

Leader's report to Full Council 4th February 2010

1. Winter Weather

I would like to start by putting on record my appreciation of the efforts that staff right across the council have gone to maintain public services during the recent extreme winter weather conditions. The efforts of the gritting teams have been appreciated by the residents of the city, and they literally worked around the clock to keep roads open, salt bins replenished, and responded to the icy conditions.

I am grateful to partners who helped out during the situation, in particular Age Concern who were able to ensure that there was additional capacity to the social care teams to respond to calls for assistance. Support for a 'Good Neighbour' campaign to encourage the neighbourliness that already operates in the city, was given by the Press, church organisations and the Neighbourhood Watch system.



Gritters in between runs being washed down at the eco Depot

The 'Salt Cell' that has taken control of salt supplies at the national level has, as I write, held back the supply of salt from our suppliers that we have not received a delivery for two weeks. Although that stock levels are currently higher than many authorities, it is of concern given that we are a long way before the end of the winter period.

2. Oneplace : Audit Commission

The Audit Commission in the Oneplace assessment of York published on 9th December recognised the work by City of York Children's Services with disabled children awarding one of only 7 'green flags' for councils in the Yorkshire Region. I am sure that staff, partners and parents will have felt that this was acknowledgement

of the work that goes on in the city to support the needs of disabled children here in York.

This follows on from the inspection in 2008 by Ofsted and the Audit Commission which judged as outstanding the council's services for children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Innovation was noted in the joining up of services with mention of the multi-agency Transitions Team supporting young people aged 14-25 which provides independent travel training, and provision of shared and independent housing. "Support is seamless – its focus is on the child or young person not on the particular organisation providing the support. It successfully puts the customer at the heart of what partners are doing."

The comment by the Audit Commission on the general services that the council provides was kicked off by the following;

'York is a good place to live and work. Public services are working well together to achieve the improvements local people need and want. Strong progress in recent years includes improved public health, retaining a strong economy - even during recession, making York a 'greener' city, and reducing crime.'

3. Fairness and Inclusion, and Equality

In early December the Executive approved the Council's Fairness and Inclusion Strategy and Single Corporate Equality Scheme (2009-12) Directorates will have action plans on how they are drawing their activities into this agenda, and so the review of tangible outcomes in April 2010 should show this and the positive changes to the lives of the residents of York. Social Inclusion work and efforts to promote equalities are important for York to maintain its position as one of cities in the country with the lowest social divisions when nationally these have been on the increase.

4. More for York

The Executive approved the proposals for the restructuring of senior management roles and responsibilities within the City of York Council as part of the More for York programme. The More for York Programme is essential if the council is going to avoid the worst of the effects of the reductions in public expenditure which will inevitably follow the General Election given the level of government debt. Part of this wider programme is the review of senior management of the authority, which is similar to the steps being taken by many businesses and organisations in the city. All parts of the council organisation will need to deliver savings in order that the majority of street level services can be retained in the face of reductions in funding, and therefore the senior management structure will have to reflect this pressure. It is inevitable that the reduction in capacity will have an impact on the operation of the council, and this will need to be spelt out to the public and members as the changes will not be without pain.

Across the council there will need to be a greater delegation of decision making which will be a change in culture which needs to be managed. The strength of the organisation will be tested, and so there is a requirement on all members to be

constructive in their engagement with the process. Equally there will need to be a greater pressure on driving out the time consuming aspects that add little to the delivery of high quality services. A greater awareness of cutting out non-essential meetings and reports will be essential as part of this process. I have asked for a report to come to Executive detailing the red tape that should be reviewed in the requirements from central government. A number of years ago the figure of £1 million was attributed to City of York Council from government form filling, and this is something that all councils and the Local Government Association are challenging for this is finance that certainly cannot be defended when essential budgets are under pressure.

The proposed changes brought forward by the Chief Executive in the composition of the Senior Management Team will have its own impact on a personal level which will need to be handled sensitively and appropriately, as well as the need for all members to appreciate the impact on the work on the council by reducing the number of senior managers. We will become a different council to what we are currently, and this will be reflected up and down the country. We must recognise the impact that this will have on staff who have spent years delivering good public service.

