

## Leader's Report to Full Council 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2009

Since my last report the Executive has met three times, and there have been a substantial number of initiatives from the council to support the economic health of the city in preparation for what is anticipated to be a difficult year ahead globally.

### 1. Enterprise Fund

The £300,000 York Enterprise Fund, was launched as the Whyte Knight Loan Fund on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at the Eco-business centre at Clifton Moor. This has demonstrated the strong partnership working within the city to help new businesses at a time when capital loans are difficult to obtain. It has utilised the £50,000 from City of York Council, approved at the last Full Council Meeting which had been placed in reserves from the return of some of the city's Business Rates. Together with funding from Aviva, York Business Development Limited and York Professionals. Details can be obtained from the weblink;

<http://www.yorkbac.co.uk/news.php?news=177>

I attended a Local Government Yorkshire and Humber meeting with Ministers on 5<sup>th</sup> December in Rotherham to discuss the regional response to the downturn and was asked to present the actions that this council has taken.



Launch of the Enterprise Fund : Bob Scrase (York Business Development Ltd) Cllr Andrew Waller (City of York Council), Norman Whyte (York Business Advice Centre), John Yeomans (York Professionals) John Lister (Chief Actuary Norwich Union/Aviva)

## **2. Unemployment in the city**

Within the city claimant count unemployment rose in the city in November by 10.6%, from 2,198 people on job-seekers allowance in October to 2,430 in November. In the Region, unemployment rose this year between October and November by 8.6% and by 8.85% for the UK as a whole.

However, in terms of job-seekers allowance claimants as a proportion of working age people in York are still faring better than either the region or the UK - with claimants representing 1.9% of people in York, 3.2% of regional residents and 2.8% across Great Britain.

The council will be working with the Business Forum, Economic Partnership, and other partner groups to support local businesses at this difficult time.

## **3. Flood defence work**

I am pleased by the progress that has been made in gaining a long term commitment by the Environment Agency to the replacement of flood defences at Leeman Road, and enhancement of other defences in the Marygate, Clifton and Clementhorpe areas of the city. This is a response to a longer term projection of flooding events with a 30 year time horizon.

The continued importance of river defences was brought home in an urgent item to the Executive in December for investigations to the damaged caused to the Ouse river bank between Scarborough Bridge and Clifton Bridge. This work is ongoing.

## **4. Eco settlement**

The application to central government for funding for the York North West development as an 'Urban Eco\* Settlement' is progressing, and a report is being undertaken on behalf of the Department of Communities and Local Government to assess the four candidates for this scheme within the city region. This funding is in lieu of the eco town which has been scrapped for the area. I am grateful to officers for the amount of work that has been done quickly to advance the case for York North West as the additional funding would make a considerable difference to the infrastructure costs of development of housing in this area. We should strive to make the area an exemplar of sustainable living. More details are available through the weblink;

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/leedscityregion/>

## **5. Transport**

At the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> November the Executive received the 2006-2011 Mid term report of the Local Transport Plan. Over the last 10 years traffic levels in the City have risen by only 4% - much less than the national average and a reflection of the success of initiatives such as Park and Ride. The targets for increasing the numbers walking and cycling to work have been achieved 2 years ahead of schedule as have the numbers using Park and Ride.

## **6. Mortgage Rescue Scheme**

Keen support was given by the Executive for the Golden Triangle Mortgage Rescue Scheme. The scheme will involve housing associations taking equity stakes in homes which are at risk of repossession, thereby releasing funds for the owner to pay off arrears, manage debt or allow time for a planned sale. The equity stakes will be funded by the Golden Triangle Partnership, and will be returned for reuse within the Golden Triangle when the property is sold, or the mortgage paid off. The help is therefore effectively a loan which is guaranteed by the equity of the property, so taxpayers' (regional) money will not be at risk..

£450, 000 will be set aside for the scheme, which should rescue up to 28 households from repossession, distributed evenly between Leeds, Harrogate and York.

