

Leader's Statement to Council

Performance

The County Council continues to demonstrate excellent performance across all of its services. The Audit Commission has just ranked the County Council as the 4th most improved council out of 388 for last year and the 5th most improved council over the last three years. Overall the County Council has maintained its position as the second best county council in the country according to Price Waterhouse Coopers benchmarking. The top three star rating recently awarded to Adults social care is a particularly pleasing achievement. The indications are that the other service assessments contributing to the overall CPA are also showing sustained or improved performance.

The final CPA star rating will be published in late February 2009 and will then be replaced in 2009 by the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. This will focus more on how well we are working with our partners to continue to deliver the ongoing improvements in services that people need.

Financial Settlement

The Local Government Finance Settlement announced on Wednesday 26th November confirmed the grant allocations to the County Council for 2009/10 and 2010/2011. These had previously been notified as part of the first three year settlement in January 2008. There is therefore no grant related impact on the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for these two years, which is something of a relief.

On Council Tax, the Government expects average increases in 2009/10 to be substantially below 5% again and they will not hesitate to use their capping powers as necessary to protect Council Tax payers from excessive increases.

The Executive is continuing its work on the Budget for 2009/10. As those Members who attended the workshop on Monday 8th December will know, there are difficult choices to be made. Full details will emerge in time for the next stage of the consultation process in January 2009

Sub National Review

The Local Government Minister John Healey has now announced the way forward for the Sub National Review. His blueprint largely follows the plan put forward jointly by Yorkshire Forward and Local Government Yorkshire and Humber. The most controversial part of the SNR was taking regional planning powers from the Assembly to Yorkshire Forward. This has been changed, with responsibility going to the Joint Regional Board.

This Joint Regional Board has now had its first meeting and is expected to take over the Assembly's responsibilities on 1st April 2009. This Joint Board will need to work together with complete trust and will in my opinion make a major difference to the region's decision making. For the position of Chair of the Joint Board Yorkshire Forward has nominated myself, whilst the LGYH

has nominated Arthur Barker. This particular item of business will be unresolved until the new year and should make for an interesting debate!

Economy

County Councillor White is reporting on the economic downturn and its impact in North Yorkshire, but I wish to comment on the regional situation.

Yorkshire Forward are taking the lead and working with business across the region, and have done a lot of work with HBOS, Bradford & Bingley and others to lobby to retain jobs within the region. They have also changed their allocation of funding criteria from 1/3 business, 1/3 inclusion, 1/3 regeneration to allocate much more money directly to businesses, with a view to supporting businesses and retaining jobs.

It is my view that one of the major causes of the economic problems over the past year has been excessive inflation. It is extremely helpful that this looks to be coming to an end with oil prices at less than a third of their peak, food prices slowly showing signs of decreasing and the retail sector giving huge discounts in the lead up to Christmas.