

Leader's Report 12th March 2024

Exceptional Financial Support Secured for the Council

It's been widely reported that we have secured Exceptional Financial Support from Government for the amount that we requested. As debated at the Full Council budget meeting last week this is not a grant but something akin to a loan facility which will have to be paid back over a long period of time. The Chief Executive is working with the Section 151 officer to lead the senior officer team in further developing the Emergency Financial Plan. This will result in a much smaller council at the end of the five years of the plan's duration. Work has already started preparing for next year's budget. The whole organisation is focussed on this budget process and I have set it as the top priority for the Chief Executive.

Devo 4 letter from Michael Gove

The West Yorkshire Mayor and the Combined Authority are pleased to have received a letter from Secretary of State for DLUHC Michael Gove to start negotiations for Devolution Level 4. This will not include additional money but it will lead to less strings with existing funding and powers from Government.

Second anniversary of invasion of Ukraine

We commemorated the second anniversary of Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February. There were two services of remembrance, one in Bradford which I attended, as well as one in Keighley. This followed on from an event earlier in the month to thank those hosts from the district who continue to support our Ukrainian guests. The presentations were very moving and highlighted what a life changing experience it has been for hosts and guests alike. Our long-standing Ukrainian community in Bradford has provided incredible support and social infrastructure for those fleeing the war and by doing so command great respect and deserve our thanks for all they have done and continue to do.

Ilkley line train services/Baildon landslip

I am incredibly frustrated at the closure of the rail line through Baildon. Notwithstanding the obvious distress it continues to be for the local residents whose properties are directly affected, it's also inconveniencing thousands of local residents. I immediately asked for a meeting with Jake Kelly, Network Rail Managing Director of the Eastern Region to ask for an explanation and a plan for how the problem will be resolved. Whilst initial reports were that the line would be open again by the middle of March, I have now been advised that the line will now be shut longer than anticipated. I think it's so vital for the district's economy to get this line open as soon as possible so have made clear that I want to see swift progress towards a resolution.

Network Rail have put in place a number of temporary bus services in place to support passengers. We need to feedback to them how these are being received and used.

It's worth noting that it's climate change that has caused this issue. There has been so much rain that Network Rail are reporting an increasing number of landslips onto lines. There have been 10 of these alone in the last 12 months. It just shows how important it is to tackle the climate emergency, it's already affecting our day to day lives.

Interchange bus station

Councillors are now getting regular updates about the Interchange from West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Structural surveys of the Interchange building are continuing to be carried out by WYCA appointed consultants. We understand WYCA are carrying out the surveys in two parts. The first of these, which has been completed, is to recommend a programme of further structural test surveys over the structure and any specialist surveys which will be required. The second phase of testing will comprise the more detailed assessment.

There will be a further updates from WYCA as the survey work progresses.

Measles

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has declared a national incident following measles outbreaks in London and West Midlands. We have also seen clusters of cases across West Yorkshire with 16 cases in Bradford during January and February alone, compared to 7 cases across the whole of last year. Fortunately, there are positive signs that the Bradford outbreak is slowing with the last cases in early February, however there is no room for complacency and Bradford continues to take actions to increase the vaccination rates and ensure community awareness of symptoms. All but one case in Bradford was in unvaccinated individuals. The current situation is directly linked to the low levels of MMR vaccination.

Measles is one of the most contagious transmissible diseases known. It can be severe or fatal in small children and people with health conditions.

Key actions for Bradford are to increase vaccination through schools, recall unvaccinated individuals for vaccination (all ages), and raise awareness about signs and symptoms among the public.

- Measles is a highly contagious and severe disease that is preventable through MMR vaccine
- Cases have been higher in Bradford because of low levels of MMR vaccination
- MMR vaccines are available for free in the NHS to any individual regardless of age or immigration status
- There are two types of MMR vaccine – MMR VaxPro and Priorix. Priorix does not contain pork gelatine and can be requested from your GP practice.

Ministerial Visit to Farcliffe Family Hub

Dame Andrea Leadsom, MP and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, said Bradford District's Family Hubs and Start for Life programme has made 'heartening' progress, at her visit to Farcliffe Family Hub, Bradford, on 2 February.

The visit was arranged as an opportunity for Dame Leadsom, who oversees public health, Start for Life and primary care nationally, to speak with the Family Hubs and Start for Life workforce, and hear from families about their experiences of the facilities and services available.

Bradford District's Family Hubs provide free support, advice, and services for families with children up to age 19 (25 with SEND) and at every stage of family life.

£24 million boost to deliver extra rail services in Bradford

We were pleased to welcome Rail Minister Huw Merriman to Bradford to announce with us that passengers in Bradford are set to benefit from extra train services and improved connectivity thanks to £24 million investment in an additional Platform Zero at Forster Square station.

This will significantly increase services, particularly to London, reduce delays and futureproof the station for generations to come. As the Bradford District prepares to become the UK's City of Culture in 2025, the new platform will be delivered by May 2025. It will ease congestion and improve access into the city for millions of passengers, commuters and tourists.