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**OVERVIEW OF LEISURE PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. During the last eight-week cycle, the following were the main areas of work under my Leisure Portfolio:

**Dolphin Centre Refurbishment**

2. The Communications Strategy that supported the refurbishment project has been successful in attaining regional recognition through the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride awards. The strategy was recognised as a model of good practice and received a ‘gold award’.

**Events**

**Best of Darlington Awards**

3. The Leisure and Arts events team have been assisting the Darlington Partnership with the organisation for the “Best of Darlington awards” to be held at Darlington Football Club on Friday, 16 February 2007.
4. Unsung heroes across Darlington will be rewarded for their dedication to the community. Two of the nominees who have made the most significant contribution will be crowned Darlington's Citizen of the Year and Young Citizen of the Year.

**Arts Development**

**HAPPI: The Health and Arts Peoples Partnership Initiative**

5. The Arts and Health Forum Event and Group Meeting took place at the Arts Centre on 12 January 2007. The aim of HAPPI is to affect positive changes in lifestyle and environment to provide creative opportunities for all.

The purpose of the event was:

- To bring people together who are actively involved in the arts and health fields and to provide opportunity for networking.
- To showcase an interesting and diverse range of arts taster sessions allowing attendees to experience ‘the arts’ in its broad, participatory and therapeutic sense.
- To present and share current and recent work being done with relevance to arts and health in the Darlington area.
- To encourage and inspire initiative, energy and enthusiasm for productive partnership working.

6. The event was an informative and creative day with opportunities to ask questions, meet people, and share ideas. Workshops took place in the morning session and presentations including creative feedback took place in the afternoon.
7. It is envisaged that the annual forum continues to establish itself as a valuable mechanism in supporting the work of the public, private and voluntary sectors.

### **Open Art Studio**

8. "The Open Art studio" has opened to the public at the Arts Centre, the aim of which is to provide resources that enable people, both with and without established mental health needs, to participate in creative and artistic activities and where mutual creativity can foster personal growth.
9. The Open Art studio is delivered in partnership with the 'One Life' programme and 'Lifestyle on referral'. For a three month pilot programme the arts service will open the art studio to the community on a membership based principle, which means members of the public and people who do or have suffered from mental ill health will be able to access the studio facilities on a drop in basis.
10. Initially they have the option of painting or drawing and as they experience the sessions they can participate in printing, ceramics, photography and video. The photography and video opportunities will be offered by the Darlington Media Workshop who are partners on the project.

### **Youth Theatre**

11. Darlington Arts Centre has been invited by Arts Council England to take part in the national Young People's Participatory Theatre (YPPT) project as a 'hub' venue. The YPPT project is a three-year initiative (2005/6-2008/9) funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
12. The project aims to work with young people aged 11-25 with a view to increasing opportunities and broadening the range of theatre related activity in which young people can participate.
13. Central to the YPPT project has been the establishment of a National Youth Council and nine regional groups to advise and take an active responsibility for the development of the project. The identification of 'hub' venues within each region is important to help the Arts Council support the work of the regional council groups, and ultimately develop the YPPT programme.

## **Dimensions arts project**

14. Adults with physical and/ or learning difficulties are participating in arts activities at the arts centre, eight participants and four careers attend a weekly taster session in a range of arts activities. The Project is being delivered in partnership with “Dimensions”, which is part of Darlington Action on Disability.

## **Arts Centre Courses**

15. A new term for weekly adult and children’s courses started in January. Classes are held throughout the day, enabling involvement from a cross section of the community.

## **Visual Arts**

16. Myles Meehan Gallery  
*‘Perceptions of Landscapes’*  
**Friday, 19 January 2007 – Saturday, 17 March 2007**
17. The Myles Meehan Gallery is playing host to an exhibition by Peter Hicks, Neil Hodgson and Chris Percy. Their representation of the North Yorkshire landscape reflects the natural world from the smallest detail to its largest vista.

## **Arts Centre Refurbishment**

18. Work is now under way at the Arts Centre on the entrance/foyer area. A temporary reception has been installed at the side of the building allowing access to staff, tenants and patrons. Information notices are displayed at the front of the building informing customers of the route to the entrance.

## **Community Sports/Sport Development**

19. The Extended Schools Programme within the Longfield School Cluster continues to deliver a diverse programme of activities for young people through the Big Lottery Fund grant.
20. Activities including Skiing, Snowboarding, Climbing, White-Water Rafting, Bollywood Dance and Archery have now been implemented with all sessions fully subscribed to date. As part of the development of the programme, training sessions are now underway for a Community Games festival, scheduled for July 2007, which will provide a celebration event for the young people within the project.
21. The Sports Development team have successfully co-ordinated a joint funding bid through Tees Valley Sport alongside Darlington Amateur Swimming Club and the Amateur Swimming Association to secure funding for a full time Community Swimming Coach within the town. The role will commence in April 2007 and the main focus will be centred on delivering a clear pathway in Darlington from Learn to Swim/School Swimming into the Darlington Swimming Club. The role will ensure sustainable provision of swimming, to help develop school club links and widen opportunities.

