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**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

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**Cabinet**

1. I have chaired one ordinary meeting of Cabinet since my last report to Council, at which a number of issues were discussed.

**Town Centre**

2. A Feethams and Markets Working Group has been established, comprising Members of the Town Centre Board and other invited interested parties to undertake work to develop a vision for the Markets together with options for redeveloping the Feethams site. The first meeting of this Group was held on 11th January, 2007, at which the terms of reference for the group, its membership, the process and dates of future meetings were agreed. A report was also submitted on the Darlington's Markets, and presentations were given on the recent consultation exercise undertaken as part of the Tesco proposals and constraints associated with the Feethams/Beaumont Street sites. In order to reflect the wider community interest in these important town centre issues, I have asked Alasdair MacConachie, Chair of the Darlington Partnership, to Chair this Working Group and I am pleased that he has agreed to do so.
3. In order to promote and encourage shoppers into the Town Centre, the Council's Events Team and Town Centre Management arranged for special promotions and for various street artists to perform in and around the Town Centre during the run-up to Christmas. In addition to this, a number of parking initiatives were introduced to encourage shoppers to visit the Town Centre and to stay longer.
4. Works on the town centre's Pedestrian Heart have developed significantly over recent months. We have seen the unveiling of the High Row steps, first ramp and planter, substantial paving around the new events space at Prospect Place, and preparations for the water feature and Life Pulse which are scheduled to be unveiled in the Spring. Public perception of the scheme has generally been very positive and it is anticipated that this should increase further as additional areas progress.

**Human Resources Chief Officers' Appointments Panel**

5. I chaired the meeting of the Human Resources Chief Officers' Appointments Panel held on 14th December, 2006, which interviewed for the post of Director of Children's Services. Murray Rose was appointed, subject to the necessary checks, to the post and he will be taking up his post in the New Year.

## **Darlington Partnership Board**

6. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held 10th January, 2006, at which reports were presented on the positive work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership on the many initiatives for children and young people being developed through the Local Area Agreements. I also attended the very useful business lunch with senior representatives from the Bank of England organised by the Partnership.

## **Events Panel**

7. As part of the Events Strategy for Darlington, it was agreed to establish a multi-agency Events Panel to provide strategic direction and support to the Events Unit, which is working to enhance the number and variety of events in Darlington to ensure that these are well targeted to support key priorities, such as town centre regeneration. The inaugural meeting of the Panel, which I attended, was held on 15th January, 2007.

## **Meetings**

8. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of events including the Children's Services Annual Conference Dinner and Awards Ceremony and the official re-opening of the Red Hall Community Association. I was delighted to attend the official opening of the new Darlington College and to add my congratulations to the staff and Board for their achievement in bringing this great resource to Central Park.

**John Williams**  
**Leader**