Last year 510 homes were repossessed in York, which had a devastating impact on those concerned, and the number of mortgage possession claims this year shows that the trend is unsurprisingly increasing. It would be a great help if more residents in York could be helped by Government funding. The Government is not investing in the Golden Triangle Partnership, and although it is a fantastic scheme its capacity is reasonably modest because of limited regional funding. I have asked through the Leeds City Region Housing Board that more central funding is made available, and it has formed part of the 10 point plan of the LCR Housing Board.

## **7. Child Poverty**



In December the Executive received a significant paper developed in response to the motion passed at full council on June 2008, takes stock of the situation at the present time and the work already underway to address issues of child poverty in York. Child poverty levels have reduced in York by 1% over the past year (15% to 14%). Our top performance is much higher than many other authorities and so building on this will be a continuing challenge for the city.

It is important to note that the response to the issue is not that of one department alone, nor even of the city council on its own. The work that will need to continue to develop will be that undertaken with all our partners involved in the working with children – such as the health service, the police, housing, Connexions, Job Centre Plus and many agencies in the voluntary sector. Child poverty is a collective responsibility.

As part of the city's response is the 'Altogether Better York', managed by the local PCT, is a Big Lottery funded programme that aims to increase awareness and understanding of the factors that influence health and well-being. The programme will recruit, train and support community health educators, who will deliver interventions to meet the health and well-being needs of targeted communities, including the Hull Road, Clifton and Westfield areas of the city. They will work with specified target groups, including lone parents and teenage parents. There is significant potential for this programme to link up with the work-focused pilot through the provision of volunteering opportunities to local parents

The report will go to the YorOK Board, where representatives of many of these partners sit, for further analysis and action plans to be drawn up by all the agencies involved – but working collectively.

The results of the Westfield pilot will be considered by the LSP; again to develop a collective response rather than that of a single agency. The findings from the pilot will contribute to the debate and the outcomes from this paper.

Meanwhile, the developing work of the Children's Centres will continue to focus on those in greatest need and targeted work will aim to help young people such as those who are homeless and difficult to reach with support and training. Most importantly, the schools in partnership with the Department's specialist team will work to raise educational outcomes, using the detailed data that is available to them. This work contributes to 'Narrowing the Gap' and aims to support the child and the family in every area of development, educational, emotional, social and physical. It also progresses community cohesion, equality and diversity and safeguarding.

This is an agenda for us all and will result in careful discussion at partnership forums and actions developed by all our partners to tackle this agenda, contribute to the overall progress of the city and ensure that all our children are better equipped to have positive adult lives.

## **8. Loan to Credit Union**

In order to help the York Credit Union to meet demand for its loans in the city, the Executive agreed to a £100,000 loan.<sup>1</sup>

## **9. Efficiency Partner Appointed**

The City of York Council is an efficient organisation and has exceeded the Gershon efficiency targets set for it by the Government. However, the council is expected to make a further £12.6 million of efficiency savings in the next three years. Therefore I am pleased to report that we have found a partner to engage with in respect to the efficiency agenda; Northgate Kendrick Ash. They have already demonstrated, with their work on community transport within the council, that they can deliver real savings to the council tax payers of the city.

The Executive looked at ways in which it can improve communication with the wider York community. Agreement was made for the Corporate Refresh Strategy, and the council's IT Strategy 2007-2012.

## **10. City Archives**

Progress has been made in terms of the Archives which is an issue that has been a debated without resolution for a number of years. The Executive considered a detailed report from Richard Taylor, Senior Curator with the National Railway Museum who had been commissioned to come forward with proposals. Whilst these will need to be considered within the financial constraints of the council, they do give a blueprint for a long term solution to the current location which cannot be considered ideal for the city's archives.



Committee Room 1 photograph from 1930's – from the Archives

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<sup>1</sup> As a member of the York Credit Union I declared an interest and did not take part in the debate.