

## **LEADERS REPORT TO COUNCIL JANUARY 2016**

### **Flooding**

We will be discussing the recent floods later in the agenda but I would like to place on record my personal thanks to all residents, officers, partner agencies and local councillors who worked so hard over the Christmas period to deal with the devastating effects of the floods on local communities and businesses.

We currently estimate the costs of the floods at about £5m although this figure will change as assessments of the damage to infrastructure such as roads and bridges are assessed in more detail.

The Government quickly released some funds to support households and businesses that were flooded and the Council has passed this money on to those affected as quickly as we can. If members are aware of any resident or business who has not received a payment they are due please contact us and we will see what we can do.

We will also be providing a CT and Business rate holiday for those affected.

Finally we will be extending the Assisted Purchasing Scheme which the Council administers for the benefit of low pay households, to those affected by the floods who have not got insurance or are unable to claim for some reason. There will be an administrative process for these individuals to go through but we will make it as simple as possible.

Through West Yorks Combined Authority and the Leeds City Region local Enterprise Partnership we will also be supporting further business support measures to allow affected companies to get back to full production as soon as possible.

We will continue to work with all our partners and affected communities to learn the lessons of the recent floods and also to ensure that life returns to normal as soon as possible for all affected. To help with this we will do what we can to get Government funds for flood resilience released as soon as possible and passed on to qualifying households and businesses.

### **Budget**

The budget consultations are ongoing and will be reported back to members in the usual way. As a result of the ongoing cuts imposed by central government I know that the draft proposals are having a more direct impact on local services than previous budget proposals. I would therefore urge all councillors who are contacted by their constituents about the proposals to

make sure that these individuals formally make submissions to the consultation through the process that has been set up so that we can capture and consider these concerns and alternative ideas.

## **Member Review**

All members will have received a questionnaire about how they see their role as part of the review of members agreed last year. I would urge you all to complete this as soon as possible so that we can bring the results, along with the views of residents who have also been asked for their views across the district, to a full council meeting for discussion.

## **Morrison's**

Members will be shocked by the decision to close their store at Westgate in Bradford with the potential loss of up to 100 jobs. We have met with the company who are in the process of starting the 45 day redundancy negotiations with staff but once they have considered the outcome of this consultation we will meet with them again to look at options for the site and adjoining area.

## **Devolution**

We continue to negotiate with Government about the proposed devolution deal for the region. Currently we have agreement on a majority of the asks but there remains a couple of issues around fiscal devolution that remain to be finalised.

What is clear is that the first devolution agreement, should it be agreed, will not be all that we would want and a decision will have to be taken by each local authority involved about whether it is sufficient to allow it to be supported as a first step towards what we would all want to see which is greater control of resources and plans at a local level rather than relying on dictates from Whitehall and Westminster.

It is likely that we will see a full and final offer in the next few weeks and I will ensure that all members have the opportunity to read it and be briefed before you are asked to make any decision. We will also consult with our local partners when the offer has been published.

It is becoming clear that geography and political interest remain a major stumbling block for some in the region. I would reiterate my belief that the geography that meets Bradford's best interest would be the Leeds City Region which is a functioning economic area and has a history of delivering in partnership over the last few years, as recognised by the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet. Amongst some people in the region there seems to be a greater interest in preserving their power than delivering economic growth for our residents and businesses.

## **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER**

### **Councillor Cooke**

Leader, on the devolution matter thanks for a detailed response. Geography issues aside can you set out what we mean by Bradford's best interests and what kind of outcomes we would want, if you like, as a minimum in terms of benefits to the district because at the end of the day there is no point anyone here signing up to something unless we can absolutely demonstratively see real benefits and advantages to the district so if you want to give us a go at that.

### **Councillor Green**

First thing to say I think that it is important to recognise that Bradford does not exist in a vacuum or a bubble and that the interconnection between Bradford/Leeds are the West Yorkshire and Leeds City Region Authorities, our economy is key and therefore one of the judgements is what is going to give the people and the businesses in our city the best chance to thrive and to grow. In terms of specifics I think it is important that there is an opportunity for Bradford's voice to be heard at the top table which currently given the decisions by Government about who they speak to I think is a real challenge to us at the moment and through a Combined Authority which is likely to have an elected Mayor we need to make sure that our voice is heard very much at that top table. There are also some specific things that I think are vitally important to this district as a whole. One of them for me and I know for a lot of businesses and individuals in this area would be a proper link to the airport, not a road link but a rail or live rail link and I think that is something that we need to continue to press for. Not only with the direct link through British Airways, through Heathrow to the rest of the world but we also need to look at it in terms of growing the airport. Also we need to make sure that Bradford is a key spot on HS3 which I believe is going to be of great benefit to this region than HS2 is so we need to make sure that Bradford is at the core of that. That is two examples of the sort of thing, plus the more generic one, of the sort of things that I certainly will be looking to push.

