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THE LEADER OF COUNCIL'S REPORT TO THE MEETING OF COUNCIL ON 11 DECEMBER 2018

Yorkshire Devolution – Jake Berry meeting

West Yorkshire Leaders were invited to go and meet with the Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry last week in Westminster. This was a constructive meeting where the Minister listened to our arguments for One Yorkshire Devolution. He was still to meet with North Yorkshire leaders but once that meeting had taken place, the Minister committed to writing to us formally to give the Government's view of the One Yorkshire Devolution Proposal. We look forward to further communications. Only by Government continuing an active dialogue with us can we ever reach the deal we need for the region.

Children's Ofsted

Members will now be aware of the judgement of the Children's Services Ofsted Inspection which found that one of the three measures that Ofsted use, namely the one entitled "The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection", was judged Inadequate. This means that the overall judgement has to be Inadequate. The Council is sorry that services are not of the standard that our most vulnerable children deserve. Robust action plans are being drafted and changes have already been implemented to get on us the path to improvement. We welcome the new Interim Director of Children's Services, Gladys Rhodes White OBE. She and Cllr Farley met with Ofsted yesterday who were checking on our progress. Ofsted have confirmed we are addressing the right issues. The finished plan is due to be submitted for their approval in early February.

LEP Review

The Government has determined that no LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) should have overlapping boundaries with another LEP area. This means that the Leeds City Region current arrangement where some authorities in North Yorkshire are part of the Leeds City Region LEP can no longer continue. As a result, after talks with the North Yorkshire and York Local Enterprise Partnership the two LEPs have decided to come together in a merger. This means we will be part of a bigger economic footprint which should also have more clout with Government. Details of the merger will be worked out over the coming months.

Visit by Sir John Armitt, Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission

On 8th November I welcomed Sir John Armitt to Bradford to discuss with him how important it is for the northern and national economy that the district has the right infrastructure investment. We took Sir John on a tour round the city centre showing him the Interchange and Forster Square stations. We also included discussions around digital and flooding. Infrastructure is not just about transport. Representatives from the other West Yorkshire Local Authorities then joined us for a roundtable discussion in the afternoon.

Meeting with Clive Maxwell, Director General for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail in the Department for Transport

I went last week to London to meet with the above to set out the case for Northern Powerhouse Rail coming to Bradford City Centre. Whilst I was there I also

advocated for our neighbours across West Yorkshire for their transport priorities. The Director General listened with interest but was keen to see the Strategic Outline Business Case from Transport for the North which should be submitted in the New Year.

Meeting with Rishi Sunak, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for Fair Funding Review

In this Chamber we have discussed on a number of occasions that the Fair Funding Review for Local Government is a critical element of Government Policy which could be hugely harmful to Bradford district if it doesn't respect those factors which impact on Bradford's costs. As a result of the council motion I sought and achieved a meeting with the Minister responsible for the review. I spoke to him about Bradford's cost pressures; about our extensive rural areas; as well as the acute disadvantage that some people in Bradford are suffering. I was clear that the district and its young people have huge potential if Government will join with us in investing. The Minister was positive in his feedback and confirmed our belief that the Spending Review next year is the best opportunity for sustainable funding for local government to be provided.

Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement delayed

Due to the Brexit shambles in Government the Local Government Finance Settlement that was due to be released on 6th December 2018, has been delayed. Given that the Brexit debate has been postponed by the Prime Minister we are assuming that the Local Government Finance Bill will now be heard. However at the time of writing no such announcement had yet been made. The Council has nevertheless had to start its consultation on its own budget. This consultation runs until 27th January.

Appointment of Lord Mayor for 2019/20

I am pleased to advise that the Labour Group is nominating Cllr Doreen Lee (Keighley East) to serve as Lord Mayor next year with Cllr Shabir Hussain (Manningham) as Deputy Lord Mayor. They have both served the district well for a number of years as ward councillors and both have previously taken prominent roles within the council. Cllr Lee, as Councillor for Keighley East will be the third consecutive Keighley Councillor to hold the position. I congratulate them both wholeheartedly on their nominations, I'm sure they will have a great year.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

Councillor Pennington

A couple of small items here. The big topics. I know it is our Government but I have to ask this question, have you had any indication from Jake Berry about the time scale of (a) his meeting with the North Yorkshire Leaders and more importantly a response to the devolution issue.

