
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

1. Since becoming Leader of the Council in May of this year, I have attended various introductory meetings which included many of the Leaders and Elector Mayors from throughout the region; the Chief of the Darlington Chamber of Commerce; Chief Officers from the voluntary and community sector; the Chief Executive and representatives from County Durham PCT; and the Chief Executive of the Association of North East Councils and Business Leaders. The meetings were held so that I could meet with them and discuss informally their work, and how the work of the Council fits into that work.
2. I am continuing to work with my Cabinet Colleagues, the Chief Executive and Directors in respect of the Council's finances, to ensure that the Council continues to provide quality services to the residents of the Borough, through the current difficult financial climate.
3. The Government is currently undertaking a review of Local Government Finance, and as part of the consultation in respect of that review, a meeting was arranged by the Association of North East Councils with Kay Willison, Deputy Director of Local Government Finance, Department for Communities and Local Government, on 5th September, 2011. The event provided the opportunity for all the Council's in the region to discuss the issues and implications for them of the Government's consultation, ahead of the deadline for responses of 24th October, 2011.
4. As part of the review of the Members' Allowance scheme, I was interviewed by the Panel, earlier this month. The outcome of the review will be considered by a future meeting of this Council.
5. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on, 14th September, 2011, at which a number of issues were discussed including the review of the Partnership, in particular engagement with Members and the Community; an Arts Vision for Darlington; and the development of an Economic Strategy for Darlington.
6. A number of consultation events have been held since the last meeting of Council in respect of the review of the Hyper Acute Stroke Services. The consultation period closed on 11th September, 2011, and this Council's response was forwarded by the Director of People to the NHS County Durham and Darlington by the required deadline. I would commend the work undertaken by the Health and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee in responding to the consultation. In particular I believe they made important efforts to ensure that the wider catchment area for Darlington Memorial Hospital were alerted to the issue and able to comment. It seems clear that the case to site the unit at Darlington Memorial Hospital is strong.

Celebrating Success

7. I was very pleased to visit the Openart Studio, along with Councillor Cyndi Hughes, which is based at the Darlington Arts Centre. This very successful initiative provides access to the arts in order to improve mental health and to develop emotional resilience. The Studio was originally only open to adults 18 years and over, but from September this year children, young people and families have been able to access the services available. This is an excellent initiative and is a positive example of partnership working between this Council and the PCT in order to improve mental wellbeing.
8. I recently attended a meeting of the Young Leaders Group. The Group, which was established through the Children and Young People Service of Darlington Association on Disability, meet every week and provides Inclusion, Participation and Leadership opportunities for disabled young people aged between 14 and 25 year olds. I was particularly pleased to discuss a project that the group were keen to start which they felt would benefit the whole community and I look forward to the outcome from that project.
9. Fabrick Housing Group recently completed the first of their 106 new homes at Woodland View on the former Beaumont Hill School site. The development will provide a mixture of two, three and four bedroom houses and will offer a range of affordable home ownership options to help people buy a new home, as well as properties for rent. I was pleased to accept an invitation to see those properties and to formally launch the scheme. The development of this site is a fantastic achievement during a property downturn and is yet another example of this Council successfully working in partnership with another organisation.

Policing and Community Safety

10. In my capacity as this Council's representative on the Police Authority, I spoke at a Stakeholder Workshop on 30th August, 2011, to look at the proposed introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012. I took the opportunity at the workshop to talk through issues, risks and opportunities for Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP).
11. I continue to attend meetings of the Darlington Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Executive Board. I am Chair of the CSP Board, which meets bi-monthly to consider current performance in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour and address any other relevant issues. The Board also receives reports from the CSP's Strategic Priority Group, which were established in March this year to ensure the progress of key priority areas. Some recent topics for discussion have been new strategic documents in relation to anti-social behaviour; domestic and sexual abuse; and the PREVENT agenda, which aims to tackle terrorism.
12. I continue to Chair meetings of the Drug and Alcohol Action Team Board and am pleased to note the successful relocation of the adult drug treatment services (The Gate) and young people's substance misuse team (SWITCH) to significantly improved premises. Darlington is already beginning to see benefits, with increased numbers of successful treatment outcomes being generated by both services in their first year since relocation.

Transformation and Business Model

13. I continue to liaise directly with officers and Cabinet Members in respect of the Transformation Programme to provide strategic leadership and attend meetings accordingly. A number of programmes have reported to Cabinet recently and there will be more to follow in the Autumn.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

14. Tees Valley Unlimited is currently developing a Business Plan for 2011/15, and a half day event was arranged to discuss the draft Business Plan in more detail. The event was well attended and it enabled Councils in the region to share their views on identified objectives and priority activities.
15. The North East Chamber of Commerce, held a Darlington Committee Open Meeting on 8th September, 2011, hosted by Teesside University in their new campus building, which I was pleased to attend as the key note speaker. The meeting was made up of a number of members from the Darlington area, who represented a cross-section of employers in the town. The meeting gave those employers the opportunity to give their views on the current economic climate and on the business community in the area. An update on the Healthy Workplace Project was given by Susan Lee from the Darlington and Co Durham NHS Foundation Trust.
16. I attended Tees Valley Unlimited's Leadership Board meetings, and Tees Valley Leaders and Mayors meetings, to agree the approach to creating an Enterprise Zone in the Tees Valley. I am pleased that the Government agreed to our proposals for a Zone focussed on attracting jobs and investment which builds on the main internationally-competitive strengths of the Tees Valley and which will benefit our economy. In Darlington we will benefit from the growth of low carbon and process industries across the Tees Valley, as well as the specific opportunity to provide a home for digital businesses at Central Park.
17. The Council, Association of North East Councils (ANEC) and Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) have been working with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on how the HCA will take forward the portfolio of land in One NorthEast's (ONE's) ownership when HCA takes stewardship of that land as a result of the abolition of ONE. ANEC and TVU have also been discussed future transport funding mechanisms for schemes of more than local significance. ANEC has been considering the Governments Local Government Resource Review.

Bill Dixon
Leader