The new Directors posts were agreed to be as follows;

- Director of Customer and Business Support Services
- Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods
- Director of Adult, Children and Education Services
- Director of City Strategy

5. Other aspects of the More for York Programme

The Income Collection strand has already collected over £218,000 of overdue debt from the commercial debtors, and measures are being taken to recover other old debt. The review of Single Person Discount has identified a number of cases where the resident has not notified the Council of a change of circumstances, with the result that over £237,000 has been collected where the discount was applied incorrectly. I appreciate that members may have received queries from residents who have not previously been asked to maintain their position as being in receipt of 'single persons discount', but I hope that members will explain why there has to be a tightening up of checks in this area.

ICT has identified a number of measures to improve efficiency and make savings, and the audit of all desktop hardware should identify more savings. This area has one disadvantage, in that the requirement of the Council to join Government Connect has restricted some measures due to the necessity to meet Government aspirations.

The Executive also gave support for the More For York Adult Social Care Blueprint and asked officers to further investigate joint working with the PCT and Hospital Trust to achieve a more joined up approach to the Health Care Economy.

6. Council Headquarters

The Executive received the report of the outcomes of the evaluation of final tenders for the delivery of the Council's new headquarters on 15th December and agreed the recommendation that Tarras Park Properties York Investors LLP be the preferred bidder.

It is a major step forward to be at this point, and within the timetable set for the competitive tendering process. It has been to the credit of both sets of developers that the council had a choice of options to take forward for the scheme.

The final contract will shortly be signed, and officers will need to continue to press for the best value for council tax payers money. Communications will be maintained as the public needs to be aware of the significant financial savings that will arise from this project, and that these were the key driver for embarking on the need for a new HQ. A pre Planning exhibition for the public will be held in the Mansion House towards the end of February

7. The 14-19 Reforms – the York Response to National Changes

The report setting out the priorities for the reform of funding for 14-19 year olds after the transfer of funding from the LSC in April 2010 was approved by the Executive recently. Curriculum reforms for young people in this age group are well established in the city and plans for the requirement for education or training to continue until the age of 17 years (from 2013) and 18yrs (from 2015) are well underway.

An increasing range of options is available to individuals via our schools and colleges and information, advice and guidance works to tailor the provision so that it suits the individual young person's abilities and aptitudes. Well-informed commissioning will allow this to continue and expand.

It is essential to ensure that the offer includes both vocational and academic options and to support a push for greater numbers of apprenticeships. To this end, greater work with partners will be needed to ensure that learners who may not be suited to present provision have all the options they need. The Executive noted the good progress made on delivering the 14 to 19 curriculum reforms, and the high regard in which the work of the York Partnership is held. Endorse the strategic approach as set out in the 14-19 plan.

The Executive requested that the Director of Children's Services comes back with a strategic action plan to increase apprenticeships across the council in every area and department, taking into account the need to include LACs as a priority group, reduce NEETs and ensure sustainability; progress on the resulting work to be reported to the Executive Member for Children and Young People at six monthly intervals. This programme of will be publicised and accessible to young people via the Internet.

8. Business Engagement and Inward Investment

The Executive recently received report presents recommendations for the future delivery of Business Engagement with major employers (often referred to as Key Account Management) and Inward Investment in York, to ensure a continued private sector focus and to provide support in a more streamlined and effective way.

The change to yorkengland.com has been triggered by North Yorkshire County Council wishing to take their part of the service in-house. However, this does present the city with the opportunity to clarify the purpose of a successor service to focus on the city council area. The decision in early 2003 to spread the area of interest of the organisation to cover parts of the county created a lack of focus which I appreciate was a cause of frustration to the York business community, and therefore a fresh start will give the City of York to provide a service which more closely follows the

ambitions of the Future York report. Nevertheless it is vital that the message is received by the city that this is not a step back to the 1990's and that the council's re-organisation is able to develop a "York Enterprise" service which whilst being funded through the local authority, and therefore more secure in its destiny than the current organisation, is able to retain the benefits that independence brought yorkengland.com in the eyes of the business community. This has been presented to the Economic Partnership and there was appreciation that Yorkshire Forward are maintaining their funding, and a complementary business engagement processes for large employers.

9. Review of Low Carbon Emission Residents' Parking Schemes

York became the first authority in the country in 2004 to introduce discount-parking rates for the owners of small and less polluting vehicles

A review on the practicality of introducing a vehicle specific charging schemes was undertaken following discussions leading up to last years budget setting meeting. A officer report concludes that to move to a scheme such as has been recently introduced in Edinburgh and Richmond on Thames would be very costly for motorists and would involve a lot of administrative time.



