

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNCIL – 20 MARCH 2018

Hate letters

We were all distressed that some colleagues in this chamber and in other cities across the country had received hateful mail which was Islamophobic in nature. Our sympathy goes to those people who have been directly affected by this mail. It was posted to them, sometimes to their home address thereby violating their personal, family space. We stand in solidarity with them against these crimes of hate. An attack on any minority is an attack on all of us. We are a district that prides ourselves on our openness and inclusivity. Where someone seeks to divide us let us stand ever more firmly together. Anyone receiving any communication of this sort should not touch the item so as to preserve any fingerprints left by the perpetrators and should call the police immediately.

Yorkshire Devolution

All Yorkshire Leaders, some Yorkshire MPs as well as trade union representatives were at the Yorkshire All Party Parliamentary Group meeting with Sajid Javid on 27th February. The Secretary of State was keen to impress upon us that he was listening and that he wouldn't stand in the way of a Yorkshire deal. He wanted to see more detail of what a Yorkshire devolution deal looked like before he would give it serious consideration. Subsequently I chaired a meeting of all the Yorkshire leaders the following week to discuss a first draft of what might be contained in a Yorkshire deal. This draft devolution deal has been despatched to the Secretary of State and we await his feedback.

Promoting Bradford internationally as part of the City Region

Last week from Monday to Wednesday I attended MIPIM, the world's leading property and economy conference, as part of the delegation from Leeds City Region. As Chair of the Combined Authority I shared a number of platforms with other regional leaders including West Midlands Mayor Andy Street at a session on "Investible Infrastructure" organised by the Department of International Trade who had a big presence at the conference. I spoke on a panel with regional business leaders about our new economic strategy and the opportunities for investment in Bradford. As a result I had meetings with several investors, some of whom already own property in the district and some of whom are interested in doing so. With the Bradford Economic Strategy launch taking place in London later this week, I have used this as an opportunity to invite those I met to this launch to further progress these conversations.

Bradford Economic Strategy Launch

We had a great launch of the strategy at Kala Sangam on 6th March. Sir Richard Leese, Leader of Manchester, delivered a speech about the need for northern cities like Manchester and Bradford to collaborate to get the investment we all need for the north to succeed. Manchester and Bradford are united in common cause to secure funding for Northern Powerhouse Rail – a new piece of track going from Leeds to Bradford and then onto Manchester. This new line has recently been confirmed in Transport for the North's plans.

Transport

We were pleased to host a visit from Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail, on 7th March. We showed him Bradford City Centre, the opportunities around the Interchange station and how vital Northern Powerhouse Rail is for Bradford and the North. We also took him to Shipley and Saltaire to show him Salts Mill and the beautiful landscapes we all enjoy here along the Airedale line.

Culture

Sir Nick Serota, Chairman of Arts Council England spent the day with us visiting Mind the Gap and Impressions. He also met with established organisations Dance United, Freedom Studios and Theatre in the Mill as well as a number of new Bradford-based artists. We have a good relationship with the Arts Council, having received a 65% uplift in funding for National Portfolio Organisations in our district during the last funding round.

T&A Education Awards

It was a privilege to be at these awards last Thursday evening. I found the stories of the teaching staff and volunteers who work in Bradford District schools truly inspirational. The words of Gill Edge, Headteacher of the Year from Killinghall Primary, typified the commitment of so many of the award winners, "I've worked in teaching 38 years and I've loved every single minute. Bradford children are a credit to us all." We don't pause to celebrate this kind of excellence often enough.

Bradford University Medical School

Government has announced its next round of Medical Schools this morning and Bradford University is not amongst them. We are disappointed in the decision. With a fast growing population, the district will need additional health professionals. I know the University has put a huge amount of work into the bidding process. I'll be seeking to understand what the feedback is and whether there are future opportunities to bid again.

Final Full Council Meeting for Lord Mayor Abid Hussain

I'd like to thank my colleague Cllr Abid Hussain for all the hard work he has put in as Lord Mayor this year. I know he has relished the role. He has done an excellent job and Keighley can be justifiably proud of the contribution he and his Deputy Cllr Doreen Lee have made over the last year. I also thank those Councillors who are stepping down. Labour Group has already said thank you to the three Labour councillors who are stepping down this time but we wish other parties' departing councillors all the very best too. In particular it is the last Full Council meeting today for Cllr Val Slater who has been an outstanding portfolio holder across several different briefs. I'd personally like to thank her for her commitment and hard work.

Resignation of Cllr Simon Cooke

I just wanted to finally pay tribute to the Leader of the Opposition who has announced he is stepping down from leadership after many years of senior service to Bradford District. Inevitably we have not always seen eye to eye on all issues however I do not doubt his passion and conviction in following through on what he believes. These are difficult times to be in local government and I thank him for joining with me on important occasions when it comes to matters which transcend everyday party politics. I wish him well for the future.

QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Councillor Cooke

First can I thank the Leader for the kind words, thank you for that. All I would think is retirement rather than resignation but there we go. On the first item which I think is very concerning to all of us the matter, and it is obviously not just an issue that has occurred in Bradford, but it is an issue which I know is very sensitive in this City, which is this matter of hate letters and in more general terms the targeting of people because of their religion or ethnicity or background or even their adherence to particular political opinions. I hope the Leader would I venture to say that perhaps we have reached the time where us as Councillors perhaps they do not need to have another conversation about how we work together to respond to this kind of hate crime from wherever it comes because it is really not, I was going to say it is really not very pleasant but it really is deeply upsetting to the those who are the targets of it and for those of us looking at something which we sometimes despair of what most of the time is a fantastic country that this kind of thing happens. Can she say what we might be able to do to be able to move forward in terms on the conversations we might have about responding to this.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Thank you Councillor Cooke. Sorry about the headline. My Deputy mentioned that I should perhaps call it something else but we wish you all the best obviously. Yes a really important issue for the district and you will have seen last week of course we are one of the pilot places for cohesion and I am hoping that we can do some really pragmatic and useful things in the city with that. These people who send this kind of stuff. First of all they are not from Bradford if the postmark is to be believed. They really are abhorrent and their views are disgusting and I do not think anybody in this Chamber would disagree with me in saying that these are particularly appalling views. We do not want them in Bradford and they have no place here in a city which is known for its welcoming nature and for its inclusivity. So anything we can do to push the agenda on. I am tired of reports coming in and being done to us so I am quite keen for us to have a conversation in Bradford rather than having other people come in for a few days and telling us what to do and then go away again. So quite happy to continue that conversation with your successor probably but happy to have that dialogue certainly.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

I will say goodbye to you Simon when you have gone. Thank you for your report Leader. Just a question on the Yorkshire Devolution. I am pleased to hear that you are making some progress and I assume that when the deal does eventually emerge it will be voted on by all Elected Members so in the light of that then what process do you have in place or you are currently under development to ensure that all Elected Members in the Chamber, both they know what they are voting for and can honestly say that it is the best deal for Bradford.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Thank you Councillor Sunderland. Yes devolution sometimes goes quickly and then it goes slowly again so you never know what the time line is. However of course any deal will be voted on in this Chamber, it is a decision for all of us. That devolution draft has been sent to all the Combined Authority members and therefore Group Leaders here should have it as well to distribute amongst your Members. If you have not had that let me know. Happy to let you have a look at that. We have had workshops in the last year on the Combined Authority and devolution has been part of that and certainly happy to repeat those with the Combined Authority. I think that will be quite useful because very much the deal that has gone in has been something that has been agreed in other areas. There is no rocket science in it. There is no very different deal in there so the Government should not find any stumbling block with it so the deals that you have seen happening around the country should be able to be applied to us as well. Historically it has been the geography that has been the stumbling block for the Government. Let's see if this time we can get it over the line. Yes happy to have that distributed more widely and

for discussion to continue perhaps in those workshop environments that we have had before.

Councillor Riaz Ahmed

First of all I would like to thank the Leader for her response on the hate mail that was received. In fact I was one of the persons that received the hate mail. First of all I would like to send a message out and the message that I will send out from Bradfordians as well as a Council and as people, ordinary members of public. There were three things designed in this letter in my opinion that was to strike terror, to divide us and then ask for response from the community. There was no response from the community especially what we have to mention and have to agree around this Chamber, the response from the Muslim community was tremendous. They did not take any notice of it. I would like to add as a Council and as Bradfordians, I would like to ask the Leader if we could send out a message and does the Leader not agree with me this hate letter was not only Islamophobic but of terror nature that it deserves because it was sent out to terrorise the community, to divide us and as a Council, as members of this Chamber, we have to send that right message out. Thank you.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

I did not quite get all the question there. Apologies Councillor Riaz. This letter is being treated by the police as a hate crime and has essentially been sent out by terrorists isn't it. I think we would all agree on that. I think anybody who seeks to terrorise is a terrorist in my book and therefore it has to be treated with the utmost seriousness but at the same time we must not respond as you say, we must seek to push those views away. They have no place here and we will not rise to them because we get on here in Bradford. We get on well together and for all our differences and we can have those in this Chamber, for all our differences, we treat each other as human beings, one to one, regardless of our background, regardless of our sexuality, of our race, of our gender, and that is what we should always strive to bring out and remember the positives about Bradford and these people who seek to come here and divide us should be turned away and should be treated with the contempt they deserve and the police have to deal with that matter.