

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

17 January 2017

Devolution

A devolution deal for the region has been in the news again. West Yorkshire council leaders have made it very clear that we believe devolution would give us greater opportunity to narrow the gap in productivity between the north and the south of England. We have always maintained that the Leeds City Region provides the best economic footprint to drive growth. We have put forward proposals, including the acceptance of an elected Mayor, however Government so far have not responded positively to a Leeds City Region proposal.

West Yorkshire leaders cannot wait around. The world is changing around us and we need to be in a position to shape our destiny and make sure that decisions about the region's future are made closer to home. Businesses also want to see greater devolution. They see the region being left behind in the future if we don't push for progress.

We are meeting with council leaders from across Yorkshire, across the political divide about devolution for Yorkshire. As a result we have had some very constructive and positive conversations about how a whole Yorkshire devolution deal might work. At the same time we have to keep doing the day job. We have a £1 billion City Growth deal from Government to deliver which supports jobs and growth. And we have a Strategic Economic Plan in place to support this delivery.

HMRC

Members will recall that in 2015 the HMRC announced the closure of 12 out of 13 of its offices in the Yorkshire region. This includes the HMRC offices in Bradford and in Shipley and equates to about 2000 jobs in the district. We had news last week that the National Audit Office has reviewed the HMRC's estates plan and found it wanting. HMRC has acknowledged that its original plan for regional centres was unrealistic and is now re-considering the scope and timing of the programme.

We all know that the Bradford district would provide best value when it comes to investing in new Government estate. Additionally we have a young, willing and able workforce; we are positioned right in the heart of the north of England; and we are responsive to business needs. We are therefore making further representations to Government and to HMRC in the hope that they will reconsider their decision about the Bradford district.

I'd like to express my thanks to the Bradford district MPs, both Labour and Conservative, for their support and work in making our case.

Social Care Precept

The Government failed to mention Social Care and the funding challenges in the Autumn statement but we will all have heard that since then, they have advised that if councils need to fund the rising demand in adult social care then they expect us to raise this through additional increases to council tax.

This is something that none of us in this chamber want to do. We know that people are struggling in this age of austerity. However the Labour group, after much deliberation and thought has decided that we should consult on adding the advised 1% to council tax. A recent poll of councils in the Local Government Chronicle showed that 80% of councils, like us, are considering the option.

The budget is still out for consultation and a final decision will be made on budget day on 23rd February when we vote in this chamber.

RSA Inclusive Growth Commission

This Government has made it clear that it is concerned to promote inclusive growth. Even before this point, Key Cities and Core Cities were both already working with the RSA to look at Inclusive Growth and what drives it. The Commission spent two days in Bradford last year as part of their work. The Chief Executive and I have since both spent time talking to the leaders of this piece of work which we hope is going to influence Government policy in the future.

As a result Stephanie Flanders, the Chair of the Commission will be doing a launch of the findings of the Inclusive Growth Commission in Bradford on March 6th. This will be a high profile event about a subject which is very important to Bradford. We are pleased that we have been chosen to host.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

Councillor Cooke

I have many questions but I will ask the one. On the first item relating to devolution the note says we are meeting with Council Leaders across Yorkshire and we have had some very constructive and positive conversations about how a Yorkshire Devolution deal might work. That is somewhat at odds shall I say with the reporting on this issue. I am sure when we have a chat our chats with each other are always positive and constructive. The outcome of this and certainly when I look at what Labour MPs from Sheffield said and things like that suggest that there is less appetite for this than we thought. Can the Leader set out without giving any games anyway and I appreciate that the kind of path that we might take from here given that someone ran it up the flag and lots of people said no we do not want that. Where do

we go from here on this because the number of options available to us are getting fewer and fewer, let's put it that way.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Thank you Councillor Cooke. I think it is very important first of all for us to get devolution and I think just to put that on record that it is important for us as a district. We talked about Brexit and people want powers back from Brussels but I do not want to go to Brussels to Westminster, I would like some of them to come to Yorkshire. It is important that we get this right. We have had lots of conversations with leaders of other parties, Council leaders of other parties in north, east and south Yorkshire as well. You are right the devil is in the detail and therefore we are working towards seeing what a plan might look like, what everybody can sign up to. Set up a working group from West Yorkshire point of view as well to see if we can talk to other leaders about what that detail might look like. There is a broad agreement that everybody wants devolution. It is just how you bring everybody to the table. Leaders I think will probably agree more readily than perhaps people outside leaders but the business community really want us to get on with this so everybody is routing for us. We just need to get an agreement and this is a step forward in the right direction I believe. Thank you.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

