

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

18 JULY 2017

Grenfell Tower

The terrible scenes at Grenfell Tower in London shocked us all. Here in Bradford even though all the council's housing stock was transferred to Incommunities in 2003, naturally we still have a moral obligation to the tenants as residents of this district. Many of us work with Incommunities on a daily basis to solve residents' issues.

We have been liaising with West Yorkshire Fire Service, Incommunities and other housing providers to make sure our own policies and procedures are robust. None of us ever want to be tested in this regard but we want to make sure that, should we be put to the test, we would respond properly.

Landmark House, a privately owned apartment block in the city centre, is the first building in the district to be found to have ACM cladding and fail the Government's test. This is obviously upsetting for the residents. Our housing and building control staff immediately met with the fire service, and the management company to assess the situation.

West Yorkshire Fire Service has agreed that there is no need to immediately evacuate the premises. Residents all have smoke alarms present in their flats which they need to check are working on a regular basis. There is also a common alarm system which if activated, triggers a full evacuation. Increased surveillance is being introduced. The management company are following Government guidance.

We have offered the management company the use of City Hall this week for them to speak with residents and answer concerns. We will attend ourselves to offer support.

Terrorism

Since the last Full Council meeting there have been a number of terror attacks in this country – Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park – events that have directly affected people in this Chamber. Our thoughts and prayers remain with those whose lives were lost or changed by those events.

These terror attacks have reminded us that we need to work harder to protect ourselves. But we must also challenge ourselves on how cohesive we are as a society. In Bradford we pride ourselves on being a friendly city and generally get on well together. Naturally however attacks such as these make people of all faiths and none feel less safe. We must keep working at this. I am keen for us to work with other local authorities to look at what else we can do so that Bradford remains a peaceful and friendly district well into the future.

Transport

Since the last Full Council, I arranged a meeting with Andrew Jones MP, then Transport Minister, Philip Davies MP and Roger Marsh, Chair of the Leeds City Region LEP to discuss how we might convince Government to invest in a Bradford stop on Northern Powerhouse Rail. I had been pushing for a date to meet the Minister for some time to talk about transport and the meeting went well. The Minister was supportive of Bradford being a stop on Northern Powerhouse Rail. However since then there has been a general election and the Minister has now been moved to the Treasury. We have written to the new Minister asking for a meeting and will make our case again.

To the same end I've met again with John Cridland, Chair of Transport for the North in Manchester and welcomed Department of Transport civil servants to Bradford to show them the opportunities which Bradford district presents to anyone serious about realising an increase in UK productivity. I also met with Lord Bradshaw who takes a particular interest in transport matters and was keen to relay our conversation to officers in Rail North with whom we have since also met.

Peer Review

Thank you to everyone in this Chamber and beyond who took part in the Local Government Association Peer Review. Representatives for the councils of Wigan, Newcastle, Hackney and Luton were part of the team who came to review how we serve the public of Bradford district. The resulting positive report includes areas of strength plus areas for development. We will be tabling a paper outlining an action plan to address the points raised at the Executive meeting in September.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

The Investment Committee met recently to approve £180 million of investment which included several schemes in the Bradford district. The most notable of these was the £17 million for the Bradford Forster Square redevelopment which is due to be completed by 2021. Major work on four routes in the district has also been approved to improve journey times. We were also delighted to see the opening recently of Low Moor station, another West Yorkshire Combined Authority investment of £10.8 million into the District which is proving to be very successful.

Ministerial meeting at Key Cities

Members will recall that Bradford is represented on the Executive of this national network of UK towns and cities. At a recent Key Cities meeting we welcomed the new BEIS (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) Minister Richard Harrington to talk with us. The Minister spoke about the Industrial Strategy. I asked him to particularly consider place-based investment, skills and transport as priorities. The Minister said he had previously visited Bradford and would be happy to do so again. An invitation is being sent.

Medical School at Bradford University

Bradford University led a meeting in London with a number of local MPs and Lords to discuss the opportunity of having a Medical School at Bradford University which I

also attended. As discussed before in this Chamber this would be hugely significant for the city to have such an institution and is the ideal place to locate it. We will continue to give the initiative our full support. No guidance on the bidding process has yet been released by Government.

Education Opportunity Fund

The snap General Election meant that civil servants at DfE were forced to cancel the Bradford launch of the Education Opportunity Fund. Cllr Imran Khan and I met with DfE again last week to accelerate activity. A new launch date is being organised for September. This remains an excellent opportunity to gain access to the £72 million put aside for the 12 Education Opportunity Areas nationally. However we are also seeing increased investment interest from national education organisations and charities just because we are an Education Opportunity Area. We look forward to working with everyone who has a passion for Education to increase the attainment levels of Bradford children.

QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

Just a question about the Education Opportunity Fund under the education bit. I just wondered how you felt about the announcement about Dixons being funded to become a research school and what impact you would expect to see that research have on social mobility?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

It's not on the report but we always welcome money into Bradford to improve education. What we're seeing here is the Education Opportunity Fund is already starting to bring people in. It's not just about the money and it is the different organisations who want to help Bradford schools and that's very welcome with the Education Opportunity Fund money.