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Report of the Leader of Council 15 October 2019

Devolution

The Prime Minister announced in his speech at the Convention of the North a few weeks ago that Government were willing to start active negotiations on devolution for the Leeds City Region. Bradford has been pushing for years to achieve more power and devolution to the region so are pleased to be invited to be in constructive negotiations with Government.

The ambition for most Yorkshire councils is still to achieve a One Yorkshire devolution deal, however we accept that Government are not yet minded to accept Yorkshire as a devolution geography but are willing to talk about devolving to a city region geography. Leeds City Region is for us a stepping stone to get to the wider Yorkshire geography and we should welcome the opportunity. Other regions with devolution are first in the queue when it comes to handing out funding pots and without devolution our region risks falling behind with investment.

In recent weeks I and my fellow LCR leaders have had talks with Ministers about how the LCR stepping stone deal might work. These have so far been helpful and positive. Civil servants are now working intensively with our Combined Authority officers to progress negotiations between meetings. Last Friday I met with the other One Yorkshire leaders to discuss how other parts of Yorkshire are moving forward with their respective stepping stone deals, the longer term ambition for One Yorkshire however remains strong. The Prime Minister again acknowledged the significance of Yorkshire by acknowledging that a Yorkshire Committee might be formed.

Bradford Bulls

It is a deep sadness for the district that Bradford Bulls has moved to Dewsbury for the next season. The Odsal site has a long and proud history and is significant for the people of Bradford. We'd like to see it continue to make history here. The site is leased by the Bulls from the Rugby Football league and the responsibility for the site lies with the Rugby Football League. Several people have had good ideas about the site but none has offered investment.

The Council has talked to Park Avenue so that jointly we are able to make it possible for the Bulls to return to Bradford whilst a longer term solution is found. However we understand that even with additional stand facilities this site would be too small for their needs.

We will continue to work with the RFL and the Club and Judith Cummins, the Bradford South MP, with the ambition to bring the Bulls back to Bradford.

Update from West Yorkshire Combined Authority

First Bus

On 29 May First Group PLC made an announcement to shareholders that it intends to sell First Bus as part of a process of re-structuring the company. Protecting, developing and improving the bus network for West Yorkshire residents is an overriding key objective of the Combined Authority and a reliable, affordable bus network is essential to enable people to access education and employment opportunities. It is central to our key objectives of driving inclusive growth and tackling the climate emergency. On 11 October Combined Authority meeting it was approved to explore options to actively respond to the sale of First Bus and considers options available. In order to develop these options and to identify if and how the Combined Authority might engage in the sale process; technical and legal support is required. The Combined Authority is currently at the necessary due diligence stage and are not committed to anything until we have a better understanding of these options.

Transforming Cities Fund

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has submitted an ambitious bid to the Government's Transforming Cities Fund. The bid is focused on funding better transforming transport connections for those communities most in need of access to jobs, services and education. Priorities set out in the submission including creating healthy streets, supporting cycling and walking as well as exploring the opportunities offered by new technology. Leeds City Region are included in the 12 shortlisted non-mayoral regions involved in a competitive bidding process for an allocation of £1.28bn. The Combined Authority submitted a draft SOBC in June and the feedback received from the DfT for this initial submission has been positive, with clarifications. The next stage of the bid is to submit an updated version of the bid by the end of November.

Brexit

The Executive considered a paper on Brexit earlier this month. This covered information about residents who are working towards settled status; data on how certain sectors may be impacted by events; and how businesses can find support through this time. Obviously the situation is still fluid. I would encourage everyone to read the Executive paper and will circulate it accordingly. Businesses should also inform themselves by starting with the Get Ready for Brexit web site.

Kashmir

Given that the district has many residents who have links to Kashmir, we have seen events and demonstrations in recent weeks about this issue. I have long made clear my support for the people of Kashmir. I condemn the actions of the Indian Government to revoke article 370 and article 35A of the Indian Constitution, thereby ending the special status of Kashmir. The Kashmiri people should have the right to self-determination that they were promised. I commend people in the district for protesting peacefully and with sincerity whilst valuing the good relationships we all hold with the Indian people and people of Indian origin living and working in Bradford.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

Councillor John Pennington

Leader, Leeds City Region, the name is going to be used as a stepping stone to a wider Yorkshire region. The first question is as Chair of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority could you not have inserted the word "Bradford" anywhere in the name. Perhaps that will come later. The transforming city's fund encompasses as you state here cycling routes. Can you please ensure that such routes are used for cycling and not as is the case in many areas used for parking of cars. Finally on Brexit we know all about the preparations here and I am repeatedly informed that we are working with the Fire and we are working with the Police, could I please ask the Leader to ensure that more emphasis is being given to businesses who are many of them sadly in need of some advice. Lastly a comment on Kashmir where it is quoted here people should have the right of self-determination. I need at this stage to point out that there are many other similar situations around the world which should not be forgotten. Thank you.