22. Work continues to develop the ‘Sustainable Westside’ programme within the Local Area Agreement process. Interim provision has been developed in several areas of the town (North Road, Harrowgate Hill and Lascelles) whilst a broader offer for young people is developed across Darlington. A consultation and taster activity session was carried out in the Lascelles Ward in December 2006 as part of the development of the broader programme and a Local Area Agreement Coordinator will be recruited in February 2007 to manage the development of the project.
23. There are now over 800 members physically active within the Zone Active project with a monthly throughput of 900 visits, engaging people of all ages in after school clubs, exercise classes such as Pilates, fit ball, dance classes and football and netball clubs.
24. In the past six months, the number of people participating reached the target for the full length of the project, so targets are currently being re-assessed. All other performance indicators have also been achieved to date.
25. The Gem Scheme is still running very successfully, a new part-time co-ordinator was appointed in November 2006 and has since developed four new community-based classes. There are now 66 qualified Gem Leaders with the next training course taking place at the end of January. Work is currently being undertaken to achieve accreditation for the Gem Training qualification through the Open College Network.
26. Following further partnering work alongside Darlington PCT’s Health Improvement Team, Leisure officers who have undergone relevant behaviour change training are now delivering Smoking Cessation programme’s within community venues. This has built on previous joint working with Darlington’s Obesity Strategy and the Lifestyle on Referral programme.

### **Lifestyle on Referral Scheme**

27. From 15 January 2007, following on from an extensive review, the Lifestyle on Referral course has now been re-branded as “Darlington One Life”. Each Exercise on Referral course within the Dolphin Centre will last for twelve weeks with a new course beginning every six weeks. There is capacity on the courses to cater for 90 patients on each twelve week course. In addition to the traditional exercise on referral, there are also classes on chronic back pain, obesity and a mental health fitness classes, all are in a community based setting. Arts on Referral has been developed to enable a broader menu of choices for patients and will include sessions at Darlington Arts Centre and the Music Forum.

### **Marketing**

28. The Spring 2007 season is now well underway. Tickets are selling fast for dramas such as “The Letter” and “To Kill A Mockingbird” at the Civic Theatre, and throughout the refurbishment, the wide variety of performances at the Arts Centre are proving to be extremely popular, with some performances selling out including Phil Cool.

29. "Cinderella" the Pantomime for 2006/07 has now finished. The show has proved to be one of the most popular pantos ever, exceeding sales targets. Work is now underway to establish the cast for this years pantomime 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'.

### **Library Activities**

30. The Bookstart Co-ordinator is now in post and we are achieving very high figures for the distribution of the book start packs. Practically every child in Darlington who is entitled to a pack now has one.
31. We have been displaying work created by young people form the Northallerton YOI. Feedback from the public has been very positive particularly about the poetry, which is very moving.
32. The Town Hall trolley service is going from strength to strength and a Town Hall reading group has now been established.
33. On 14 February, we hosted an event at Crown Street Library aimed at the Polish community. The event was run by the TUC and included information about a range of issues affecting economic migrants.

### **Darlington Railway Centre and Museum**

#### **Events**

34. The Museum has a student on placement from the Travel and Tourism Management degree at New College Durham who is working on the planning and evaluation of events at Easter and our Thomas event in July. She is on placement from 29 January until mid April for two days per week.

#### **Education and Access**

35. The Hub funded Oral History Project has started and the Project Officer has already collected ten interviews from a range of Darlington residents. The recent article in the Northern Echo has attracted more volunteers to come forward for interview.
36. The Museum Access Officer has begun an art outreach project working with members of GOLD, an artist and colleagues at the Arts Centre. A Taster day held at the museum on Saturday 27 January was popular and seven ladies from GOLD attended. The project looks at local history and the group will use the Ken Hoole Study Centre, the Local Studies Library at Crown Street to gather information and images and will use these to decorate clay tiles. Some of the tiles will be taken home by the group members and some will be made into panels to display at the Museum.
37. A number of outreach visits to schools have been made and further ones are planned, especially targeting schools that are non-visitors. The Museum is running a week of workshops for infant and nursery aged children to look at Victorian Toys and Games – there are 358 children booked in.

38. There is a full week of activities planned for half term in February, including arts and crafts, storytelling, and playing with Victorian Toys and Games – and the chance to meet a Victorian Lady. These activities have been part funded by a grant of £600 from Renaissance in the Regions (the museum hub).

### **Ken Hoole Study Centre**

39. The first month of 2007 has been extremely busy with almost double the usual number of enquiries to the study centre, ranging from family history enquiries to specialist picture research for authors both in the UK and overseas. Our Documentation Assistants Madi Grout and Katie Brown have also worked extremely hard, and have broken their own record for cataloguing by creating computerised records for over 500 museum items this month.
40. The Museum's Accreditation Application (showing that the museum meets an agreed national standard) was submitted as planned in early January. We would hope to hear back from MLA North East within a couple of months.

### **Project Funding Update**

41. Work to turn Darlington's historic Railway Centre and Museum into a top-class visitor attraction is expected to get underway after Easter. Funding for the scheme has been obtained from the following organisations: £498,000 Heritage Lottery Fund, £400,000 The Northern Rock Foundation, £385,000 European Regional Development Fund, £191,000 English Heritage and £150,000 Railway Heritage Trust.
42. Funding for the £1.7 million refurbishment of the Grade II listed Victorian station - home of the world's first passenger railway, which opened in 1842 on the Stockton to Darlington line - will be used to turn the museum into a top-class visitor attraction. The project will improve the facilities within the museum with new interactive displays, which will explain the significant role Darlington played in developing the railways - as well as the impact this had on the town. The refurbishment will provide greater flexibility around which locomotives are on display, with more scope for accommodating touring engines, which will help to keep the museum fresh and interesting. The Ken Hoole Study Centre will also be moving within the building, to provide better facilities, to enable more people to take advantage of the archives and artifacts, such as schools, colleges, historical groups and societies, as well as individuals. A programme of special activities is planned for the period when the Museum is closed for refurbishment.

**Councillor Lee Vasey**  
**Cabinet Member with Leisure Portfolio**