I am a bit disappointed in the Leader's report. I know, not a personal criticism at all, it is just that I am not sure what it is for. There was nothing in it really that you could not have picked up out of a newspaper and being a strong supporter of the newspaper, the local newspaper, and buy at least one copy a day, if not two some days, that is forgetful not generous. I just think that we ought not to try to, we ought to find stuff that is not readily available and is a bit more about the business of the Council to put into the Leader's report. I am extremely pleased to see we are moving towards a brand Yorkshire, I think it is a strong brand and I think that is what businesses are pushing for. Given that you seem to think it is, or appear to be giving the impression that it is somewhat second best, I would be really pleased if you would open up some sort of channel of communication that that information can be shared more widely and particularly that you maybe want to open up a communication with the Telegraph & Argus and ask them to run a whole series of things about is this best for Bradford because you clearly think it isn't. Thank you.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Thanks Councillor Sunderland. I am sorry you are disappointed with the report. It is only about a matter of four weeks since we had the last Council meeting and of course there has been Christmas and New Year in between so some of the meetings I had with Government have not happened obviously in that Christmas period so I am hoping that next time it will be more exciting and there will be more in there for you to grab hold of. Regarding devolution, I wanted to bring it to the

Chamber because there has been a lot in the press but we have not had an awful lot of chance to talk about recent developments in the Chamber. It is interesting to see here what you say on that and interesting to hear you as a Yorkshire devolution fan. I want the best deal for Bradford and I have and that is always going to be at the heart of any devolution proposal that I propose to this Chamber to sign up to. That is always what I am batting for. We need an agreement and I am happy to propose a Yorkshire solution depending on what is underneath it. I am happy to sign up to that of course depending on what this Chamber says because it obviously is your decision at the end of the day. But it cannot go unnoticed that of course South Yorkshire went for a deal and West Yorkshire went for a deal but we have not had that signed off by Government so it is a matter of principle saying look we are keen to have devolution, we have made a proposition, but if that is not acceptable let's go for the next step which is the whole of Yorkshire. I think you are right, I think for a public perception point of view people understand Yorkshire, it is a brand that people can understand. We have had more Olympic medals than most countries in the world if you look at the last Olympics and we are bigger than Norway as Yorkshire, we are about as big as Belgium and Scotland, so why not have our own devolved region. There is plenty to be said for it but it is the detail and I want to make sure we can the right detail and the right deal for Bradford in that. We are constantly talking, trying to get a few more negotiations going and push forward on this new what could be a consensus to a deal. Thank you.

Councillor Pennington

I appreciate your report. I think it is a great idea of Councillor Green's. I think he was the man that started it. Like Councillor Sunderland I am a little confused but that has been said before. Could we not have something, there is no mention for instance of the unfortunate disturbances in Leeds Road after the shooting of Mr Yaqub, there is not even a little update on the Bulls and I would like to know when we are going to get our HS3 station.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

It is not in the report. If there had been some update I would have included it in the report. The Bulls, I did not include it in the report because it has changed daily for quite a long time but now it seems I think this afternoon a statement is being made so rather than steal somebody's thunder I think it is up to the RFL and the Bulls to make their own statement on that. You mention also there – yes the police have been very strong and action for that and I commend the action they took and they are talking to communities. So that was about 60 people at the bottom of Leeds Road and some people want it to be a peaceful protest which is fine but if you are not peacefully protesting that is not acceptable in Bradford district. There was a third thing – station – yes well that is something that Councillor Cooke and I talked about that we all want and make sure it happens in Bradford so HS3 is something we are all pushing for and trying to get a meeting with Andrew Jones still and Chris Grayling

to try and make our case to them. Continuing to have conversations with Leaders as well who also have an influence on Rail North to make sure they are pushing our case. It is not just Bradford pushing our case, it is Government Ministers and other Leaders pushing our case. Because it is not just Bradford who needs to be on that line, everybody needs Bradford to be on that line because we have a 102,000 young people who are the workforce of the future. They are all in those schools, they are the workforce of the future and we need them to have access to those opportunities, just as those businesses need our young people to access them. It is a win-win for the region and very important that we get it through. I know we are all backing it in this Chamber and I thank you for your support. Thank you.
