

LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL DECEMBER 2015

This is the first ever Leader's report to Council and I would appreciate feedback on the format and content to ensure that it delivers the information that Councillors want in a way that is useful.

HMRC

Members will be aware that the HMRC have announced plans to create a regional centre in Leeds, closing their other offices including three in the District. We have been working with our MPs and partners in the region to get this decision reviewed.

I met with the Chief Executive of HMRC to discuss their decision and it appears to me, from the comments made in the announcement and in the absence of a published business case or any detailed information, that the decision has been based largely on outdated perceptions and sketchy information. I hope that the HMRC will accede to the request of both the Council and the District's MPs to provide the justification for the decision so that we can identify the reasons why it was made and test their analysis.

As well as continuing to fight for the existing jobs in Bradford we are also making progress with the Public Sector Hub planned for the Jacob's Well site which will bring more civil service jobs to the district. We have explained the plans for the site to HMRC and the benefits that it would bring them and how this enhances the Bradford offer.

EDUCATION

I was extremely concerned to read the ill considered and outdated comments made by the Chief Inspector of Schools in relation to Bradford. I have never denied that the education system in Bradford has been well below the standard we expect, in fact I have stated it clearly in various public forums.

In the last two years we have put in place processes and plans to improve attainment, support recruitment, retention and leadership in schools and supported national and local initiatives aimed at improving standards. The latest Ofsted report from June talked about a "step change" in Bradford with a "real cause for optimism" recognised in the report. The Chief Inspector is either careless or has taken a deliberate and considered decision to make these comments. I am very disappointed for our schools and teachers that the speech failed to mention Ofsted's own positive findings about their work.

Sir Michael Wilshaw's speech drew comparisons with areas with similar populations profiles, notably East London, but ignored the substantial additional financial input there has been in areas of London to raise standards and the length of time the London Challenge took to achieve those results. Neither did the speech refer to the fact that Bradford took the initiative to bring in Prof David Woods, who was part of the London Challenge, to advise on our plans and that we have adopted all his recommendations.

By ignoring the actions that are in place, supported and recognised by his own organisation, Sir Michael Wilshaw's words can only have a de-motivating effect on teachers and officers who are working so hard in Bradford to bring about positive change.

There is no one in this room, or this district, who does not accept that education in this district has not been good enough over decades. However the children of Bradford expect

and deserve positive suggestions and practical offers of support from partners such as Ofsted. From a local authority perspective we have been proactive at asking for such support where the need has been identified and to this end hosted a meeting of the Education Improvement Strategy Board last week which included Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner who both offered positive support and encouragement.

DEVOLUTION

Negotiations with the Government are still ongoing and progress is being made, albeit slowly. We understand that there may be some amendments to the Bill that is going through Parliament at the moment and may provide greater flexibility in the arrangements, particularly regarding geographical arrangements, which may help with the regional debate.

We are not expecting to be in a position to have any sort of deal to consider until the New Year but, as promised, I will try and keep Members and the wider community updated as things develop.

EAST PARADE KEIGHLEY

I am sure that like me Members were disappointed to hear that the developers of the proposed new shopping centre at East Parade have gone into administration. The Council is working closely with interested parties to try and ensure that there is no delay in bringing forward alternative plans and getting a development off the ground as soon as possible. Currently these conversations are commercially confidential but as soon as we are able to release information we will.

THE ODEON

The proposed Odeon development has successfully got through the first stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund process and will be considered at a national level in the New Year.

SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

At the last Executive we approved a new scheme for business rate relief to help new and expanding businesses and bring empty units back into use. The scheme is based on our experience of the success of the City Centre Growth Zone and seeks to support businesses in our major district centres and create employment and training opportunities for unemployed people.

In the City Centre the Broadway opening has not only increased footfall throughout the City but it has also significantly raised investor interest. We are seeing new development starting and a number of schemes are in the pipeline and we hope that these will soon be on site in the months to come.

We have launched a new Priority Streets scheme to support key areas of the city centre that are potentially affected by the movement of retailers into Broadway. The scheme offers a package of assistance to pay for property improvements and equipment along with business rate rebates, both subject to job creation. It is available to property owners or tenants who want to bring vacant ground floor premises back into commercial use in Darley Street, Kirkgate, Ivegate, Rawson Square and Rawson Place.

