

North Yorkshire County Council Meeting**Wednesday, 9 November 2016 at 10.30am****Leader`s statement****Change of government**

Since our last meeting, we have a new Prime Minister, a new Secretary of State for DCLG, and a new Northern Powerhouse Minister. Previously we had excellent working relationships with Greg Clarke and James Wharton and I`m pleased to report that we are making progress in building new working links.

Congratulations go to Gavin Williamson, former County Councillor, on his promotion to Chief Whip.

There have been numerous other changes – in fact only Andrew Jones appears to have kept his previous brief – and one thing is clear, this is a new government with new priorities and new aims. Clearly Brexit is one.

Brexit

I am repeatedly asked about the impact of Brexit and what it will mean for the County Council. The simple and honest answer is that we simply don`t know. What we do know is that there are some areas that are more likely to be impacted but separating the effects of Brexit from other global developments is much harder.

In economic terms the fall of the pound has meant that we get less return on our cash investments and inflation is expected to go up to 2% next year and then be nearer 3% for a few years after. Both of these areas will hit the Council`s finances and will be factored into our forthcoming Budget / MTFS. Perhaps of even greater import though is the economic performance of the country as a whole – if the economy slows down then tax revenues will decline and the public finances will be stretched further and for longer.

As a Council we receive very little direct European funding but we have provisionally secured £1m for the next phase of the roll-out of superfast broadband. I am hopeful that this funding will be secured over the coming weeks. Similarly, European social funds have previously been secured by community organisations to fund skills development. At this stage we know that European funds secured by the Autumn Statement are guaranteed by government but after that it is currently unclear.

The areas that are more likely to be impacted are those which we share with partners. So, for example, we employ significant numbers of staff who have moved to the UK from other parts of the EU particularly in social care and facilities management. Likewise the health service draws many staff from the EU and further afield. The future of the country`s immigration policy will therefore be of interest to both the County Council and the wider County itself.

We will, of course, monitor the situation very carefully and respond appropriately as the picture becomes clearer. Whilst much of the future is uncertain, and we will need to react to issues as they emerge, I welcome the fact that the Transport, Economy & Environment O&S Committee is setting up a standing working party to oversee emerging issues.

Devolution

Devolved powers remain an aim of the new Government. This was confirmed at Prime Minister's Questions yesterday (Wednesday 26th October). In a conversation I have had with the SoS it was crystal clear that the biggest gain share i.e. benefits would only come under an Elected Mayoral model. Any other form of governance would be devo-lite.

Along with the other Leaders in York, North and East Yorkshire including Hull, I remain committed to devolution to the largest possible geography, as this is fair to all, and of a significant size to compete nationally and internationally. This remains the preference of a large part of public opinion, the media, most business leaders, the majority of MP's across all parties and all the region, and the government. If a devolution deal was available to the whole of Yorkshire, One Yorkshire, following the above principles, I would be very willing to participate in such discussions.

Health matters

You will see that later in this agenda I am proposing a motion, seconded by Cllr. John Blackie, concerning a review of health care in the north of the County. I hope this will find unanimous support, as although it is geographically more relevant to Richmondshire, North Hambleton, and Whitby and the Esk Valley, it is relevant to any part of the County where services are delivered "over the border".

Cycling

To finish on a very positive (and healthy!) note, I'm delighted that the route of next year's Tour de Yorkshire will cross Tadcaster's rebuilt bridge over the Wharfe, illustrating far and wide that the town is indeed open for business again.

I'm even more delighted that the governing body of world cycling have agreed that Yorkshire will host the World Cycling Championship in 2019. This will involve 12 races over eight days in this nine day event which includes individual and team time trials as well as full road races. The 1,000 best male and female riders in the world from 75 countries will take part.

We will once again promote Yorkshire as a visitor destination to the whole world. If hosting the Tour de France Grand Depart is like hosting the final of the Champions League, this is akin to hosting the World Cup.

County Councillor Carl Les

November 2016