

## **Council Report of the Cabinet Leader**

### **Floods**

I want to publicly thank the staff of all agencies for the hard work they carried out during the recent floods. I know ward colleagues and my Deputy were up most of the night as the flood levels reached their peak in the Leeman Road area, helping the local community during this difficult time. At the Ouse's peak, I visited various parts of the city to see how the floods were being managed. This included visiting Silver Command at Fulford Police Station.

I will be writing to the Government to call for resources in helping with the clean up operation. Thanks to all who supported the combined effort, whether paid staff or fellow residents.

### **Inward Investment**

Preparations are being made with a view to welcoming Hiscox to York and to the Hungate site. This will require Cabinet taking a decision to sell land on the site to accommodate the new employer. This will bring 500 jobs, of which 200 will be relocated. The council has shown it can be quick to respond positively to inward investment opportunities when they arise. I first met with Hiscox in November and encouraged its representatives to bring the company to York. At the time they were considering another Yorkshire city. This opportunity was created due to the hard work of Richard Flanagan, the President of the Chamber of Commerce.

I directed resources to this inward investment opportunity and have since met with Hiscox again and been in close contact. I will soon be visiting their London office for further discussions. This investment is the biggest vote of confidence in York's economy since Labour last attracted CPP to York. This has sent out a positive signal about York being open for business and has galvanized the council's reputation after the passing of the Monks Cross planning application. Not only are the employment and supply chain opportunities good for York, but to also begin sorting out the Hungate site and supplying extra footfall for the city centre is tremendous.

Although we have shown we can respond to opportunities quickly, we as yet are not creating enough of these opportunities ourselves. I have come to the conclusion that the only reason a company relocates is to be closer to its supply chain and the labour it requires. I have therefore instructed our economic development team to survey York's top

companies and find out who their top suppliers are. If there is commonality and if York is a leader in the field of that business, then we will begin to aggressively target those companies to locate to York.

### **Internationalisation**

We are forging economic links with Nanjing, Chongqing, the Philippines, Chicago and Dijon.

The Lord Mayor and I travelled to Dijon last month to develop economic links and opportunities. This followed an invitation from the deputy regional Mayor. It was really positive for the Lord Mayor and the Council Leader to work together in this way to do what is best for the city, something I hope we are able to do more regularly in future.

It is clear that Dijon is working in similar markets to us, especially around food agriculture technology. We will be following up the opportunities and giving a presentation back to the Business Forum to which all councillors will be invited. The Burgundy Chamber of Commerce wishes to send a delegation to York following our visit and I have already set up meetings between the Chamber and a number of York companies.

The University of York, York St John and York Professionals also accompanied us on the visit enabling the city to develop relationships across a number of important sectors.

### **Homelessness**

I visited the Peasholme centre and our other homelessness services recently. I want to pay tribute to our staff who work in very difficult circumstances, providing an essential service to those in less fortunate circumstances than ourselves. It is a service that will come under increased pressure in the future as the impact of national policy is fully felt at the local level.

### **Benefits Advice**

I have spoken to staff in the benefits advice office and to residents who access this service and it was really interesting listening to the concerns of both.

We believe in helping people to achieve self-sufficiency, but benefits must be available and promoted to those that most need them. In a society such as our own, how well and to what extent we do this is an important measure of how developed that society is.

## **Veritau**

I have visited Veritau and discussed their work and how they can save more money for the council. I was alarmed to learn that under the previous Liberal Democrat administration the council stopped verifying housing benefit payments and therefore the level of inappropriate claims has risen. I have instructed the Chief Executive to begin these verifications again to ensure payments are correct, warranted and ultimately to save the local taxpayer money.

## **York's Fairness Commission**

I welcome the final report of the independent York Fairness Commission and the Cabinet will analyse its recommendations and give a full response as to how we take those recommendations forward.

We welcome public debate on the report's recommendations and on some of the more fundamental challenges the council faces in creating a fairer city.

We know the principle of fairness is anathema to Conservatives but establishing the Commission was a key part of the Labour manifesto that we were elected on, and fairness one of our core values.

## **Reinvigorate York**

We have committed £3.3m to city centre infrastructure and this has been welcomed by city centre businesses. This is the biggest investment the city centre has seen since Labour introduced pedestrianisation.

We will be extending this programme and the new City Team York has been helpful in this regard.

## **Tour de France**

Progress is being made on securing the Tour de France coming to Yorkshire and York.

The country has had an incredible sporting year, and that success can only help with bids such as this. We must capitalise on the momentum and good will built up this year and the Tour De France coming to York, as well as increasing interest in cycling, are great ways of achieving that.

This will be a sporting event on a hitherto unseen scale in the city, with a global TV audience of 50m + as well as huge economic benefits for York.

Please pledge your support to get it here, and encourage those you know to do likewise at: [www.yorkshire.com/back-the-bid](http://www.yorkshire.com/back-the-bid)

### **City Deals**

I have negotiated for York to be a part of the Leeds City Region Deal in terms of transport and skills. This is the biggest devolution York has secured in some time and follows the mandate the council gave to campaign for regional governance. This is an important first step.

I am currently involved in securing a city deal for York and North Yorkshire with regards to the food agriculture industry.

### **GCSEs**

We have given our backing to legal action being taken by Lewisham Council against political interference in GCSE examination marking. It is unfair for hard working pupils to get lower grades now than they would've done a few months ago, and the Government shouldn't be playing politics with the education of young people.

### **Employment**

After visiting Job Centre Plus and Prospect training and listening to staff, I have asked the council to begin setting up work experience schemes for the unemployed.

This builds on the good work we have already carried out in recruiting apprentices, which has been recognised further afield and which I was asked to share with Lord Adonis and others at a meeting today.

Councillor James Alexander  
2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012