DRAFT BUDGET

The draft budget is out for public consultation, I appreciate that there will be different views on the proposals but I would ask that all of us encourage people to take part in the consultation to ensure that we can consider their views and ideas.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER ON THE REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

Councillor Cooke

Can I start by thanking the Leader for coming up with the bright idea of having this report and hopefully it will run more smoothly at the next Council meeting. Can I ask cheekily a couple of questions as it gets them all out of the way and I do not have to do it twice. Firstly I note the reference to the situation regards to HMRC and I appreciate all the effort has been done by many and varied in terms of trying to address this issue. In the eventuality - hopefully it does not arise but let's speculate that it will - that HMRC do go to another city, which name we are not going to mention, what work is being done to try and fill the gaps so to speak in terms of looking at other possible organisations, public or private, and to a certain extent links to that and, I appreciate that we were not entirely masters of the process in this, what work has been done across West Yorkshire through the City Region or through the Combined Authority to try and ensure that future situations like this, we do not have to knit a collected response, we have already got one there in terms of how we respond to these kind of things and that hopefully that response isn't everything goes to Leeds?

Leader – Councillor Green

First can I say that if we had access to the HMRC business plan it would help us to be able to put together a cogent argument as yet, although we have asked for it, we have not seen it and my understanding is neither have any of the district's MPs. One can draw whatever conclusion one likes from that. The other thing I think is the way that the announcement was made in that it was made in a public domain before there was any real discussions not just with Bradford but with Calderdale, Leeds or any other local authority. However we are continuing to work cross party and cross public and private sector to try and get HMRC to review their decision and we are going to continue to do that and I would like to thank everybody who has been involved in that campaign. As regards to filling the gap we are continuing to push ahead with the public sector hub proposals and we have already had a significant interest and more than interest from several public sector organisations looking to relocate. We are hopeful that we will be able to develop that hub and as soon as legal documents etc have been signed public announcements will be made. One of the problems about trying to do something like this is that whilst there is a lot going on behind the scenes we are not in a position where we have got things signed, and we know the problems of announcing things before they have signed in this City, so what I can assure you is that that work is going ahead about relocation of other public bodies into Bradford.

Councillor Warburton

My question is about the education and the comments made by Sir Michael Wilshaw and I have requested that the Leader writes to Sir Michael Wilshaw asking for a full apology for his negative politically motivated comments with regard to the work being done in Bradford to improve standards in education especially after the strong support and optimism from Ofsted over the recent months.

Leader – Councillor Green

We will be debating in more detail with the Motion and I hope that Councillor Hinchcliffe will be able to give some more information from a meeting she has had today with Ministers. Wilshaw's comments about Bradford. I just said in my report there is nobody of any political party who can take any comfort or joy from the educational standards in this City and this is not over the last four years, it is not over the last ten years, it has been an issue since I was elected 25 years ago and most probably before that. So we are all equally as culpable and we are all equally as responsible for finding the solution to that problem. That is why we have bought in outside expertise to review the improvement plan. It was done under Ralph's (Councillor Berry) portfolio holder and it has been taken forward by Susan's (Councillor Hinchcliffe) and we have adopted all their recommendations. There is a political will, there is an officer will, there is a school will. That has been recognised by Ofsted who is

allegedly run by Mr Wilshaw, who does not appear to read his own Inspectors' reports and if you read the whole of Mr Wilshaw's speech about Bradford, not only has he not read his own officer's report, some of the comments he makes about extremism and other issues in Bradford schools are extremely damaging, are inaccurate and one has to really question the motivation behind his comments. It does not reflect his own organisation's view, it does not reflect the views being expressed by law enforcement agencies and you have really got to wonder why he has decided to make those statements. So we will be making representations in the strongest possible terms.

Councillor Khadim Hussain

First of all I want to congratulate the Executive and the Leader for his business support extending this help and support to struggling businesses. I know he acknowledges the fact that support will be given to the other districts but I wanted clarification if Keighley and district will be part of that extended districts?

