

Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council

Flooding

Work has continued since the Boxing Day floods to help residents and local businesses recover. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped both during and after the floods – the community spirit on show has been fantastic. As an Executive we are doing all we can to support business in York and get out the message that the city is open for business. In our budget we took the decision to freeze council car park charges and contribute £50,000 towards York's largest-ever UK-wide tourism campaign.

Last week, I had the pleasure to visit Jorvik and business on Walmgate with Tim Farron MP to hear at first hand how traders are getting back on their feet. A range of support is available for businesses and I would also encourage residents who were affected by the floods to apply to the Two Ridings Community Foundation for financial support. Please contact me directly if you know of any businesses in your wards that need extra support or are having difficulty accessing any funding.

Locally, we are also increasing gulley cleaning to deal with surface water drainage issues and I will continue to lobby nationally to ensure the Government gives the necessary long-term support and funding for York.

Ward Committees

Last July, we agreed a new system to devolve decisions and budgets down to Ward Committees. At my Decision Session earlier this month, I received a report on the progress to date and the feedback from the system we have put in place.

The report showed that 30 Ward Committee meetings have taken place to date with the majority of wards having had at least 2 of their 4 ward committee meetings. A number of positive projects and good practice examples were highlighted across the city. These include a consultation with Canon Lee students in Clifton and Rawcliffe & Clifton Without, monthly reports in Dringhouses and Woodthorpe summarising the work of the ward team, and consultation events in Holgate on topics such as York Central. A number of community projects have of course already received funding.

We have listened to the feedback of ward councillors including through scrutiny on how we can promote more engagement and a better understanding of the system. We have also put in extra money in our budget to increase the support offered to wards, but there will be further opportunities for feedback.

Budget / Frontline Services

I was pleased to pass our budget which focused on key priorities such as protecting frontline services, supporting vulnerable children and adults, and our ambitions to make York the Greenest City in the North.

As I am writing this, we are awaiting the national budget from George Osborne. I am sure that whatever is announced, the financial environment for local government will remain extremely challenging in the coming years and we are already working with officers on our 2017/18 proposals. I will continue to make the case to the national Government that York and its residents deserve a fair deal when it comes to national funding for public services.

Apprentices

I was delighted to attend the Apprentice Recruitment Event held at West Offices recently. The event has gone from strength to strength and I was very pleased to meet both current apprentices and those applying for roles. As an Executive we will continue to do all we can to boost the number of apprenticeships both inside and outside the Council. Already York is currently the sixth best performing local authority in the UK, with the latest figures showing a 30% year-on-year rise in the number of apprenticeship starts.

Refugees

I am continuing to work with partner organisations including Migration Yorkshire on plans to resettle Syrian refugees in York. Earlier this year, the Government announced that it would change the system for distribution of refugees to a regional model. Unfortunately, this has further delayed the process and it remains frustrating that the Government has not done more to keep local authorities informed about timescales and the support on offer. I would like to reiterate my thanks to all residents and groups in York who have already offered support.

York Central / Economic Strategy

I would like to thank all the residents and businesses who have responded to our consultation on the plans for York Central. We will listen to the specific feedback although plans are of course at an early stage. Later this week, I will be meeting the Director of the National Railway Museum to hear more about their proposals.

York Central has the potential to be a game-changing development for York and is a key part of the emerging economic strategy. I am currently working on this document with officers. This strategy outlines some of the key challenges for our city, including how we can secure more high-value jobs and improve how we as the Council engage with businesses. The new Business Improvement District will also of course play a major part in this. As a Council our job is to work with business on achieving their goals, including to progress plans to be a Business Friendly Council.

I am aware that a number of local businesses have raised concerns about the increasing cost of business rates and the ending of the previous rate relief system. I will continue to make the case that we need a wide overhaul of business rates and the Government should do more to support local businesses, which are the lifeblood of our local economy.

Military Covenant

I am currently working with officers to ensure that the council does all it can to support the military and backs up the Military Covenant we signed at Full Council during the last council term. It is important to work with the armed forces community, so I chaired a meeting of the Military Covenant this week and will bring forward further plans on this in the coming months.

Please get in touch if you would like any further information or would to discuss any of the issues in this report: cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk

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