
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Cabinet

1. I have chaired two ordinary meetings and two special meetings of Cabinet since my last report to Council. The special meetings considered reports, prior to consideration by Council, on the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans, Housing Revenue Account and Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators 2006/07. The ordinary meetings of Cabinet considered a number of issues including a presentation by Sarah Diggle the Council's Relationship Manager and Paul Harrison, the Council's Audit Manager from Pricewaterhouse Coopers on the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, which, which was extremely positive; the submission of a Draft Local Area Agreement for Darlington; and the Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

Town Centre

2. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board held on 9th February, 2005, at which a number of items were discussed, including the Pedestrian Heart Scheme; the Council's Draft Events Strategy; a review of the Christmas period; the Commercial Street development; and Town Centre Directional Signposting.

I also chaired a meeting of the Town Centre Forum held on 17th February, 2006, which was well attended by representatives from the Town Centre. The main focus of the meeting was to discuss ideas and initiatives to encourage and support the independent retail sector with Darlington Town Centre.

Work is progressing on the schemes that are currently underway in the Town Centre. The first completed parts of the Pedestrian Heart scheme, which is being developed to make the Town Centre a more attractive place to visit and shop, have been unveiled; plans for the new multi-million pound shopping centre in Commercial Street have been boosted by the exchange of contracts between the Council and the developers; and work has commenced on the refurbishment of the Dolphin Centre, in order to improve and offer the finest standards for the users of the Centre.

Darlington Partnership Board

3. The meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 9th March, 2006, which I attended, discussed a number of issues including the Local Area Agreement for Darlington, and Inter Faith Working.

I also attended a Business Breakfast meeting, arranged by the Chair of the Darlington Partnership, which offered an excellent opportunity to engage with a wide range of business

people in the town.

Scrutiny Committees

4. I attended two special meetings of the Council's Scrutiny Committees. The first was the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee held on 31st January, 2006, which considered the County Durham and Darlington's Strategic Health Authority's consultation on new Primary Care Trust (PCT) arrangements in County Durham and Darlington.

The second meeting was the Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 8th February, 2006, where I, together with officers, presented and responded to questions on the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial (MTFP) Plans for 2006/07.

Town Twinning Visit to Mulheim

5. I was part of the Town Twinning visit to Mulheim which took place between 2nd and 5th February, 2006, with the Council's Chief Executive, Mayor and Escort and the Chair of the Town Twinning Association, Councillor Nutt.

Mulheim celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2008, and with other towns in the Ruhr is competing for European Capital of Culture in 2010. The trip provided a good forum to discuss potential collaborative projects for these two key events, and work is underway with the Darlington Partnership to enable them to be realised.

Youth Parliament

6. The Election for the Member of the Youth Parliament was held on 16th February, 2006, which I attended and spoke at. The election mirrored the Local and General Election process with voting taking place in secondary schools and colleges throughout the day with an official count on the evening. The degree of participation by young people was very encouraging, and I am sure we will give Ashleigh Trevarrow our full support over the coming year.

Education Village

7. A media press day event, which I attended, was held at the Education Village on Friday, 17th March, 2006, to which local, regional and national media attended. Public visits to the Village are now underway.

Contemporary Political Disengagement

8. I was a member of the panel, arranged by the Churches Together in Darlington, to debate the 'Contemporary Political Disengagement and how to remedy it'. While attendance was disappointing, it was a useful discussion on an important and challenging topic.

Meetings

9. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of meetings including the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Committee; presentation to all Members of the Council by the Fire Authority; North East Assembly; Tees Valley LGA Leaders and Mayors; Tees Valley Partnership; Citizenship Ceremony; and Regional Roundtable Event arranged by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister. I also presented an award for the 'Contribution to the Community' at the Best of Darlington Award Ceremony.

John Williams
Leader