Leader – Councillor Green

Would I dare do anything else? Yes it is. When we are talking about districts, we are talking about Keighley, we are talking about Bingley, we are talking about Ilkley, we are talking about Shipley. Those major areas of retail and business use so that is where it will be extended to.

Councillor Morris

It is on the education. Has the Council cancelled the contract for the consultancy contract worth £20,000 for the post 16 education in Bradford following the farce last Tuesday at Victoria Hotel when the Assistant Director of Children Services had to stop their workshop with the head teachers? Have you not been made aware of that?

Leader – Councillor Green

I cannot give you the details as many people will know I am on part time at the moment. I will have a look at it and maybe Councillor Hinchcliffe can address that and find a way of weaving it into the answer, into any supplementary questions or into her speech and cover it.

Councillor Robinson

Good news about the Odeon Council Leader. Presumably that is for the capital. Give me your thoughts on do you think that there are private firms available or in situ to run the development if the capital is eventually received from the Heritage Lottery?

Leader – Councillor Green

It is a private commercial venture applying for public funds and as with any application for public funds it would have to produce a business plan that shows it is viable. So if it is going through the Heritage Lottery system and from the areas of the business plan that were presented to the Council when we chose them as the preferred developer there is a business case that means it is viable on a private sector basis.

Councillor Pennington

Just on the new scheme for business rates which I am sure we all salute but I just want to voice the view of a large number of businesses, in fact by far the largest number of businesses, which do not get any such relief and they are starting to feel a little alienated because quite frankly they are just not in the right area. Not only are they feeling alienated they are feeling difficulties in paying the rates because as we all know it is a bit historical so the business rates might even be defined as being already too high but that is another matter. What is of concern to me and the question I would like to ask is whilst we are investing in new businesses and empty shop units being re-opened and we are making some quite hefty investments, is there any safeguard should those businesses fail for whatever reason so that we can recoup some of the investment?

Leader – Councillor Green

We are trying to build in every possible safeguard. Clearly this scheme is based as I say on the district's centres and based on the experience we have had of the city centre growth zone which has been successful and continues to be successful. It is not just about buildings, it is about supporting new start businesses, expanding businesses and those businesses that are seeking to take on new employees who are unemployed and apprenticeships. It is a scheme that has worked well in the City Centre so we have based it on that. Can you ever guarantee that every business that you back is going to be successful, no, and there are people in this room who have had businesses that have not been successful as well as then going on to having other successful businesses. It is a nature of capitalism and I doubt Councillor Pennington will condemn capitalism. But I do think and I hear what you are saying about people in other areas but to a large extent we cannot be all things to all people so we have to choose where we get the biggest bank for our bucks and given the representations I have had from Councillors in those more important district centres there is a concern about the effect that is happening with shops closing, businesses closing, the difficulty in bringing buildings back into use. This is not an attempt to support businesses in all those centres. I hear what you are saying and if somebody would give me an unlimited amount of money and total power I might consider doing it for the whole district but as yet that is not in the devolution deal.

Councillor Sykes

Devolution Leader. Some amendments, greater flexibility, will that extend to mean not having to not having a mayor inflicted upon us?

Leader – Councillor Green

I am afraid your friend Mr Osborne is totally and absolutely committed to having an elected mayor for any proper devolution. The only place that has not got an elected mayor and has allegedly got a devolution deal is Cornwall and if you look at what that deal is it is totally different to anything that is going to the more urban centres.

Councillor Hawkesworth

Going back to the Odeon. Indeed it is good news that the Heritage Lottery Fund is smiling on the building. Having said that has there been an analysis done to see what the impact a super duper big concert hall is going to be at the Odeon or St George's?

Leader – Councillor Green

I think if you look back to the original bids that was an issue that was looked at as part of that process. We are aware that there is that competition but whether they are in the same market if you talk to the Odeon group I think is a moot point. They are looking at a different sort of market in many ways to St George's Hall. There is always that threat and I think that we have always recognised and accepted it which is one of the reasons why we are also looking to see what can be done to improve the offer at St George's Hall so that we can see if we can get the financial support to do it so that we can complement the offer which will be St George's Hall, the Odeon and the Alhambra.

Lord Mayor

And that concludes questions on the Leader of Council's report.