

Deputy Leader's Report to Council

Business Improvement District (BID)

I was delighted that at the end of November businesses voted to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). I would like to congratulate everyone involved in making this happen.

We know from elsewhere that BIDs can bring significant benefits, not just to local businesses but to the wider local community. The York BID Chairman has said the focus will be on street cleaning, rubbish collection, public safety, the public realm, car parking, Christmas lights, street events and the evening economy.

In the coming weeks, I am looking forward to hearing more about these plans and working to ensure that an effective partnership is developed between York BID, Make it York and City of York Council.

Business Support and Apprenticeships

I spent last Saturday (5th December) visiting small businesses in Acomb to celebrate Small Business Saturday. Small and micro businesses make up around 95% of businesses in York. They are the backbone of our community and I am sure all councillors value the small businesses in their wards.

To support small businesses, we have passed plans to make York a 'Business Friendly Council' - this will see support given to businesses to bid for Council contracts and partnership working with organisations such as Make it York to help businesses access support and advice. The proposals are being funded by an extra £30,000 we invested in July's Emergency Budget.

I was pleased that the latest job figures show that the number of York residents claiming Job Seekers Allowance and Universal Credit has fallen by 20% in the last 12 months. This is the result of effective partnership working as is the recent rise in the number of apprenticeships.

Comprehensive Spending Review

The Government U-Turns on changes to Tax Credits and Police were welcome. The cuts to Tax Credits would have affected 8,000 families in York. We also received excellent news over the bids at York Central and Sand Hutton after a lot of positive work from the Council and partners.

However, overall the Autumn Statement confirmed we face further cuts. Analysis from the Local Government Association() shows core government funding will fall by 24% in real terms, or £4.1 billion, over the Spending Review

period. This is on top of an estimated £10 billion in 'demand led cost pressures'. There will also be a £75 per pupil cut to the Education Services Grant (which funds school improvement work and functions such as criminal background checks for staff) and Further Education faces a £400 million national cut.

Our focus will now be on working with officers to understand more about the impact of these cuts and doing all we can to protect frontline services. As ever with George Osborne, the details which emerge in the coming weeks and months will tell us more about this Autumn Statement than the headlines on the day. For instance, on tax credits this includes how the move to Universal Credit will impact residents and of course further detail is needed on the plans for business rate retention.

Ward Committees

Most wards will have had their first round of meetings and will now be working to finalise the allocation of funding. Re-establishing proper Ward Committees was a key priority for me before the election and I am pleased we have delivered this as part of the Joint Executive.

I'm aware that some members have reservations about the new system. This is why I have invited Cllr Gunnell to add the 'Review of Neighbourhood Working Arrangements' to the agenda of January's Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee ahead of my decision session in March. I have also asked officers to arrange meetings with Parish Councils and volunteer groups to discuss how things are going on the ground.

Protecting Pubs

In October, I met representatives from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and following this we agreed proposals at Executive on promoting the use of Assets of Community Value (ACV) to protect pubs. We are now working with officers to take these proposals forward in York.

Listing pubs as ACVs now gives them increased protection and means that the local community would have to be consulted before a pub could be converted into a supermarket or office - this follows a long-running campaign from Lib Dem MP Greg Mulholland to change national legislation on permitted development rights.

Refugees

In September, I chaired a meeting of voluntary, community, and faith organisations with the aim of coordinating a response across the whole city.

This has led to the public launch of the York Refugee Appeal, the creation of a Task Group and a dedicated refugee response coordinator.

I would like to thank everyone for their efforts so far. York residents and students have put the Government to shame in the speed and selflessness of their response. Residents (or members) who wish to make financial donations can visit the Two Ridings Community Foundation website, www.trcf.org.uk

We are working closely with Migration Yorkshire and the Home Office on the final scheme. Mixed messages from the Government over budgets and details have delayed our efforts and we are still awaiting confirmation of the funding arrangements. I am working alongside the LGA to push for greater clarification. Each local Council has been given an initial allocation from the Government based on population and for York this is around 60.

Greenest City

The Executive is focusing on a number of key priorities, including our ambition to make York the Greenest City in the North. We are bringing forward initiatives to increase overall recycling levels by 5,000 tonnes and to over 50%, which could save up to £500,000 in Landfill Tax. This should be a cross-party ambition which I hope all councillors can rally behind.

Finally, I would like to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

If any members would like further information on aspects of this report or in my role as either Deputy Leader or Executive Member for Economic Development and Community Engagement outside of this meeting then please get in touch.

Cllr Keith Aspden