
NEW COUNCIL - NEW FOCUS

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director – Ada Burns, Chief Executive

Purpose of Report

1. This paper sets out a new direction for the Council in a series of interrelated plans, new structures and ways of working and a method of building capacity within the organisation to ensure that we remain fit for purpose as the environment in which we operate continues to change.

Summary

2. A great deal of work and reflection has taken place recently by both officers and members to determine what this organisation needs to do to respond to local needs and external requirements. These include supporting the LSP enquiry groups to develop the next community strategy and a new organisational development strategy, Leading Edge, which aims to ensure that we have the capacity to deliver our bold new ambitions. At the same time, the recent local government bill places new requirements on all local authorities, for example to develop new sustainable community strategies and local area agreements and a new form of inspection to replace Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).
3. This report summarises, at high level, the main external and internal stimuli for change. Darlington Borough Council's response to these drivers takes many forms: from new political portfolios to a proposed new management structure; from new ways of engaging the community to new behaviours and culture within the organisation. All of these developments are inter-linked and the agenda of this meeting comprises significant detailed pieces of work. The intention of this paper is to explain the interlinkages and set the scene for the subsequent reports.

Information and Analysis

4. A high level summary of the issues that have influenced thinking on what we need to do as an organisation to continue to serve the public and maintain our reputation as a high performing council comprises:
 - (a) the direction of the new administration – this builds on the track record of the council whilst ensuring that we focus more on community engagement to become a more inclusive and engaging council;
 - (b) the local government bill in which the main changes are:
 - (i) Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) – all local authorities are required to produce sustainable community strategies that set out the ambition for the places

they serve. The SCS is the way in which local authorities, in partnership with other stakeholders, define what they mean by place-shaping in their area. In many ways our existing community strategy fulfills the requirements of the SCS (in how it was developed and project managed for example) but the time is right to refresh it;

- (ii) Local Area Agreements (LAA) – these will be the delivery plans of the SCS setting out what targets will be achieved in the area and what funding, from across the whole of the public sector will be invested in the delivery of these targets. LAAs enhance and strengthen the role of local strategic partnerships (LSPs);
 - (iii) Community engagement is at the heart of the local government bill. A new statutory responsibility on local authorities to involve local people in the activities of the council is a theme that runs through the whole of the document. Similar direction is being applied to police and primary care trusts;
 - (iv) Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) - CAA does not simply inspect and rate organisations; it will examine how all organisations in Darlington work together to improve the quality of life of local people. This is a continuation of what we have experienced under best value and CPA. Under best value, services and parts of services were inspected. Under CPA, the whole organisation was inspected. The harder test CPA, which we face in March 2008, adds new challenge because, in this system, we will only be as strong as our weakest link. Under CAA we will be as strong as our weakest partner. Our existing community strategy and Striving for Excellence positioned us well to meet previous challenges. Our new community strategy and Leading Edge must similarly position us well for the future;
 - (v) Community Call for Action (CcfA) – we need to define within the constitution how the community can trigger a call for action, how this will feed into the governance arrangements and how results will be fed back to the public. Although further guidance is being prepared nationally, it is appropriate to incorporate this into the proposed review of the constitution.
- (c) Leading Edge, the next phase of organisational development will be crucial to the authority's continuing improvement. Just as Striving for Excellence focused on improving our performance and took us to a 4 star rating, successful delivery of Leading Edge will help us remain at the forefront of performance because it will build capacity to help us compete and has been designed to help us become more inclusive and engaging;
 - (d) continued drive for value for money – the white paper requires us to do new and different things. At the same time, Gershon efficiency targets have been increased. We need to be able to free up efficiencies within the organisation to do the new things. Leading Edge has been designed to help us do this;
 - (e) preparation for CPA corporate assessment in March 2008 – this paper highlights the significant amount of change that is planned for 2007/08. We face our third corporate assessment in March 2008. This presents us with three main challenges on top of the normal challenges that CPA presents in any case:

- (i) we must ensure that all changes identified here are project managed well and are proceeding to time/completed as planned, before the inspection;
 - (ii) the things that are being changed e.g. community engagement, our organisational capacity, officer-member structures are things which attract major scrutiny in corporate assessments;
 - (iii) there will be an overlap in staff involved in carrying out the changes and preparing for inspection.
5. It is immediately apparent that significant change is to be anticipated from this analysis of the high level local and national context. All attempts have been made to look at these drivers in a rounded holistic way so that we do not develop solutions or proposals that, for example, suit CPA but not local priorities. There is a natural order for us to approach this change encompassing plans, structures and new ways of working.
6. The main changes to our plans are:
- (a) to ensure that the direction of the new administration is integrated within our major plans, we postponed completion of the corporate plan. This was submitted to Special Council on 22 June. The departmental plans arising from the corporate plan were submitted to Cabinet on 10th July 2007.
 - (b) our current community strategy has served us well. However the world moves on and we need to revise the strategy, taking account of what has been achieved e.g. many of the most urgent physical developments associated with Darlington Gateway have commenced and we need to take account of emerging new issues such as addressing climate change, reducing obesity, improving parenting skills etc. Darlington Partnership have owned the existing community strategy and are now enthusiastically engaged in developing the new one to revised government guidelines. The process and timeline for developing the new SCS and its accompanying delivery plan (the LAA) is introduced and presented as agenda item 6 (c).
7. Changing plans and structures will only be effective if we have the right culture and work with appropriate behaviours and in new ways. The most important new ways of working are:
- (a) to ensure that the organisation is fit for purpose, a new organisational development strategy has been developed. A key component of the organisational development strategy is a new human resources strategy. Both papers were submitted to Cabinet on 10th July 2007;
 - (b) our thinking on taking forward the community engagement strategy agreed by Cabinet on 17 April 2007 to become a more inclusive and engaging council has been further developed through the establishment of the Connecting with Communities Unit, analysis of good practice elsewhere and a series of new ideas. These are summarised as agenda item 6 (d).
8. Our focus in Darlington has always been more on plans and delivery than structures. We have avoided the perpetual reorganisation that plagues many other organisations. However, the scale of our revised ambition, learning to date and necessity of becoming fit for purpose

now requires us to review and refine our structures. The main changes proposed to structures are:

- (a) to have Cabinet portfolios and Scrutiny arrangements whose remits are more understandable for the public and to better reflect our new priorities. The rationale for change and proposals for new portfolios are introduced and presented as agenda item 6 (e);
- (b) similarly, in order to better deliver our new priorities, requires us to refine the management structure.

Outcome of Consultation

- 9. The development of the next community strategy started with the establishment of partnership enquiry groups. A community engagement plan is in development to gain widespread input. The corporate plan is constructed from an iterative process of service planning which incorporates the results of the residents survey. The organisational development strategy has had widespread input from members, trade unions and staff at all levels.

Conclusion

- 10. This report summarises a programme of work that will almost immediately (March 2008) be subject to stringent external scrutiny. Significant momentum has built up by the coming together of external and internal drivers through which it is hoped that consensus can be quickly agreed. Such consensus combined with our track record provides confidence in delivery despite the hugely increased ambitions.

Legal Implications

- 11. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- 12. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Recommendations

- 13. It is recommended that the programme of work to develop a fresh vision for Darlington and to enhance the capacity of Darlington Borough Council to drive delivery of the Community Strategy be endorsed.

Reasons

14. The recommendations are supported by the following reason: to ensure that the Council develops a new vision and that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the new vision.

Ada Burns
Chief Executive

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

L O'Donnell
Extension 2013