Against a background of unstable air quality issues, there is, however, an increasingly strong argument that the largest and most polluting vehicles should pay more to enter and park in the City. One way of making a start on such a policy would be to charge a premium for those (relatively) high emission vehicles which park in ResPark areas. The proposal below envisages an increase in the cost of a pass for those vehicles in VED bands J – M.

Approximately 620 vehicle owners would be affected, out of a total of about 5400 pass holders.

One advantage of the scheme would be that all the charges for the other vehicle bands would be frozen at their present levels for a further year. This would be the fourth successive year that low emission (bands A-C) pass costs have been frozen at a charge of £44 per year.

It is hoped that the scheme would also deter the owners of very large vehicles such as motor homes and some wide 4X4s from parking on the streets. Such vehicles can take up an excessive amount of space both in terms of length and width.

The Executive also asked officers to prepare a further report that considers the implications of a vehicle specific low emission scheme including discount incentives for commercial vehicles meeting the latest Euro emission targets

10. Access York Phase 1 Park and Ride Development

The Executive agreed to appoint Halcrow Group Ltd as the successful bidder for the Lead Design Consultant for the Access York Phase 1 Park and Ride Project as part of the city's continuing transport improvement programme which will go on to receive DfT approval.

11. Local Area Agreement Refresh 2009/10

Finally central Government has acknowledged that the recession which will impact on the outcomes of many activities of the local authorities, partners, and businesses in Local Strategic Partnership area. The changes to the proportion of working age people on out of work benefits is being recommended at 4.3% below the national average. The number of affordable homes has been reduced from 797 to 549 which is more realistic. The figure for average earnings is measured in comparison with the national average rather than an absolute figure and thus the national average will have a built in response to the recession

12. Centre for Cities Report

There has been an updated Centre for Cities report launched on 18th January 2010.



York is in many of the top 10's; high levels of employment, high levels of training and qualifications. We are also shown to continue to have the lowest levels of inequalities, and lowest levels of people without any formal qualifications – all of which are the result of tremendous efforts by the council, schools, and a whole range of partners, we cannot let up on these efforts to keep York where we are. The 'One City' campaign in response to the recession is supporting retraining, and providing help to local companies.

The independence of York's economy is recognised in this report, but it also supports the policy of co-operation with neighbouring areas as jobs and employment patterns flow beyond council boundaries. We will continue to engage with the Leeds City Region where we benefit from being part of a larger economy based on 3 million people, arguing for our fair share of national resources, but without losing our identity as York, an internationally known city.

There are now much better links between the council businesses and the Chamber of Commerce in the city than I have know over the last two decades. There is a 'cautious confidence' that York companies can make the most out of a future recovery. I recognise that there are responsibilities on both sides to take full advantage of this.

As a city we need to build on our strengths in science and technology, food, 'green jobs' and tourism. The spin off businesses from York University, Science City, and more recently the Phoenix Centre at York St John University are setting up the

companies that will employ future generations. The eco-business centre at Clifton Moor is also a key to helping companies to set up and grow.

The reports argues that we are seeing the benefits for the future of the city from the investment by the public sector in the Heslington East Expansion, new buildings at York St John, and York College, new council homes, an new council HQ, and the national recognition of the eco-housing proposal for the former British Sugar site. We are making a pitch for relevant civil service and government science jobs being relocated out of London. During 2010 we will see the benefits of investment in the Yorkshire Museum, and a new Visitor Information Centre in Blake Street, building up York's reputation for heritage and tourism.

Investment by the private sector is vital for a balanced economy, and this is recognised in the report.. I look forward to the new hotels emerging from the former Rail Headquarters, Blossom Street, and the improvements in other hotels around the city. Network Rail are investing in the mainline up the East Coast which is a lifeline to the York economy. I will keep the pressure up on getting investment for York Central site to open that up for development. From the retail sector new shops are opening up in York as a sign of confidence in the local economy.

There are positive signs from the report, but I am sure that along with other members of the York Economic Partnership we will see this as a reason to step up efforts to get the most out of the opportunities that this city has for a strong future.



Retailers at the January 25th Retail Strategy Group meeting reported that sales in the run up to Christmas 2009 had been up on the previous year, and in many cases recovering to 2007 levels which is a sign of how much stronger the retail economy is doing in York relative to others around the region

St Nicholas Fayre 2009, Parliament Street York

Cllr Andrew Waller
Leader