

Leader's Statement

Leeds City Region

During recent weeks the Leeds City Region has signed its City Deal with Government. The main elements of the City Deal are based on West Yorkshire councils. The governance arrangements for the City Deal are centred around the creation of what is called a "Combined Authority" which will have as its core members the West Yorkshire councils. The Combined Authority will be in effect another tier of Local Government with its own ability to raise local taxes. I believe it is a recreation of the former West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council. The latest timetable indicates that a statutory order creating the Combined Authority will be laid before Parliament by November next year with the new Authority formally being established on the 1st April 2014. The Combined Authority will initially focus on transport but I expect the body to deal also with skills, economic development and possibly housing for West Yorkshire. I am clear that it is right for North Yorkshire not to be part of the Combined Authority and we will have to renegotiate our partnership with Leeds and other West Yorkshire Councils in light of the new arrangements which will lead to a redesign of the whole concept of the Leeds City Region.

North Yorkshire, York and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership

The North Yorkshire, York and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership has recently set out its priorities for the next phase of its development. These are:-

1. Support and encourage small businesses to grow
2. Provide support for major growth opportunities - Potash and Agri-Innovation
3. Be recognised as a strong voice for local business at a local and central government level

It can be seen that one of its aims will be to help maximise the economic advantages to the county from the proposed potash development on the East Coast. In recent weeks the proposed site of the new mine has been announced a few miles south of Whitby. This is potentially a major boost to the North Yorkshire economy and I very much welcome the progress that has been made to date. The proposals for the new mine will have to go through the planning process overseen by the North York Moors Planning Authority. This due process will obviously have to be followed but in the meantime it is right for the Council along with other partners to continue to look at how we can make the most of the opportunity if it moves to construction.

School Funding

One of the most important issues that has been occupying my time in recent days has been the future funding arrangements for our schools. Cllr Arthur Barker, the Executive Member for schools will provide more details in his report but I would like to emphasise the importance of the issue that could result in many schools in North Yorkshire losing vital funding. I have already written to the appropriate Minister and all of our MPs to raise our concerns and to ask for more local flexibility. I, along with Cllr Barker, will keep this Council updated on developments.

Flooding

North Yorkshire, along with large parts of the North of England have recently gone through some of the worst flood conditions since 2000. Many homes have been flooded in different parts of the county and damage caused to schools, roads and bridges. We are still pulling together the assessment of costs for the County Council and I hope that the Government will re-imburse at least a portion of these costs. I would however like to pay tribute to all those across the county who helped our communities cope, the public, the emergency services and other public agencies and the many members of staff from the County Council who were involved.

Health

I have been concerned to learn recently of further increases to the Primary Care Trust budget deficit and their proposals for immediate cuts to health provision. North Yorkshire is one of the lowest funded areas for health and has a proportionality high number of older people who need support from health services. The low levels of funding predate this current Government and increasingly this position looks unsustainable. It is unacceptable for residents of North Yorkshire to be placed at greater risk than in other parts of the country as a result of PCT cut backs. Along with the Executive Member for Health and Adult Services I will be making this point strongly both locally and nationally.

Senior Staff

Everyone will be aware of Cynthia Welbourn's announcement of her retirement. This will not be Cynthia's last Council meeting so I will not dwell on Cynthia's contribution to this Council now. The process to recruit a new Director of Children and Young People's Service has started and the job is currently out to advert. It is however Gary Fielding's first meeting in his new role as Corporate Director of Central Services and I would like to wish Gary well in his new role.