

County Council Meeting**Wednesday 20 February 2019****Leader's Statement**

- Budget

We will be debating our next Budget and setting our Council tax later in today's meeting. We are told that austerity is coming to an end, although caveated by the Chancellor that this would require a "good" Brexit, and we have played our part in achieving the savings that were expected of us. Our staff need to be thanked for the part they have played in delivering these savings, mainly through efficiencies.

What we are seeing now is unprecedented demand in two key areas of our work – looking after vulnerable adults, and providing for children with higher needs. I'm grateful to our MP's who have taken up this cause, and for Ministers who have listened and provided extra funds this year. Hopefully these demands now recognised will find their way into the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

This will be influenced by the Fairer Funding Review and again through our MP's and the County Council Network we have made our case for a redistribution of funding based on the costs of delivering services in a rural context. There are clear imbalances per head of population between Inner London boroughs, urban areas and shire counties, with us coming last.

- Brexit

Without wanting to open up the debate about In or Out, we have had to make preparations for Brexit, with or without a deal, and whatever that deal may be. And therein lies the difficulty, that there is a lack of clarity about what we are preparing to encounter. Possible impacts forecast nationally are import delays, currency fluctuations and a shortage of labour in certain sectors. Regionally, work has been coordinated by the Resilience Forum. More locally we have been checking on our business continuity plans and putting in place sensible procedures using a 7 point check list for preparedness provided by govt, using funding of £175k over the next two years.

We have prudently allocated 1% of our gross budget to cover unexpected costs in service delivery. If not needed it will be returned to General Working Balances.

- LEP review

We are fortunate in this County to have an excellent private sector led LEP, originally chaired by Barry Dodd LL CBE, now followed by David Kerfoot DL MBE. Both built substantial highly successful businesses themselves and have given freely of their time to help the County they live(d) in. We have an exciting opportunity following the government's review of LEP's to take the best of our LEP, and the best of Leeds City Region LEP, and create a new LEP covering most of Yorkshire with an economy the size of Scotland's. Transition work is ongoing prior to a recommendation being made to both LEP boards in March. An exciting opportunity however which must not be to the detriment of our existing successes.

- Devolution

The previous item fits neatly with Devolution. I'm sure we can all sign up to the principle of decision making being removed from Whitehall to the Town Hall, and the fact that a large degree of spending power comes with that process. 19 out of 21 Yorkshire Leaders consider this to be worth pursuing, and Government have now sent the outline submission to the Treasury for analysis, and the Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry congratulated the bid in the Yorkshire Post recently for its "ambition". We await the Treasury's response with interest. Again this is an exciting proposition, but it must build on our successes, not diminish them, and it must be achievable.

Carl Les