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So he said in a short term so I am hoping for something before Christmas although to be honest with everything happening in Parliament at the moment I suppose I should perhaps have under expectations of that. He was meeting I think the North Yorkshire Leaders by telephone in the end because there is quite a lot of them. Obviously you have got the District Councillors to consider as well so I think that was

a telephone conference call but I am hoping for something back in the next few weeks. I just really welcome the dialogue so we can start having a conversation. He was asking us questions about the deal and the economic geography that we were choosing and also talking about the road map of how we get there. So with some practical conversations there that we can build on I am hoping that just builds to get something in the end. What I also raised was can we have an extension to the growth deal as well and he seemed warm to that. Following that up in writing to see if we can progress that further.

Councillor Pennington

Getting Ministers to focus on Bradford which is where I am coming from. You also had a meeting with Rishi (Sunak) regarding spending reviews. Did you get any response from him or was it again a grey area or is he going to beat the drum for Bradford to get some more investment?

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Of course he is a Yorkshire MP which helps actually. So he was constructive in his listening. He would not commit to anything of course because he cannot do so without going through Parliament. I also pitched to him that we have applied for the business rates pool again this year with Leeds City Region but also North Yorkshire in together and we will find out about that when the local government settlement comes through whether we have been successful in that or not. That will not mean a huge amount but it will mean probably another £1.5 million into the budget which we obviously as you will see from the budget we desperately need. So I am hoping for a positive response from that but we will have to wait and see. It is about making sure that our voice is heard. Obviously the County Council's network I think has been quite successful in talking about the reality, the cost of reality, but I did point out of course that Bradford District is a geography that includes rurality in terms of the rural areas around the district but also those urban areas where we have considerable challenges when it comes to children adult social care as well. He gave us the opportunity to pitch that and left him with comprehensive notes about the figures to back up our arguments and that is not all. We will have to keep going back and keep pitching but it is good to have our voice heard at that level so that when the decision is made hopefully it will be done with our comments ringing in his ears.

Councillor Pennington

Finally Lord Mayor this is one I have to raise. The Ofsted report. Now we have got the Strategic Director who has left. We have got Gladys Rhodes White in as an Interim which we welcome. I think we are in capable hands there but are there likely to be any further recriminations against officers on the next tier down. Just one person going is not going to necessarily solve the problem and also are we going to have any recriminations politically?

Councillor Hinchcliffe

So obviously we all welcome Gladys Rhodes White coming to the Council. She has got a lot of experience in turning services around and we have to work comprehensively with an action plan to get that through. That is not about recriminations, it is about supporting staff to make sure we improve, we provide a quality service to all the children in the district and that has to be our uppermost. We, I feel, in bringing the motion that we have done today, the questions that have been asked of Council are taking full responsibility for making sure that journey does improve and we will continue to challenge and hold officers accountable to make

sure that all the services that vulnerable children receive in the district, is of high quality and something we can be assured of.

Councillor Sunderland

First one really is on following on Children Services and the Ofsted, we need to still keep our eye on the ball of education improvement and we have scrapped the, or appear to have scrapped or cancelled, the Strategic Improvement Board. I just wonder what plans you have to replace it?

Councillor Hinchcliffe

Absolutely right that education remains a top priority. Gladys Rhodes White is here not just for Children Services but for education. Important that those 4,000 children are looked after but obviously there are 140,000 children in the district that are in education system at this present time and they must also make sure that they are well provided for. The Education Improvement Strategy Board is meeting in January and I believe you are on that Councillor Sunderland so it will be great to have you at that meeting to discuss the way forward. Since that has been established what three/four years ago now, I think it is right to consider whether times have moved on and it is time to change the focus of that. We have talked in this Chamber a lot about vulnerable learners before and I think we do need a focus for that work and it could well sit with that body. However that is for discussion in January and I hope you will be part of that discussion.