### **Councillor Jeanette Sunderland**

It is a question really following on from the flooding around the flood resilience those up to 5k properties about whether or not we are going to make workshops and such like available to members of the public because whilst I understand that you move your boilers upstairs the end of my knowledge about what you do next is quite thin but lots of people now are coming in and asking questions so it is clarity about when that information is going to be available and whether or not we will support that information with workshops and such like so that we can explain the details of what you do to make a property flood resilient. Thank you.

### **Councillor Green**

The details are still being worked up but clearly what we want to do is when we have got those plans to go out to those areas that were most affected. There are certainly discussions going around not just what you can do internally in households to make life easier for them but actually is it better

potentially to club together that £5,000 per household to look at doing something different that makes it less likely that those houses would flood and there is some discussion about what we can do to help those people who live on unadopted streets for example to try and do something collectively rather than individually. So we will be going out with what will basically be a suite of options and talking to people and it is not going to be one size fits all I do not believe. So we will go out and we will talk and we will have workshops or meetings or whatever you want to call it to try and make sure that whatever we do it is best for the communities that are affected.

### **Councillor Pennington**

Just an item on Morrisons who over many years have tried to redevelop that site. In fact at one stage I think all the way down to Kirkgate Market but they seem to be rebuffed by both of the main parties over a very long period. So I just want to know if you have considered a business rate holiday to help with the short term viability of the store?

### **Councillor Green**

I do love Councillor Pennington's rewriting of history. In actual fact to my knowledge this Council in the last fifteen years have looked at redeveloping that site. Certainly twice whilst I was on this side and once whilst I was on that side and it was actually Morrisons' view at the time that they didn't wish to be part of a redevelopment. We approached them just a few months ago, as well to talk in general, as we were looking at the refurbishment of that top end of the town. So the situation is that we met with Morrisons and we met with them this week. They are opening their consultation period with staff. Clearly cannot make a final decision whilst that consultation is ongoing. We are looking internally at the plans that we produced over the last fifteen years for that top end of town, that for reasons did not happen and then we will be meeting with Morrisons should that consultation result in the planned closure going ahead. To look at what they intend to do with the store because they still have a long lease on it. They can sublet that lease, they can hand it back, they could come into some sort of partnership with us but until they finish the consultation they are not in a position to make any commitments.

### **Councillor Dale Smith**

I will not ask my first question about the consultation for Burley & Menston Library being held in Keighley. My question is regarding the Members survey. I was under the impression that the survey had actually closed now and the date had past. Is that the case or not? Does the Leader know how many Councillors responded? I thought the questions were a bit simplistic. It was rather like asking turkeys not to vote for Christmas. Is there a timescale for this review and would he consider sending the survey to Scrutiny before it came to Council?

### **Councillor Green**

In answer to the first question that you did not ask, what I would suggest is that those central consultations need to happen somewhere. I certainly had one consultation in Wibsey and I will be having another one Dale and I am sure you are capable of organising your own in your own patch should you so

wish. In terms of the Members survey I do not have that figures on how many are back but I do know from talking to several Councillors that it was one of those emails that they got and said that they would deal with later and it is still hovering so this was a gentle nudge. The timescale was an encouragement and if people would like to complete their surveys it will be included and when all that information both from elected Members and from members of the public which are being collated at the moment is together and the independent reviewer who is the chair of our Remunerations Committee has had a look at it and started pulling some of the strands out. I am easier about it going to Scrutiny before it comes here but I do think that Members need to get to see it as soon as possible and we are out actually chasing the public questionnaires as well to try and get as many of them back so that we get a broader view across the district as we can.

### **Councillor Pennington**

My second question was just a request really on devolution. You state in your report that you will consult with our local partners and add that amongst some people in the region there seems to be a greater interest in preserving their power. Hey-oh. I would ask please that you actually think out of the box if you will pardon the pun and engage with some more distant authorities to present a far more diverse and a better offering to central government.

### **Councillor Green**

I think you have identified the wrong enemy there Councillor Pennington and I would suggest that you might want to go and have a conversation with some of your Blue colleagues both within Bradford and the rest of West Yorkshire and also some of them in North Yorkshire and elsewhere particularly those who aren't district Councillors or metropolitan Councillors but may be MPs and County Councillors who seem keen on preserving the status quo rather than doing what is best for local economy, local skills, local training, local employment because they fear what will happen to their fiefdoms. We know that if devolution comes then the role of local authorities and local government will change what Bradford District Council is and does will change. But we do not exist for the benefit of 90 elected Members in this room. We exist for the benefit of half a million people out there and if that change gives us the opportunity to improve the opportunities for those people then we have to bite the bullet and it is just a shame that some people seem more interested in preserving what happens within County Hall or within Westminster rather than what is happening out there.