in Government share our agenda to promote economic growth in York, even though we may disagree on how to achieve this.

York's economy is changing and our relationships in the region are changing too. We will be increasingly looking towards collaboration with Leeds and West Yorkshire for improving job opportunities for York residents.

However I recognise the special relationship we have with North Yorkshire County Council. The rural economy is an important sector in York's economy and that together with tourism makes it important to collaborate with North Yorkshire.

### **Leeds Bradford Airport and Flights from Heathrow**

I took part in negotiations with Leeds Bradford Airport to reinstate flights back from Heathrow to the region. York and Bradford led these negotiations with the airport.

I visited the airport with Len Cruddas from the Chamber of Commerce, Gillian Cruddas from Visit York and Councillor Sonja Crisp, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Tourism.

The return of direct flights from London to the region, plus the planned airport expansion, will be a boost to our tourism economy and business visitors.

I am currently in negotiations to secure direct transport links between the Airport and York to maximise the benefit to our local economy.

### **HS2**

The opportunities that High Speed Rail could bring to York and the region are vital to our long-term vision for the continued economic prosperity of the city. To secure this vision I have continued to lobby Government on High Speed Rail and have worked closely as part of the Leeds City Region and along with Sheffield City Region to present an economic case for high speed rail.

I chaired the recent HS2 Conference: Opportunities for the North which brought together a panel of local and national experts to make the case for the extension of HS2 into the region and to York.

Alongside this I am also leading a number of Council's on the East Coast Mainline to lobby for significant improvements to the service. We need better and faster services at a more affordable price.

### **Shared Services**

I believe this agenda will go further under the amalgamated authority. To prepare the options I visited Kensington and Chelsea Council to learn about their tri-borough arrangements.

And I am already actively pursuing opportunities for York to enter into shared service agreements with other local councils. I anticipate that we will soon enter into a shared management arrangement for Building Control Services with a neighbouring LA. Discussions are well-advanced and the shared service is on course to start in the late summer.

I understand that under the previous Liberal Democrat administration shared services was considered by the Leader with regards to Selby and this was rejected. I believe this was a mistake.

### **Leeds City Region**

I remain a Vice-Chair of the Leader's Board. Councillor Tracey Simpson-Laing remains on the housing board and Councillor Dave Merrett remains on the transport board. Business remains focussed around the city deal and the ways in which York can play a full part in regional business.

### **Castle/Piccadilly**

I have met with Centros before and after the decision on Monks Cross. They confirmed at the first meeting that their PR company was working for the campaign against the stadium. They said if the stadium was approved they would pull out and there would be other consequences.

Since the decision they have decided to enter negotiations. They are requesting a public subsidy and this is under consideration.

### **Skills**

I am very disappointed that the Government is keen to remove the need for schools to provide work experience for teenagers.

I expressed my concern to Nick Gibb MP who is a schools minister. He wrote back saying schools should concentrate on academic qualifications and not concern themselves with work experience. The CBI, local business and I disagree. This experience is invaluable. I have, in response, asked the Chief Executive to prepare the

Council for providing worthwhile work experience programmes to those who need them. This administration led the drive to create over two hundred apprenticeships last year and we will continue to give all children the right to learn skills in the workplace.

### **Jobs Fair**

We held a jobs and training fair in conjunction with Job Centre Plus and the National Careers Service. Over 400 people attended. It is disappointing that The Press did not cover this event despite a release being issued. I see this fair as very much a part of York meaning business.

I have asked for the event to be repeated.

### **Community Stadium**

I am pleased that Eric Pickles has recognised the decision over the stadium was conducted properly and was a local decision. I also believe he supports this administration's aspiration for economic growth.

I am just pleased that after almost ten years of talk this administration is the one actually getting something done.

### **Delivery and Innovation Fund**

Letters have been sent to Parish Councils and voluntary groups asking for expressions of interest in this fund being used to deliver council services at a cheaper cost or better quality.

Conservative North Yorkshire County Council have a similar scheme.

The previous Liberal Democrat administration also had a similar scheme under the venture fund.

### **One Year On Mansion House Speech**

I will soon be giving a speech recognising achievements and what this administration has learned over the past year.

The speech will articulate the vision I have for this city and the step change we are making in ambition of what can be achieved.

York: Proud of our heritage, ambitious for our future

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