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

Thank you Councillor Pennington for those questions. First of all on devolution and the position of Bradford within that. Bradford is central to everything and it is certainly centre of my world and probably yours but I think we have to start seeing ourselves as a big city in the north of England on a par with other major cities in the UK and not always be defined by just Leeds. So I frequently say that Bradford is bigger than Bristol, Newcastle, Liverpool, actually about the similar size to Manchester as a city council and a lot of people are surprised when I say that. So it is a matter of making sure we define ourselves as one city in the north of England which is on a par with others and is taking our rightful place in the world and needs the investment to make sure we fly as a younger city as well which has already been included here. It is Leeds City Region because it will also include York as a non-constituent member at least and there are other non-constituent authorities think about which we have like Harrogate, Craven, Selby, so that is still a work in progress and therefore that is why the name comes about but I can assure you that Bradford is always central to everything that goes on in this region and shall be for ever I remain Leader. Cycling – The cycling connect programme is a lot about segregated cycle networks and obviously we have our own now which goes through my ward to the city centre which increasingly people are using. It is that kind of segregated network which encourages people to use cycles more because we all hear the horror stories of people being on a cycleway, on a bicycle and getting knocked off by a lorry and having serious injuries so the thing is we need to make sure people are safe if we want people to get out of their car and onto their bike. Segregated cycleways are the way to go. We have had debates in the Chamber before about people parking in cycleways. It is a matter of highway law that they are allowed to do so and therefore they are an imperfect solution to something that we all want to see more of. Finally on businesses yes at the economic partnership recently obviously we saw a presentation from the Chamber about what kind of confidence levels there were from business about the future and it transpired looking at the figures that the less prepared they were the more confident businesses were about the future of Brexit and I do think we have all got a job to do making that sure any businesses in our wards are aware that there is a lot of information. The Government website which is called Get Ready Brexit and they just need to look at that website and make sure

they have read and thought through all the ramifications of what might happen next. In the Combined Authority we are putting aside measures to make sure that the businesses that we deal with that receive grants and support from us are supported through whatever comes next but I have to say that this uncertainty is really bad for our country and bad for our economy. We do not know what is going to happen beyond the end of October and that is terrible damaging for our economy. We as local Councillors and as Combined Authority deal as much as we can with that but that uncertainty makes planning for any business absolutely impossible. So if you are in a business now, you do not have all the details and all the information you need for the future and that is down to the Government and what is going on at the moment and I have to say I am afraid that is where it needs to be put right. Thank you.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

I have got two questions and I will ask them separately. I will not give you a list. First of all a question about devolution and is it the Leeds City Region. Does she agree with me that perhaps the best place for Councillor Pennington to ask his question would be the Conservative Government Minister that is holding our region up and perhaps whilst he is doing that he maybe could ask for the Leeds City Region to be renamed the "Greater Bradford City Region" of which I would support.

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

It is indeed disappointing that the Government are not keen on Yorkshire Devolution and I have made that quite clear. We have 18 authorities that are working together towards achieving that. We still have an ambition to do that. The Government are starting to understand that Yorkshire is something that people care about. We keep saying to them Yorkshire actually in Yorkshire is immensely popular. People like it, people really feel an affinity to it. That is our identity as Yorkshire people so it is disappointing that they are not willing to go down that route just yet but we are still holding out hope that we will get there and that this interim deal will be a stepping stone solution to that. I would like to put Bradford at the heart of everything and make sure that Bradford goes over everything that we can. Obviously we need to be mindful of all the different authorities in the region and all different cities and everything needs to move at the same time at the same pace. We will leave it at that.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

