

COUNCIL 16 JULY 2019 REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

Devolution Update

The Yorkshire Leaders Board is still very committed to One Yorkshire and whilst this does not yet have the support of Government, their objections to it are less strident than they were.

The meeting with James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Communities (outlined in my last report), was useful in opening up the opportunity to meet with HM Treasury. This resulted in a meeting with Treasury Minister Robert Jenrick at the end of March to discuss the steps towards devolution which was attended by myself, the Leader of Leeds and the Leader of Kirklees councils.

What everyone agrees is that if a One Yorkshire Devolution deal is to succeed, it cannot be realised until 2022 when the South Yorkshire current Mayoral term comes to an end. I have therefore made the case repeatedly that there have to be some interim arrangements in place for the Leeds City Region to continue operating. There needs to be a bridge between the Leeds City Region Growth Deal finishing and the One Yorkshire Devolution deal starting.

At the meeting with Robert Jenrick he gave permission for his civil servants to start talks with Leeds City Region staff towards finding a way forward for an interim deal. These conversations are on-going and tomorrow I am going down to London with the Leader of Wakefield for another meeting with Robert Jenrick to acknowledge progress made and see how we can further develop the detail of what an interim deal might look like.

There is still a way to go both in securing an interim deal and also in securing One Yorkshire devolution. However the fact that our respective officers are in dialogue is heartening. Obviously with a new Prime Minister imminent, none of us can rule out a change of direction.

The work of the Yorkshire Leaders Board continues and a meeting was held last week which covered Northern Powerhouse work as well as devolution. This cross party/cross region working is fostering good collaborative relationships which can only hold us in good stead in the long run. These relationships continue regardless of changes in Leader with Scarborough, Ryedale, York and Richmond all having changed party leadership in the local elections this year.

Children's Services Ofsted Monitoring Report

Clearly the recent Monitoring Report we have received from Ofsted is not good enough. The pace of change needs to be accelerated and new working practices, just introduced, need to be more deeply embedded. We are fully sighted on the challenges the service is facing. For example, Recruitment remains a significant issue. We are pleased that our frontline staff are committed to improving the service and motivated to be part of a new improved service. We thank them for their commitment and loyalty during challenging times.

We are grateful to Gladys Rhodes White for having stepped in as Interim Director to take us through the first stage of change whilst we recruited a permanent Children's Services Director. Ofsted praised her contribution. Mark Douglas, who has led improvements at Doncaster Children's Services, joined us as the permanent DCS at the beginning of this month. We welcome Mark and offer him our full support and cooperation in implementing the change we all want to see.

Climate Emergency

Last week as Chair of West Yorkshire Combined Authority I led an event with Roger Marsh, the Chair of the LEP on the Leeds City Region Climate Coalition. Here we commended the actions of individual constituent authorities in the city region for passing motions on Climate Emergency and also pledged that we would collectively be net zero carbon by 2038 at the latest, having made significant progress by 2030.

We should be under no illusion that to achieve this target significant investment is going to have to be made in transport and energy. We have an opportunity to attract some of this funding through the work on Air Quality we are currently undertaking for Government, the outcome of which we will not know until we submit the outline business case in October followed by the full business case after consultation.

However there are also opportunities to be had. It is estimated that investment in clean growth is worth £11 billion to UK economy and will create 100,000 extra skilled jobs. We want to be sure to have a share of that opportunity.

Meeting with Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England

I went to London a couple of weeks ago to meet with Darren Henley, Chief Executive of the Arts Council. Darren knows Bradford well having visited several times already. Bradford currently has a bid in to the Arts Council for Creative People and Places Funding. This is a competition with other UK cities and towns and therefore the competition is fierce. We will find out whether we have achieved this later this summer. It would mean significant funding for culture from the Arts Council over the next three years. I truly believe that cultural investment in all our communities builds our confidence as a place and makes people from outside Bradford district take a fresh look at what we have to offer. I wish the bidding team which includes arts organisations from all over the district the very best of luck with the bid.

