
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

1. Following extensive consultation, the Council approved its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2012/15, at the meeting of Council held on Thursday, 1st March, 2012. A ten week consultation period with residents, local groups and businesses prompted over 6,100 responses and resulted in a number of changes to the initial proposals contained within the draft Medium Term Financial Plan which was published in November 2011. The process of implementing those proposals has already commenced, with the consideration and approval of a number of implementation reports by Cabinet. During this process, we will continue to do all that we can to minimise the human impact of the cuts on our residents and staff.
2. The Council has been working in partnership with the Darlington Partnership and the Northern Echo in launching the 'Darlington Foundation for Jobs'. The initiative will run throughout 2012 and beyond and will give young people a better chance of finding work by developing more effective links between schools, colleges, universities and employers to help them get a better understanding of the world of work and to get better connected with local employers. I am very pleased that the Right Reverend Justin Welby, Bishop of Durham, agreed to be the patron of this important initiative. A number of companies from within the town, including AMEC, CTC Marines, Magnet and Mech-Tool Engineering have already committed their support to the campaign. There are a number of targets for the project in the first year which include 100 employers to sign up to offer three-month internships or work placements; 100 additional apprenticeships; 50 young people developing self-employment skills; and for Darlington to be developed as a centre of excellence for creating opportunities for young people.
3. The Darlington Partnership has a small number of Action Priorities for the year, which rely on contributions from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors. These priorities are identified as those issues having the greatest impact on the communities of Darlington and include giving our young people a better chance of getting a job; harm caused to our community through the misuse of alcohol; and ensuring the elderly in our community are well supported. These priorities were the main items which were discussed at the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 14th March, 2012, which I attended.
4. Darlington has signed up to be a British Heart Foundation (BHF) Heart Town and is working in partnership with the Darlington Partnership and the British Heart Foundation to help put the heart back into Darlington as part of the charity's 'Mending Broken Hearts' Appeal, which was launched last year to mark the charity's 50th Anniversary. It is pleasing to note that Darlington has become only the second Heart Town in the North East and one of the first fifty towns in the UK to wear its heart on its sleeve and sign up to be a BHF Heart Town, and is another example of good partnership working between this Council and other organisations.

5. I met with the Development Manager, Federation of Small Business to discuss 'The Federation of Small Businesses' which has launched the Real Life Entrepreneurs Campaign, to champion and promote the interests of real life entrepreneurs in Darlington. The campaign is calling on the Government to help real life entrepreneurs by making access to credit easier, simplifying the tax system, easing the burden of regulation and ensuring that Real Life Entrepreneurs are paid on time.

Celebrating Success

6. I was very pleased to attend the 16th Annual Vibe Awards 'Positive for Youth' held at the Civic Theatre on 15th March, 2012. This year's Vibe Awards had a slightly different focus and slightly different categories than in previous years to enable nominations to be made for young people who have made the greatest steps forward against the odds.

Policing and Community Safety

7. In January, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) announced the contract award for the new adult, Integrated Drug and Alcohol Recovery Treatment Service in Darlington. North East Council on Addictions (NECA), who have been delivering high quality substance misuse services in the Borough for over ten years, were successful in winning the contract. The new service will be launched on 1st April, 2012 and will operate from existing premises at The Gate and Enterprise House. A working group is preparing to refresh the Darlington Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy – Safer Drinking Safer Darlington – on publication of the anticipated new, national strategy after Easter. The young people's Social Norms Survey results show a downward trend in reported substance misuse for the third and fourth years running in schools across the Borough.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

8. Tees Valley Unlimited Board Members recently conducted a tour of local authority areas and Darlington was visited on 8th March, 2012. Tees Valley Unlimited are progressing work on the implementation of the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone and preparing for the allocation of Growing Places Fund to be discussed at the next meeting of the Board. Work through Tees Valley Unlimited should make a significant contribution to bringing forward the Central Park development, where the new planning powers for the Enterprise Zone have now been agreed by the Government.

Bill Dixon
Leader