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**LEADER'S AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW**

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**Cabinet**

1. I have chaired two ordinary meetings and one special meeting of Cabinet since my last report to Council. The special meeting was called to consider the Council's first combined corporate and financial plan, Housing Revenue Account for 2008/09, Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management for 2008/09 and the new national scheme for concessionary bus travel from 1st April, 2008.
2. At the ordinary meetings consideration was given to the vision, priorities and themes of the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, prior to consultation being undertaken with the stakeholders. In addition, the process for developing the self-assessment for the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection for 2008 was considered.
3. In respect of my Economy Portfolio, there were a number of relevant items considered including the draft Darlington Local Development Framework, and the terms negotiated for the purchase of Arriva's leasehold interest in the bus depot. It was agreed that the acquisition be progressed, subject to confirmation of the receipt of external funding. Once confirmation of this funding is received, work will commence on removing the unsightly building and the creation of a temporary car park. In addition approval was given to a land exchange between this Council and Discovery Properties to facilitate the relocation of a sub-station on the Commercial Street car park and to incur expenditure to facilitate the marketing, developer selection and disposal process for the land at the Feethams West Site.
4. The first meeting of Cabinet in the Community took place on Tuesday, 15th January, 2008, at Holy Family Primary School, in conjunction with a 'Talking Together' event. The opportunity was given to the school for some its pupils to attend the meeting and ask questions of the Cabinet Members. The school were very keen to take up this opportunity and six very bright and lively young people attended the meeting and asked questions on various issues including school dinners, the parks, speeding, recycling and pollution.

**Town Centre**

5. I chaired the special meeting of the Town Centre Board, held on 7th January, 2008, at which the revised timetable for the proposed 'Oval' development was discussed. The Board Members in attendance at the meeting, although expressing concern in relation to the changes in the timetable, were appreciative of the work that the Council had already done to minimise any disruption that may be caused by the changes. There was a recognition that the long term value of this development far outweighs the short term challenges of major construction programmes.

6. The Working Group, established by the Town Centre Board to look at options for the Feethams/Beaumont Street sites considered the development briefs for the proposed office development for CTC Marine on Beaumont Street, and the process for preparing a development brief for the site as a whole; a report on options for the location of stalls on the Outdoor Market; and a report on the visit by members of the Working Group to Leeds and Doncaster markets.
7. I, along with the Chief Executive, visited a number of Town Centre Businesses to discuss any concerns or issues that they had, on an informal 1:1 basis.
8. There has been positive feedback from the recent marketing activity. 80,000 copies of the Wintertime Magazine were distributed in and around the Borough. The response to the competitions held in the magazine has increased considerably on all previous years. This I believe demonstrates that it was well received.
9. Work has started on the preparation of a new brochure – Unique, to promote the rich diversity of independent retailers present in the town. This follows on from the successful TV and radio campaign which ran in December 2007.

### **Darlington Partnership Board**

10. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 9th January, 2008, at which reports were considered on the process by which the Local Strategic Partnership would evolve to meet the new challenges of developing and delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement and the Joint Strategy Unit's new Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which gave an indication of Darlington's relative position compared to other local authority areas. In addition, an update on the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) was given by the Assistant Chief Executive.
11. Following an inspiring presentation from Brendan Foster on how mass participation events can really increase motivation towards a healthier lifestyle, I was delighted to be able to propose that the Board should support the 'Take to the Streets' campaign. Darlington becomes the first town in the country to sign up to it. The aim of the campaign is to boost the health of the nation by getting two million people involved in regular exercise by 2012.

### **Briefing by Chief Superintendent Carole Thompson**

12. Chief Superintendent Carole Thompson was invited to give a briefing to all Members of the Council on 15th December, 2007, which I attended. Her presentation included the aims and priorities for policing in the Borough, achievements to date and the resources available for neighbourhood, core and specialist policing.

### **Corporate Governance Group**

13. The work of the Corporate Governance Group, established to review this Council's Governance Arrangements is continuing and the contributions from all Members to a series of practical proposals is welcome. An interim report from the group can be seen elsewhere on this agenda.

## **Human Resources (Appointments) Panel**

14. I chaired the interview panels for the Assistant Director posts of Regeneration and Transport and Highways and Engineering.

## **Community Engagement**

15. At the Council meeting held on 19th July, 2007, a number of proposals were agreed, in order to foster closer working relations with residents and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), modernise communications and allow opportunities for the public to interact with the Council. As part of those proposals, I attended the joint meeting, held between Cabinet and the LSP Themed Group and Enquiry Group Chairs on 16th December, 2007. Whilst the focus of the joint meeting was to discuss the progress in delivering the sustainable community strategy the opportunity was taken, at the meeting, to consult the LSP on emerging Council policy. The development of an effective dialogue with the Partnerships themed group chairs is very welcome, particularly for those Cabinet Members who do not sit on the Partnership Board.

## **Meetings**

16. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of events including the Darlington Assembly and the Tees Valley Leadership Board.

**John Williams**  
**Leader and Economy Portfolio**