

# Teamwork put



**STUART ANDREW** (Con, Pudsey) – Health



**RACHEL REEVES** (Lab, Leeds West) – Jobs and Economic Development



**GEORGE MUDIE** (Lab, Leeds East) – Regeneration and Housing



**GREG MULHOLLAND** (Lib Dem, Leeds North West) – Energy and Climate Change



**ALEC SHELBROOKE** (Con, Elmet & Rothwell) – Transport



**ED BALLS** (Lab, Morley & Outwood) – Regional Economy

A new spirit of cooperation exists between the eight Leeds MPs. Political Editor **Mark Hookham** looks at how the Team Leeds initiative came about...and whether it will work.

**WHEN** David Cameron vowed to end the “Punch and Judy politics” of Parliament, we all knew it wouldn’t last.

The idea of MPs agreeing with each other and playing nice was never going to happen amid the bear-pit atmosphere of the Commons chamber, the layout of which is designed to maximise eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation.

But can MPs from different parties work together and co-operate when they are away from the play-acting, camp slurs and mock indignation of the Parliamentary pantomime?

That is certainly the ambitious challenge set for the eight Leeds MPs by business chiefs in the city.

During the last five years, the city’s captains of finance and industry have been getting increasingly fed up that Leeds – the economic engine room for so much of the north – has been habitually punching below its weight.

Time and again Manchester, Birmingham, and to a lesser extent Sheffield, appeared to be catching the government’s eye and securing generous slices of regeneration and transport investment.

The Supertram debacle in 2005 infuriated many business leaders whose hopes had been raised that the city would finally get a much-needed public transport network. Nigel McClea, a partner at Leeds law firm Pinsent Mason, said: “There was the

froth in the region about how wonderful it was going to be, about what it was going to do in Leeds and a lot of money was spent. It went down to Westminster and it got killed.”

Leeds, bereft of a suitable public transport system, an arena or a conference centre, appeared to be increasingly left on the sidelines. Attention turned to whether the MPs were doing their bit and “shouting for Leeds”.

Mr McClea said his firm has previously organised lunches on behalf of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce where only half of the invited MPs turned up.

## Lobby

“There has always been the impression that say in Manchester and some of the other regional cities, they have been better at getting their MPs together in order to be able to go and lobby more effectively.

“Here in Leeds, I don’t really know why, it has been more fragmented,” he said. Shortly before this year’s General Election, the Leeds Chamber organised three meetings with the parliamentary candidates of each of the main parties in a bid to forge a new working relationship.

From those meetings evolved Team Leeds – a cross party initiative that will see the city’s parliamentarians meeting four times a year and co-operating across all major policy issues.

In an echo of cabinet government, each MP has adopted a portfolio which will

become their specialism.

Despite the city’s post-election political diversity – five MPs are Labour, two Conservative and one Lib Dem – Leeds’s political representatives have recognised the need to work together.

There are fears that Chancellor George Osborne’s budget with its aggressive spending cuts of £61 billion over five years will hit areas of the North hardest. The axe is likely to fall on 600,000 public sector jobs and West Yorkshire, like the North East and North West, has a heavy reliance on the state payroll.

“It is in the interests of all of the people in Leeds that we have a strong group of MPs”, said Leeds West Labour MP Rachel Reeves, who is leading on jobs and economic growth.

Leeds North West Lib Dem MP Greg Mulholland, who will specialise in energy and climate change issues, said the MPs recognise that city has to come before party.

“We have been elected to stand up for our area and the people in it. That should happen regardless of who the government is.

“We are an independent-minded set of people but we all go in to bat for Leeds.” Leeds North East MP Fabian Hamilton, who has represented his seat since 1997, does not accept claims that Leeds MPs failed to bang the drum loudly enough for Supertram.

But he does agree that the new spirit of cross-party cooperation is unprecedented.

This seems partly a product of the pragmatic personalities of the MPs –