
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Cabinet

1. I have chaired two ordinary and one special urgent meeting of Cabinet since my last report to Council at which a number of issues were discussed. The special urgent meeting of Cabinet was called to consider the Building Schools for the Future Primary Programme and the Building Schools for the Future Primary Programme Pilot Proposal, a response to which was required by the Department for Education and Skills by 14th June, 2006, together the submission of an Expression of Interest in an Academy in Darlington.

Town Centre

2. Work on the Darlington Pedestrian Heart Scheme is continuing and information boards have been erected around the Town Centre to keep people informed about the scheme. The boards have been designed to provide visitors and residents with more information on what the finished scheme will look like, when it is due to be completed and who to contact if they need more information.
3. The Pedestrian Heart team staffed an information exhibition at the Cornmill for one week (Monday to Sunday inclusive), commencing 26th June. The exhibition consisted of graphics, two models and a series of leaflets to publicise the key features of the scheme – Life Pulse, J Pease Statue, water feature and steps, events and markets areas, and the planters.
4. The findings from the review established to investigate the circumstances in which a gas main was found during the course of the Pedestrian Heart scheme, were endorsed by the Resources Scrutiny Committee at a special meeting held on 30th June, 2006. The recommendations from that review were considered and approved by Cabinet at its meeting held on 11th July, 2006.

Town Centre Board

5. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board held on 20th July, 2006, at which a number of reports were considered, namely the Town Centre Business Plan – Year 2 Action Points evaluation and approval for Year 3 priorities, update and evaluation of the consultations relating to a Strategy for Independent Retailers and update reports on the Town Centre Pedestrian Heart Scheme and the Commercial Street development.

6. The Board has launched a new partnership to help businesses thrive in the town. The event, called 'A Window of Opportunity: Darlington 2006/09' was held to 'kick start' proposals for the future of the town centre and to make the most of the opportunities that lay ahead and give them a competitive edge by creating a strong marketing campaign during and after the Pedestrian Heart works. A loyalty scheme for residents and visitors to Darlington will be an integral part of the scheme to promote the businesses located within the Borough and will be launched on 1st August.

Darlington Partnership Board

7. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 12th July, 2006, at which a number of issues were discussed, including the Community Strategy Performance 2005/06, the future structure of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, the Events Strategy and Town Twinning.

Town Crier

8. The Town Crier continues to be a cost effective method of keeping the residents of the Borough informed on council news and information. The Town Crier is one of the most economically produced council magazines in the country. However, communication is a two-way process and as well as providing information, the Council wants to listen to the views of the readers. To achieve this the Town Crier has an annual readers' survey as well as other surveys asking readers for their views on a range of issues. In addition to this, 'vox pops' have been introduced, in order to gain the views of the public on some of the high profile that may impact on the lives of many residents.

A to Z Guide of Council Services

9. The Council has produced an A to Z Guide of Council Services, which I launched at an official photocall on 26th June, 2006.. The guide has been produced to help people access the authority's services more easily. More than 100 different listings are included and copies are being distributed to every household and business in the Borough during July. The guide will be re-issued each year to take account of changes in services or contact details.

Assistant Directors Appointments

10. I chaired two meetings of the Council's Human Resources Panel (sitting as an Appointments Panel) for two Assistant Director posts within the authority. Jane Breheny was appointed to the post of Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Health within the Community Services Department and Gill Walker was appointed to the post of Assistant Director, with responsibility for outcomes of Being Healthy and achieving Social and Economic Wellbeing within the Children's Services Department. I am sure that Jane and Gill will make an excellent contribution to public services in Darlington.

Town Twinning

11. I accepted the invitation from our Twin Town of Amiens to attend their Fête dans la Ville, along with the Mayor of Darlington, Councillor Eleanor Lister, Councillor Chris McEwan, Cabinet Member with the Children's Services Portfolio and Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services. There are significant opportunities to enhance our international links, as many schools and other groups are doing and I am confident that the Darlington Partnership will endorse this and take this forward.

Darlington Gateway

12. I attended, along with Alan Milburn M.P., the Darlington Assembly event on 8th June, 2006. The theme for the Assembly was 'Taking Forward the Darlington Gateway'. Highly informative presentations were given by Richard Alty, Assistant Director, Development and Regeneration, on the Darlington Gateway, and Dr. Ricardo Gomez from Regeneris regarding future employment prospects for the local economy. This was followed by workshops, which allowed the many private and community sector representatives feed their input into the final report. It was one of the most successful events that the Darlington Partnership has hosted and was well attended by representatives from developers, service and retail sector businesses. The closing addresses were given by Alan Noble and Alan Milburn MP.

Street Scene

13. I, along with Peter Barron, Editor of the Northern Echo, attended a photocall for a supplement to the Northern Echo to mark the official launch of the 'Street Scene' initiative. The supplement was free with the Darlington edition of the Northern Echo on Monday, 3rd July, 2006, and it has also been made available in council buildings around the town to enable as many people as possible to find out about 'Street Scene'.

Appraisal Sub-Group

14. I chaired the Appraisal Sub-Group held on 17th July, 2006, at which the annual appraisal of the Chief Executive's performance was undertaken.

Meetings/Presentations

15. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of meetings including the ANEC AGM; the launch of the McMullen Bomber Print for Schools; the official re-opening of the Crown Street Library Foyer; the North East Assembly Annual General Meeting; Darlington Volunteering Awards organised by Darlington Council for Voluntary Service; and a visit to Abbey Road Junior School. I also attended the Local Government Association and Annual Conference together with the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Executive.

John Williams
Leader