



## **Under embargo until 21.30 on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2019**

### **Leeds Chamber Annual Dinner: Queen's Hotel, Leeds**

#### **President's speech**

A very warm welcome to the 2019 Leeds Chamber Annual Dinner and I am delighted to see so many of you in attendance.

Events like this take much planning and support and I would like to start by thanking this year's sponsors, Business Enterprise Fund and Leeds Bradford Airport. Your support is very much appreciated.

In my first year as your president I am very proud that we have once again represented your views to policy makers and ensured your issues are heard not just here in Leeds and the region but nationally too. On your behalf and working with our Chamber colleagues in Westminster we have shared views on apprentice reforms, planning policy, transport and infrastructure matters and many other business matters. We hold regular dialogue with key government departments, the Bank of England and many others.

Our quarterly economic report continues to provide a remarkably accurate finger on the pulse and I am delighted that we have renewed our relationship with Roger Marsh and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership for another three years, ensuring the quality of response continues. Those five minutes you spend completing the survey each quarter feeds directly in to those who can make a difference in Town Halls and Whitehall.

In the last twelve months we have published a report on the thorny issue of housing across the city and my thanks to Housing Forum members for contributing their time so readily. It is vital that we provide quality housing and the supporting infrastructure to ensure future generations can put down roots and make their living in our fabulous city.

The Chamber continues to push for improvements to our urban environment too and we were delighted to announce in September the launch of the Leeds Waterfront Enhancement Fund. The aims of this fund are to invest in small projects which improve the public realm around what will in future years be the heart of our city centre. My thanks must go to Leeds City Council and to Cllr Judith Blake in particular, for listening to business and responding in such a positive manner.

2018 also saw the first cohort of young people moving on from UTC Leeds. For those not familiar this is West Yorkshire's first specialist secondary school dedicated to engineering and technology in which the Chamber was influential in opening in Leeds. I am so pleased to hear that the young people who finished their education at the school 37% went on to take up high quality apprenticeships, five times more than a standard secondary school. More importantly every single

young person went on to do something positive, testament to the focus on employability skills which companies said were so important when the project started back in 2013. The Chamber believes strongly that employers have a huge role to play in ensuring the next generation are provided with the essential life skills needed to fulfil their potential.

On a related vein, the Chamber, working with partners in the city, launched the inaugural Leeds Manufacturing Festival last autumn. I want to pay tribute to Agfa's Graham Cooper who was the driving force behind this initiative to connect industry with education and open the eyes of young people to the huge variety of opportunities which exist in the city.

Through our annual Raising the Bar awards, we know that huge amounts of this employer support for education takes place but I believe there is even more we could do. Schools will benefit hugely if more business leaders took up places on governing bodies, or provided careers advice, mentoring or simply allowed their own younger employees to mentor pupils. There is plenty of help available to companies to facilitate this, come and talk to the Chamber if you want introductions.

And on the subject of business giving back, every year the President chooses a charity and this year I have chosen St George's Crypt. The Crypt offers year-round support to the homeless, vulnerable and those suffering addiction. They offer immediate practical support in terms of food, cleanliness and, unlike counterparts in some cities, they also work exceptionally hard and with great success to break the cycles that lead to homelessness so that many clients can move on to better lives. I've been closely involved with the charity for several years and they really do a fantastic job. Please do contribute to the excellent work of this organisation via the envelopes on your tables.

## **Devolution**

Having reviewed my speech from last year, I note that I said, "I understand we are now closer to some kind of deal with Whitehall...." Twelve months later it is abundantly clear to business leaders across the region that we appear to remain poles apart from views in Whitehall. In 2012 this region led the way with the country's largest City Deal, which included £1bn for transport investment. It is immensely frustrating to see how far back we have fallen as other regions power ahead with their devolution ambitions. As business leaders we implore our politicians to be pragmatic and break the impasse in 2019.

## **Channel Four**

Leeds is the city I have chosen to call home and I, probably like all of you, was immensely proud when Channel Four announced they too were also going to make their home here. It is a great endorsement of the many advantages which our city has to offer and we join all the businesses in the room in welcoming Channel 4 as an addition to the many quality businesses represented across the city and in this room tonight. Congratulations to Roger, Judith, Susan, Tom, Martin and all of those involved in bringing this opportunity to the Leeds City Region. I have no doubt that the creative industry and all of those who want to forge a career in the industry will thank you for your ambition and hard work.

From a personal perspective it was particularly pleasing to see that the bid for Channel 4 majored on the diversity of our city and I am sure you would all be disappointed if I didn't mention diversity this evening. As a chamber we have continued to champion Women in STEM – something which was a big issue at the Manufacturing round table I attended last week with Nick Garthwaite, the Bradford president, and you will hear more of our plans in the coming months. I am delighted that the Chamber is no longer a male bastion and that my successor as President, Amanda Beresford, will confound the belief expressed to me that "You can't have two women, it's taking it too far". The Chamber holds Womens lunches which are really well attended – some men attend too and are welcome - and provides guidance and support for female business people. There are those who question this and believe that it is "going too far" or that having targets or ambitions for gender equality is reverse discrimination or will lead to "average women getting the best jobs". Well I tested this at a Women in STEM event that I hosted with my US partners in Silicon Valley last September. I asked the audience what they thought of this view and one of the delegates gave me a great quote, which I would like to leave you with this evening. "True equality will not be achieved when a female genius is just as likely to win the Nobel Prize as a male genius, but when a female schmuck is just as likely to get the top job as a male schmuck".

Events like this take much planning and support and I would like to take the opportunity to thank this year's sponsors, Business Enterprise Fund and Leeds Bradford Airport, your support is very much appreciated.

**Notes to editors:**

- WYNYCC is the fifth largest Chamber in the country and our members employ close to a third of the working population of the Leeds City Region.
- WYNYCC is the British Chambers of Commerce Award winner 'Most Effective Campaign 2016', and was shortlisted for the BCC Awards 'Most Effective Campaign 2017'
- There are Chamber offices in Bradford, Leeds and York.
- Leeds Chamber
  - President - Paula Dillon, Partner, Womble Bond Dickinson
  - Vice President – Amanda Beresford, Partner, Shulmans