



May 2007

To: Group Leaders, City of York Council.

Via Email

Councillor Steve Galloway
Westfield Ward

6 Stirrup Close
Foxwood
York
YO24 3LU

Tel: 01904 794111
Mobile: 07850 736900
Fax: 01904 788250
Email: cllr.stephengalloway@york.gov.uk

Dear Colleagues

Future political management arrangements at the City of York Council

Following the declaration of the results of the elections on 4th May we have met on several occasions to try to find a mutually acceptable way of running the decision making processes of the Council and one which seeks to respect the wishes of the electorate. In doing so we have all been conscious that any period of apparent indecision could adversely impact on the morale of Council staff, partner organisations in the City and residents generally.

We concluded that

- The City must have a workable, durable, speedy and inclusive decision making process. Any structure must be allowed to work for at least 12 months and should be based on an agreed set of policy objectives and milestones.
- The decision making process must recognise that voters did not give any party an overall majority. Hence residents may expect to see a “mix” of policies and personalities.
- The new council needs to take a fresh initiative in terms of communicating with, and consulting, its residents and stakeholders.
- There may be changes needed to the Councils Constitution which would assist in the running of a balanced Council.
- The Council must have a responsible financial management policy which will be durable. The policy must address known financial pressures on the Councils budget.
- There are some difficult financial choices to be made over coming months. These include job evaluation, waste management, increased demand for some services, pressures on the contingency provision because of the effects of the pensioners pass cost transfer, continuing pressure on both adult and children’s social care budgets, resources for the capital programme as well as the need to focus on filling key officer vacancies, maintaining service quality and getting a sound CPA score.

All Groups initially advanced an all party Executive as their preferred option.

Following discussions, Labour rejected this option citing irreconcilable "policy" differences.

Labour had also ruled out having a joint administration with LibDems citing "the lack of a credible opposition" within such a structure.

Both Labour and the Conservatives declined to cooperate together in a two party administration.

The Conservative Group indicated that they would not enter into any arrangement for the 07/08 municipal year with any other party. They do, however, want to be "constructive" and might change their position in the future in the light of experience.

Labour have ruled out forming a minority administration at this time.

The proposal we have agreed to pursue is that the Liberal Democrats, as the largest group, will form a minority administration.

Labour would form the Shadow Administration.

Any agreement would be based on all parties agreeing to support it at the Councils AGM and that it would last for at least 12 months.

There will be an early review of members allowances (which would certainly be expected to recognise the more significant role of the Minority Group Leader) and a further review of the Constitution (see annex 1). The revised members allowance rates would come into effect as soon as an independent review had been concluded and agreed by Council, but they would not be backdated.

Any revised constitutional arrangements - unless unanimously agreed - would come into effect from the beginning of the 2008/09 municipal year.

I have indicated that the formation of a minority administration is the LibDems least favoured option and that any agreement would have to be underpinned by this written exchange explaining the new processes that had been agreed, together with a written statement of objectives for the Council for the next 12 months. In essence we would commission an update of the Corporate Plan (annex 2).

I would not wish to attempt to take proposals through the Councils decision making bodies (EMAP, Exec or full Council) which did not have a chance of success (as this would represent a potential waste of officer time).

I am pleased, therefore, that the Group Leaders have agreed to be involved at an early stage in the process of commissioning officer reports. This principle can be extended to individual portfolio areas involving Group spokespersons in the dimensioning of reports.

In addition we have agreed to re-introduce the Strategic Policy Panel to which potentially controversial reports can be referred for guidance. This supplements the formal scrutiny "calling in" procedures which will remain available for use, although all 4 groups will seek to avoid unnecessary reliance on this option because of the cost and delays that it involves.

I am happy to confirm that as a matter of principle we are prepared to accept the majority view expressed at these forums and will implement their agreed policies. It is my hope, however, that it will usually be possible on key issues to form a consensus on the best way forward for the City.

This agreement acknowledges that the current

1. Council Corporate Plan
2. 07/08 revenue budget &
3. 07/08 capital budget

will remain the basis for officer actions unless and until they are changed as a result of reports commissioned under this agreement (see annex 2) or as a result of subsequent further discussions or changed circumstances. Any changes will be subject to an officer report to the appropriate panel or Executive.

I acknowledge that residents will expect to see some early refinements to Council policies as a consequence of the election results. For example, against a background of generally buoyant car parking revenue, we have agreed to scrap residents evening car parking charges as soon as is practical.

We have all mutually agreed that we will commission a City of York Climate Change strategy report and a review of the City's leisure and swimming strategy is being placed in the Forward Programme.

I am quite clear that we will want to incorporate an initiative on improving consultation and communication arrangements with York residents

Some changes are proposed to committee numbers and are incorporated in attached (annex 3) which details the chairing and place allocations that we have agreed for the Councils decision making committees and panels. *[NB Annex 3 is not attached for the purposes of the Executive report on 12 June 2007].*

I would be grateful if you would write and confirm that this document represents the mutually agreed conclusions of our discussions.

When I have your response, I will recommend the proposal to my Group for endorsement.

Subject to this, we have agreed to issue a joint press release on Wednesday at 4:00pm when Ian has returned to the City from his short break.

Until that time the contents of this correspondence will remain confidential. Upon receipt of your confirmation though, the proposal will be selectively released, on an "in confidence" basis to key officers to allow them to make the necessary arrangements for the Council AGM and set in motion the changes to process that will be necessary during the June meeting cycle. It will also be necessary for us to prioritise the "review reports" so a further Group Leaders meeting will be necessary after the AGM

I should like to thank other Group Leaders for their contribution to this process which has of necessity involved some flexibility on all sides. I will work constructively with you all during the next 12 months for the benefit of York residents as we set out on another chapter in our City's long history.

Yours sincerely

Steve Galloway

Steve Galloway

Leader, City of York Council,

Liberal Democrat Group