

Item 9 – Report by the Leader of the Council

New Chief Executive

We will be agreeing the appointment of a new Chief Executive today, Lorraine O'Donnell. Lorraine is currently the Chief Executive at Cheshire East Council and comes with a wealth of experience of working in large and complex council areas. My thanks to Councillor Imran Khan, Councillor Shakeela Lal, Councillor Rebecca Poulson and Councillor Matt Edwards for serving on the recruitment panel and for their conscientious approach to this most important task. Should Lorraine be appointed today I know we will all welcome her to the district and support her to succeed in our ambitions for our place. My grateful thanks to Kersten England for agreeing to stay on until the new Chief Executive starts to ensure a smooth transition.

Morrisons

We were all very concerned to hear of nearly 500 people facing the prospect of being made redundant at Morrisons. That is a high number in any business but for Morrisons, a proud firm founded in Bradford, it is particularly concerning. I have asked to meet with management to understand how they are supporting their staff through this period and also what their wider plans are for the business on this site given this decision.

City of Culture funding

It was great to finally be able to confirm funding from Arts Council England of £5 million alongside £5 million from National Heritage Lottery Fund and £10 million from Government. We all know how important it is for Bradford district to put on a great welcome during our City of Culture year so this investment is very welcome. We will be continuing our conversations with Government to draw down further funding commensurate with the status of a national celebration where Bradford will be the focus for our country during that year. This week we are going down to London to do an event in front of national partners about our progress on City of Culture, showcasing the district and what a great place of opportunity we are.

Rail station ticket office closures

Just in the last week there has been an announcement by Rail Operators that they are intending to close 85% of the ticket offices in West Yorkshire with only three out of the 69 stations across West Yorkshire retaining a service. Bradford Interchange, Leeds and Huddersfield would be those retaining a staffed ticket office, but even these would be on reduced hours. The background to these closures is that Government have told the Rail Operators that they need to cut £2 billion from their operating costs. There are a number of key concerns about this announcement, not least of which:

- Ticket machines do not sell all ticket types, and many are card only.
- Staff also open/close waiting rooms, toilets etc. How will reduced staffing hours impact these facilities?
- Boarded up ticket offices make stations feel less secure.
- Have Equality Impact Assessments been undertaken? – Disproportionate impacts for users with mobility problems, learning difficulties and visual impairments, also those without bank accounts, internet access.
- In some ticket offices historically staff monitored CCTV, who would monitor these if these offices close?
- While there are currently guards on trains, any change to this by Government would lead to serious accessibility issues in some locations.
- The West Yorkshire Mayor and myself as West Yorkshire Transport Committee Chair have written to the Secretary of State expressing our concern about this proposal. We will also be sending in a submission to the consultation which closes on 26th July. I have asked WYCA to contact all user groups to let them know about the consultation and I would encourage all councillors to make their own submission by the deadline. To be clear in our district this decision means a closure of offices at: Keighley, Bingley, Menston, Ilkley, Shipley and Bradford Forster Square, and reduced hours at Bradford Interchange.

Rail Connectivity for Bradford

Huw Merriman, the Rail Minister, appeared in front of the Transport Select committee on 21st June and said that the Government will respond to the Select Committee recommendations on the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) by the end of the month.

He noted that the committee would be pleased that Government will do more where the committee made recommendations. Huw Merriman said they remain committed to the core IRP but it will include getting better options assessed for Bradford and enabling Bradford to put forward options for a new station to support regeneration, which they are keen to do, and will require changes to the IRP. This is a result of positive discussions with HMT and the Department for Levelling Up.

This is all very promising but the end of June has come and gone and the parliamentary recess is on the horizon. We will continue to press for a decision from Government in July so that key improvements to our rail connectivity can happen in time for Bradford to be UK City of Culture in 2025. Otherwise Government will miss the boat.

Shaun Davies, Leader of Telford, elected as new Chair of the Local Government Association

The results of the local elections mean that Labour now take over the Chair of the Local Government Association which has been led by the Conservatives for many years, and most recently by James Jamieson, a Conservative Councillor in Bedfordshire. Shaun Davies, Labour Leader of Telford, was elected last week as the new Chair of the LGA. We thank James Jamieson for his work on behalf of councillors across the country, and look forward to working with Shaun Davies.

Whilst the role has to embrace views from all political parties, it is important that the Chair of the LGA speaks strongly for our sector. We are too often overlooked by Government for funding and this has to change if the country is to survive and prosper.