A question about the bus services. The First bus is not the only bus provider or provider of bus services in Bradford and the people of Bradford South are clearly very dependent on Arriva who are similarly talking about pulling out of providing bus services so your report only talks about First bus. Can I ask the question what options are being explored around the services currently provided by Arriva?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So First buses are the one for sale and that is why we have got the paper to look at the Combined Authority and that is why I am outlining it here today. We have talked of course a lot about franchising bus services as well and franchising is something that Manchester are looking at and spending about £20 million so far on looking at franchising without doing it yet. But we would be wanting to do something like that through devolution for example but that is still to be negotiated and as I outlined

about the Manchester situation we do need a significant amount of money to be able to do that kind of work. I think what we also have to remember that we can talk about processes and franchising and who owns what but at the end of the day I still believe that whatever the processes, more money, more investment needs to go into everyday bus services. We all spend quite a lot already through Council tax on bus services in the Bradford District, about £4½ million a year I think it goes into bus services. With shrinking Council budgets we do not have the capacity to grow that. There are no easy ways round it. If you want a bus service that goes to more communities you need to pay for it and transport particularly bus services should be a public good that we fund and that the state funds to enable the economy to grow and actually everybody to feel a part of that growth. Whilst we talk a lot about whether we own it, franchising etc, let's also remember the end user and make sure they get the best deal possible from well-funded public services.

Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

Final question. Around the Bradford Bulls I am interested in whether or not the impact of the move to Dewsbury has any financial impact on the Council. For example the payment of the business rates. Are they still being paid by the Rugby Football League?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

The RFL obviously are leaseholders of the site and are liable for business rates at that site are continuing regardless of whether the Bulls are there or not.

Councillor Mike Ellis

Could you just expand on in the devolution where you mention the formation of a Yorkshire Committee?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

So this is what the Prime Minister mentioned as a Yorkshire Committee. All Leaders across Yorkshire are keen to see the Yorkshire Committee not being a separate new body but actually being the Yorkshire Leaders Board strengthened and resourced. So the Yorkshire Leaders Board that meets informally at the moment, we would like to see that as being what the Government terms a Yorkshire Committee but we will not have a separate thing. Let's just carry on and strengthen what we have got already.

Councillor Robert Hargreaves

Transforming Cities Fund - I see the Department for Transport are running that now. You talk about cycling, you talked about cycling a lot a minute ago and walking mentioned in here. We have got Queensbury Tunnel. The Council has done an advocacy document which is nice but it is not taking action to really do something there. It is saying we support other people to do things there if you can pay for it. Can we look at this fund knowing that the Department for Transport do not want the tunnel. They have got money to get rid of the tunnel. They want to give you the tunnel. There are two authorities within West Yorkshire Combined Authority that will benefit from it so can we put that fund towards that. Can we look at that for Queensbury Tunnel and take some action?

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

Transforming Cities Fund essentially has got to be spent by 2022. That is one of the routes we looked at and everything has to comply with what the Government wants. If we had devolution we would get the money straight away and we could spend it on what we thought were the right priorities. As it is at the moment we have to negotiate with the Government. So absolutely it is a priority for us and we are looking at how we can get that funded by any means possible. I have also spoken to the Government about it and to the Secretary of State directly as well. Rest assured it is a priority for us. If we can get it funded we will.

Councillor Abid Hussain

I would like to ask the Leader if she could urge our Prime Minister to the atrocity taking place in Kashmir. I do understand the motions and the agenda but I do know it is an international issue but there are 125,000 people who live in our district belong to the Kashmiri people. They have a great link with Kashmiri people in Kashmir and the atrocity taking place for 73 days. It has been locked down, the biggest prison ever created in the world. I would urge the Leader to write to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom because this issue has been since 1947 when Lord Ratcliffe had drawn the line and since has always been taking place killing and there are 15,000 young men have been taken prisoners since 5 August and the number of women have been raped and I have just heard the news and now what the Indian Government is trying to do is taking prisoners of 12 year old children and so many people have been killed. I would like to urge the Leader to write to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. We want to resolve this issue and the British Government have to play a major role and make sure everything will come in order because we do not have any communication from 73 days, all the Bradford people living in Kashmir, 25,000 people, there was great concern.

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe

Can I just say thank you Councillor Hussain for the question. I know you did a lot in your year as Lord Mayor as well for this cause. Absolutely happy to write a letter to the Prime Minister. I know the strength of feeling. We hear it in the gallery above us. We do condemn what is happening in Kashmir at the moment by the Indian Government. It is absolutely appalling and I am sure we will hear more about that today in the debate that follows. I am happy to write the letter to the Prime Minister. I do believe it is really indicative of the fact that it is a very weak Government that we have got at the moment otherwise they would be taking more action on this issue but because they are so consumed by Brexit they can do nothing else and our standing in the world has been diminished by that. So absolutely we should be doing more on that and with a stronger Government we would be.