Councillor Sunderland

Just to agree with you entirely about vulnerable learners but not all children who should be in school are in school and we need to have a real focus on those children that are not there. The second question really is about I am sure you have been watching, like I have been watching with horror, the pantomime that the House of Commons is turning into over Brexit but given that the IMF is now suggesting that a No Deal Brexit could cost the economy somewhere between 5% and 8% of GDP, that would represent a loss of thousands of pounds to families in Bradford. I just wonder what steps we are now starting to take to prepare to support our most vulnerable families if they are going to face the loss of between £2,000 or £3,000 a year?

Councillor Hinchcliffe

There are all sorts really isn't there. Brexit affects everything and you are right it is a complete shambles there at the moment and does not inspire confidence. So we are working essentially with other West Yorkshire local authorities and I believe at the next Combined Authority meeting there is a paper coming on Brexit and all the actions we are taking collaboratively to try and do as much as we can to protect ourselves and protect residents from whatever might come next. There is also a question from one of our group this time about skills. I do believe that regardless of Brexit, education and transport would always be the two things that we should concentrate on from an economics point of view and that is regardless of what happens next so we will continue to do that. There is a lot happening on both those issues as outlined in my report and in the questions and the answer to that Brexit question from our group so we are doing all we can but with uncertainty it is very difficult knowing to predict what happens next. Any business you speak to in the district will say that to you that actually regardless of what result comes out of this, they need some certainty.

Councillor Ellis

Yes Leader, reference to the Infrastructure Commission, quite interested in this and having read the whole 160 odd pages of it. I would just like to be reassured that Bradford will be at the forefront with joined up thinking as far as the relevant people are concerned. We are talking about charging for electric vehicles. Recycling 75% of our plastic packaging is going to be some challenge. Options on road pricing of course is going to be quite controversial and the infrastructure to support housing is going to be extremely important to all of the north anyway but in particular as I say I would like reassurance that Bradford is going to be at the forefront of working with partners to deliver what is to my mind a very excellent report.

Councillor Hinchcliffe

I knew you would find that, I knew you would ask a question on that. I thought you would ask a question about flooding though but you didn't. So absolutely I was really keen to get Sir John Armitt to come to Bradford because I had heard him speak in Manchester at a round table and I thought he needed to spend more time at this side of the Pennines understanding how the dynamics here work as well. It is not just about transport. You are absolutely right, it is about how we get rid of our waste in future, how we create our energy, digital infrastructure and flooding of course, flood alleviation, so all those things are very important. Having his initial visit here was great. We are hoping to continue that relationship and hopefully making an announcement soon for the whole region but in the meantime a really good start to the relationship with Sir John Armitt and hopefully they will see what they learned here and take it forward.

Councillor Cooke

Since nobody else asked about the LEP. I thought I had better ask about the LEP. I have some concerns. I am not entirely convinced by the argument in the statement here because of overlapping because there wasn't any. But that aside what this does is it dilutes Bradford's influence over these organisations by adding in a whole lot more and we may get a better reach, really quite concerned that we will see the focus of attention shift still further away from Bradford. I want Leeds to tell us what she has done and what the Council is doing to make sure that Bradford's voice is still really strong and loud in this process of merger and in any future LEP because the worse thing in the world would be for it basically to end up being Leeds and York LEP and for us to be a bit left behind. So can we get some reassurances on that?

Councillor Hinchcliffe

The overlapping element was not of our making. It is a Government edict has gone out nationally so you cannot have overlapping geographies and that was Harrogate, Selby, Craven etc. They did not like that being in the Leeds City Region LEP. That is why it has come about and the merger was something that now both North Yorkshire and York and Leeds City Region have embraced. I think you are not the only ones to worry about Leeds being a big strong dominant voice in that. I think any local authority in the whole of that new LEP geography would echo that so I think we have a big voice in Bradford. I am Chair of the Combined Authority which counts for a lot and have a leading voice therefore around that local enterprise partnership table and will have a voice going forward in how that is developed when the two LEPs merge. Obviously you can never be complacent. We always have to stand up for Bradford and fight for Bradford's voice to be heard and we will always do that whether it is behind the scenes or in public but that always happens. I can assure you that will always be front of my mind.