Williams Rail Review event in Bradford

This morning, in this Chamber, the Northern Powerhouse Partnership held an event with Keith Williams, the eponymous author of the Government sponsored Rail Review. The Williams Rail Review has been tasked by Government with setting out proposals for the future of our railways. In Bradford this morning he gave an insight into the findings of his report which will be published later this year. I welcome his commitment to putting passengers first after the disaster of the timetable changes in May last year. The ensuing disruption to travel cost our region dearly. He acknowledged this and advocated less central control from civil servants in Westminster in future arrangements. As an advocate of devolution I obviously welcomed this approach. I have committed to meeting with him again before the report is published in order to have our input into the action plan which should come out of the report. It was good to welcome him to Bradford.

Cricket World Cup Success

Finally I would like to add my congratulations to Adil Rashid and Jonny Bairstow, both from Bradford, on their magnificent contribution to England's World Cup success. This is truly wonderful news and Bradford is very proud. I have already spoken to the Leader of the Opposition and we are agreed that we would like to organise some kind of celebration for them on their return. This is being organised in conjunction with their families and we hope to have more news soon.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

Councillor John Pennington

We have got Mark Douglas here today and I hope the Leader will make sure that he is getting all the support that he wants and also from our Chief Executive because he needs some support right from the very top so that needs making sure. You also mention the Arts Council England and we will shortly have a new Director of the Science Museum in Bradford here who has got great ideas for the museum and I wonder if you would consider at some stage closing the lower part of Little Horton Lane so that it will join up quite nicely, not only with the new church that the Reverend Toby (Howarth, Bishop of Bradford) is going to create, but it will then join up with the Alhambra and the Odeon and we could then have a real crescent of entertainment for the public to visit Bradford.

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So first of all on Mark Douglas. Yes very much welcome him arriving in the Authority. He can speak to our Group on Monday night. I am sure he will be happy to speak to the other groups in the Chamber. He has obviously led improvement process elsewhere successfully and therefore we are very pleased to have him here and we obviously will be providing him with our full support to get the improvement journey speeded up and I am sure we are going to debate that further in this Chamber today. I will not go into (Councillor) Adrian Farley's speech. Regarding culture I do believe that culture is really important for the district and that is why I maintain a positive relationship with the Arts Council because they have been a major funder of ours in the past and presently and hopefully in the future. Regarding regeneration opportunity I think the NEC going to the Odeon opens up a whole load of regeneration opportunities. I think we will see it being a real game changer in that part of the city. Great that the church are investing as well in that building, quite a significant amount of money I understand, and again that is going to further re-regenerate that area. A city is always changing. As towns are always changing. It never stops and therefore like our lives which continue cities continue as well, whether we are there or not. So there will be more changes to come in the future. I am sure we will all try and make sure in this Chamber that they are as positive as possible for the people of this district.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

About Devolution really the first one. Does it actually feel like pushing water up hill without a bucket? When do you think there will actually be any progress made?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So it has been a very long time. I spend a lot of my time talking about Devolution and trying to make it happen but of course given the national environment at the moment as well it is quite tricky because there have been quite a few changes in terms of key people to speak to as well and decision makers in the House of Commons. It is very difficult to achieve. I do feel we have made progress. I do not like to speak too soon to be quite honest because obviously we are going to have a new Prime Minister in next week and it could all change again. The conversations we have been having so far about an interim deal have been constructive and I am hoping we will make further progress with that once I have had the conversation with Robert Jenrick tomorrow and then obviously we are all together as one Yorkshire and we are still pushing that agenda and there is an opportunity for a new Prime Minister to come and say you know what let's make a big statement about the North of England, let's give Yorkshire devolution as it has been asking for but let's watch this space but yes I think we are making progress. You have got to be patient and persistent.

Councillor Kevin Warnes

Does the Leader of the Council agree with me in relation to the climate emergency that you are in a position of unique leadership as Chair of WYCA and with that in mind why are you not pressing for a zero carbon deadline of 2030 at the latest rather than 2038 which by then will be too late?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So what we have said is that we are going to accelerate as quickly as possible to make as much progress as possible by 2030 but I am also being honest with the electorate Councillor Warnes because actually without significant Government funding for some of the things we want to do we will not be able to make significant progress. At this moment when we do not know how much investment we are going to get from Central Government I am being very honest with people of Bradford District and West Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2038 obviously is exactly the same as Manchester are aiming at. It is also twelve years before the national Government is aiming at so it is still very stretching and ambitious and I think we need to be really pragmatic about making sure we get the money available to make the changes we all want to see. That is what I am focusing on at the moment.