



Councillor James Alexander
Labour Leader of City of York Council
Report to Full Council – December 2012

Floods

Flooding has hit the city once again, and we have shown that working with our partner agencies, we can reduce the worst impacts of extreme weather on York residents.

I want to thank staff involved from all agencies for their efforts in the recent floods.

Living Wage

I am very proud this council is the first in Yorkshire and Humber to announce our intention to implement the 'Living Wage' for our lowest paid workers. This is something tangible that has arisen from the work of York's independent Fairness Commission.

City of York Council will be joint first in the region to implement the Living Wage from 1st April 2013. This will help 573 of our lowest paid workers during a difficult financial climate and will help stimulate some of our poorest areas with greater purchasing power. As important as anything else, this is about paying individuals fairly for the valued work they do for this city.

Councillor George Barton, Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group, said his group opposed the Living Wage at the York Economic Partnership. The Liberal Democrat Group has said the introduction of the Living Wage is "financially reckless".

Paying the Living Wage is morally the right thing to do.

Unemployment

The latest claimant count for Job Seeker's allowance in York is 3067. This is an increase of 10 people from the previous month. This represents 2.2% of the working age population. The national average is 3.8% and the regional average stands at 4.6%. In October 2011 the amount stood at 3,439.

The actions this administration is taking to support jobs and growth is becoming tangible in our unemployment and growth figures. We will be relentless in supporting the local economy.

Internationalisation

City of York Council will be taking part in the MIPIM conference with other councils in the region. The conference is the place for people to pitch development sites to investors. The ambition to get development sites off the ground in York over the past few years has been lamentable and I hold the previous administration partly responsible, together with the present national economic situation which we have far less influence over. It is a shame the Liberal Democrat Group has opposed the Hiscox development at Hungate and now opposes measures to promote other inward investment opportunities in York. Their policy has to been to hold on to wait for land values to go back up, when there is no evidence that this will be the case. This policy would result in no schemes getting off the ground.

Our taking part in this conference is backed by the private sector and all three main group leaders agreed at the economic partnership to not play political games where international travel is in the best interests of York.

I am pleased to say Julian Sturdy MP has resisted this temptation and given me his backing for such travel to support developments in York.

I have held follow up discussions with the Philippine Ambassador to the UK with regard to economic and cultural links. Interest centred around a growing agricultural food industry (to which Dijon is also involved), supply of energy and learning from the Philippines with regard to volunteer flood responses. There was also discussion around students, bio-medical industry and tourism.

The meeting was at the invitation of the Philippine Ambassador following a successful meeting in York. The Ambassador said his trip to York was the most successful of his meetings in the UK outside of London.

Important work with Shanghai and Chicago are also underway with a view to bringing further tangible benefits to our local economy.

I will keep council informed on progress on this important area of work that I feel has been neglected for some time. Conservative Minister Greg Clark and UKTI are encouraging greater internationalisation of cities to increase exports which will secure a demand-led economic recovery.

Impact of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement

The submission time of this report is before the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. I am, however, happy to answer any questions on the impact this statement has upon York.

Fireworks

I am pleased this administration managed to secure two fireworks displays in the home of Guy Fawkes. The displays were not at any cost to the council taxpayer and although the organisers will have some lessons to learn from the displays, it is a very positive step in the right direction. It is a big turnaround from the previous administration and no professional major displays in York.

Scrutiny

I am concerned that scrutiny is not working as it should be in this council and there is a lack of direction in the scrutiny function that the Executive function of the council cannot lead on.

This administration reinstated the scrutiny budget that was cut by both Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors in the 2010/11 Feb budget. We want scrutiny to work but instead we have a system with very few positive outcomes which I would like to see change.

I would like to discuss the issue with Group Leaders in a constructive way that seeks to find a way forwards. But ultimately it is down to all Members of the council to want to change the way scrutiny works and to want outcomes which improve the lives of York residents.

As Cabinet Leader I can only support this process, rather than lead on it.

HQ

The council will shortly be making the move to its new HQ. This has been many years in the planning and is critically important to both changing the way we work, and saving money.

I'm confident it will be a positive step for the council and look forward to working more closely with officers and Members once the move is made.

Christmas Stimulus Package

The administration has listened to city centre retailers and increased funding for Christmas lighting. We have secured free parking for late night shopping on Thursdays in the run up to Christmas and we have also funded free parking on Boxing Day.

This stimulus package also included the council bailing out retailers along Stonegate that would have had no lighting this year due to lack of their own funds and deciding some years ago to not be involved with the council's lighting system.

This, as well as the economic development decisions we are taking detailed above, is why Labour in York is trusted on the economy.

Christmas

I would like to wish all members of the council a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Councillor James Alexander

4th December, 2012