

Report of the Leader of the Council

Devolution

Devolution has continued to be one of the biggest issues on the council agenda and unlike the previous administration we have been determined to keep our options open, which will enable us to get the best deal for York. We are currently involved in bids focusing on the Leeds City Region footprint, York/North Yorkshire and East Yorkshire and also the so called Greater Yorkshire. I would like to thank all those, whether individuals or bodies, who have fed their views into our devolution consultation and urge anyone who still wishes to, to do so. Conversations are continuing with other authorities and also with government and a small team of our officers are working superbly in this complex and fast moving area. The conversations about working together which stem from devolution have highlighted just how poor the previous administration's work was with our neighbours and is something we are addressing in improving relations and opportunities.

Enterprise Zone

It was great news that in September York Council, in association with the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership submitted a bid to government for the York Central site to be made an Enterprise Zone. If this was to be successful it could help unlock over £100 million to deliver this critical brownfield site and be a huge boost to jobs and economic growth in the city. It is also a key brownfield site which is vital to develop as this administration ensures our city can grow but we ensure strong protection for our Greenbelt along the way.

Syrian Refugees

Council officers have been involved in investigating where we as a city can help with the current refugee crisis. This has included a meeting of voluntary and faith groups to see where they can help. York has a strong history of helping those most in need and it has been pleasing to see people offer their help. Officers are talking with government about how exactly we will assist. However the greatest suffering continues to be people still in Syria or around under the evil Islamic State regime.

Jeremy Corbyn

The focus of this report is about local issues and what we as a council can control. However it would be wrong to think the election of the new Labour leader does not have an impact on our area. Not only are many of Jeremy Corbyn's views from decades ago but there are a number that have simply never been acceptable. There is perhaps little unusual in his supporting people not sharing platforms with the likes of the BNP as he, rightly, finds their views offensive. However this by definition throws into a worrying light his views on other extremists that he will share a platform and terrorists that he calls 'friends'. I hope all Labour councillors in York will disassociate themselves from Jeremy Corbyn's views, as well as those of John McDonnell his new Shadow Chancellor who for example shockingly credits 'the bombs and bullets and sacrifice' of the Provisional IRA for the Irish peace process and believes it a shame Margaret Thatcher wasn't assassinated.

Ward Funding

Recent weeks have seen us bring forward additional funding for wards which will give residents a greater say in how money is spent in their areas. This is a great opportunity for residents but equally the new system must be explained to people and I hope and believe officers and ward councillors will ably do this.

Community Stadium

With this council having the Executive Report from Cllr Ayre I am sure there will be more detail on the project however I am pleased we are continuing to take the project forward. We would not have started from where we are and the previous administration's appalling failure which meant there was not a brick in the ground for all their time in office, but we have managed to get the project back on track and are committed to the delivery of the stadium and to safeguarding Yearsley Pool.

Art Gallery

This is another issue I am sure Cllr Ayre will provide fuller detail on but it is pleasing we as an Executive have found a middle ground of not charging some for admission to the Art Gallery but

understanding admission has not been free for years and there is a need for a further charge for the long-term viability of looking after our museums. As a council we have to find ways of doing things different to ensure we can provide services and in the case of York Museum's Trust visitor numbers have done under their time.

Bootham Park

Recently we have had the unfortunate news of the Care Quality Commission's withdrawal of registration from Bootham Park Hospital, essentially closing York's central psychiatric hospital, at least for the time being. Although the fate of Bootham Park is in the hands of the NHS, the council has kept in close touch with all of the major NHS providers and commissioning groups connected with the running of Bootham and we have made our concerns for the well-being of the patients and their families and our insistence that safe, high quality mental health care be restored in full to the people of York loud and clear.

As of the time of writing I understand that the new NHS mental health provider for York and Selby is still on track to take over the service on October 1st and that it is in negotiations with the Care Quality Commission regarding the registration issues at Bootham. The council is in contact with the new provider and we look forward to working with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust to provide high-quality mental health services to our city.

Tang Hall going strong

Twice in the last month I have had the pleasure to attend events in Tang Hall. The first was the relaunch of Your Café where volunteers cook meals from donated food, often that would otherwise have been thrown away, with people then paying what they wish to. The second was the launch of the Tang Hall Big Local which was an amazing demonstration of what can be achieved when the community comes together to help each other. If I wore a hat I would take it off to the excellent work of all those associated with both projects.

Jobs Fair

It was pleasing recently to attend the latest council organised, kindly sponsored by Hiscox, Jobs Fair. The event continues to be a big success with increasing numbers of stallholders and an extensive range of good jobs available. It is important we as a council do whatever we can in terms of the jobs market to work alongside the success of the government's long-term economic plan.

Meet the Teams

I continue to spend time with different colleagues, whether in West Offices, at Hazel Court or on site. I am grateful to all members of staff for the insight they have given me into the jobs they do and the challenges they face. I will continue to do these in the weeks ahead and remain open to all those who want to raise queries or concerns with me. We have committed to listen to and engage with all, whether residents, staff or in many cases both.

Councillor Chris Steward
29 September 2015