
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Peer Review

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge took place between 4 and 7 June 2013 and addressed the five core components, plus three additional areas requested by the Council. Since my last report to Council we have now received the final report from the Team. The Team were impressed by what they found in Darlington and made a number of recommendations including the need to ensure that there is a balance between the messages that we send out to our staff and public about our financial challenge, and the messages that we send out about the good things that are happening and our hope and optimism about the future; the need to work at a faster pace to identify and then implement collaborations and arrangements that offer the best prospect of meeting our challenges and making the most of our opportunities; and the need to work more closely with other public services. These recommendations and other useful ideas and reflections that are contained within the report are welcomed by myself, my Cabinet colleagues and the Council's Chief Officers Executive, who have already started working on how best we take forward that learning.

Budget Advisory Panels

2. The views expressed in the Budget Advisory Panels, were brought together for 'The Big Debate' which was held on Saturday 20 July 2013. Members of the Council, public agencies, community groups and the public were given the opportunity to put forward their case to the Council at this event, for the public services they valued most. The event was well attended.
3. As part of the budget process, digital media students from Darlington College produced a short animated film to explain the financial difficulties faced by the Council.
4. Proposals to support a further round of engagement are being worked on.

General Updates

5. I was pleased to meet Sue Snowden, the Lord Lieutenant for County Durham, when she visited Darlington earlier this month. The Lord Lieutenant spent time visiting a number of venues while she was in Darlington including FRADE (Furniture Reclamation and Delivery Enterprise), Age UK, Lingfield Point Business Park and Subsea Innovation Limited.

6. I continue to undertake business engagement visits throughout the Borough and Tees Valley and I have recently visited PD Ports, Nifco and SABIC. This is part of a systematic programme of business engagement to ensure that the Council can support the various sectors within the Borough and play a full part in growing the Tees Valley Economy.
7. I continue to attend meetings with the East Coast Mainline Authorities (ECMA) to develop the case for investment and gain greater involvement in the decision making around the line. The Department for Transport has agreed to listen to ECMA's views on the East Coast franchise, and a detailed business case is being prepared by ECMA, with Darlington and York council officers leading on this. I have also met with the Transport Minister to discuss the East Coast Rail Network, Bank Top Station proposals and Trans Pennine Service. On 4 September 2013 I attended a Ministerial meeting on the East Coast Mail Line (ECML) as Vice Chair of ANEC along with Councillor Paul Watson, Chair of ANEC and Leader of Sunderland City Council. On 11 September I joined Jenny Chapman MP in attending a parliamentary presentation discussing the future of the Cross Pennine train franchise. Both meetings went well and I continue to present the case for any early upgrade of Darlington Bank Top Railway Station.
8. Significant progress is being made with regard to the relocation of DfE to the new office building proposed to the rear of the Town Hall. A planning application has been submitted and enabling works are scheduled to commence late September following the completion of the legal documentation with DfE.

Health and Well Being Board

9. A meeting of the Health and Well Being Board was held on 10 September 2013, which I continue to Chair. A presentation was given at the Board on NHS England's 'A Call to Action', which was a new engagement exercise involving patients, the public, partners and health and social care staff, to elicit views on how best to meet some of the major challenges the NHS faces over the next 10 years, and on the role of Health and Well Being Boards in this initiative.
10. A number of reports were also considered at the meeting on a number of issues including alcohol harm reduction; NHS England social care payments; a progress report on 'Transforming Care: A National Response to Winterbourne View Hospital; winter planning; welfare reform; the new Quality Assurance System, in response to the Francis Report; and update reports on Healthwatch, the Clinical Programme from Darlington's Clinical Commissioning Group, the Health and Social Care Integration Pioneers and Transformation Challenge Award and the health and social care delivery plan.

Darlington Partnership

11. I attended the last meeting of Darlington Partnership Board on 10 July, 2013. The Board confirmed that the following conditions would be needed to realise the strategic ambitions for Darlington :-

- (a) where people recognise the importance of taking responsibility for the way they and their families live their lives (like not littering and making sure the kids get to school on time);
 - (b) where people organise themselves in order to help others in their community;
 - (c) where services are delivered effectively through collaboration;
 - (d) where every single pound is spent wisely in order to make the most impact; and
 - (e) where the economy thrives and all people who live in Darlington have equal life chances.
12. The Board then considered how the Partnership can exert it's influence most effectively to bring about these conditions and reached the conclusion that, of the five conditions, the Partnership had the ability to exert most influence over encouraging personal responsibility, developing social capital and supporting a thriving economy.
13. Over the coming months, the Partnership will be planning action to help bring about these conditions.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

14. I continue to attend meetings of the Tees Valley Unlimited Leadership Board, ANEC and Durham Tees Valley Airport Board. TVU is continuing to negotiate with the Government on 'City Deal'. Preparations are being made for substantial EU Cohesion funds to come to Tees Valley from 2014. Preparations are also being made for the Single Local Growth Fund to come to TVU, though a significant proportion of this is money that would otherwise have come to local authorities, and some of which will be subject to competitive bids to Government.

Policing and Community Safety

15. The Youth Offending Service has won a National award, in recognition for their work around Restorative Justice, which they have progressed in conjunction with Durham Constabulary. The award which was presented in London in July was given by the Howard League for Penal Reform. This award demonstrates the effectiveness of work around Restorative Justice in Darlington and provides a sound base upon which to build newer projects such as the Neighbourhood Resolution Initiative.
16. The Neighbourhood Resolution Initiative mentioned above now has 34 volunteers who will shortly be undergoing training. There have already been four nuisance cases successfully resolved by the project. Some of these had been on-going for several years which shows the benefits that this new approach can bring.
17. The Community Safety Partnership and the Local Safeguarding Adults and Childrens' Boards are currently working together to extend the 'Safe Place To Be' Initiative to include adults who are victims of hate crime. This initiative will be implemented early in the autumn.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

18. The adult Connected Recovery treatment service has now been embedded, with an excellent report from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), following an unannounced inspection earlier this year, and an independent review of the implementation which highlighted significant achievements in the early days of the service. You can see the CQC Final Report at the following site: www.cqc.org.uk
19. Quarter 1 performance data from the service is showing an upward trend in successful completion outcomes. To enhance this progress, the DAAT and NECA are exploring the option to participate in a digital pilot to maximise the use of technology, such as texting services, to increase retention and prevent relapse.
20. The development of the Recovery Centre is going well with a formal launch to take place in September.
21. A full review of the young people's service, SWITCH, is underway to build on excellent performance to date and determine the nature of the service in the future.

Bill Dixon
Leader