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**LEADER AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW**

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1. Since my last report, there have been a number of significant developments for both the Borough and for the Council.
2. I, along with my Cabinet colleagues, are working with the Corporate Management Team to develop a revised Medium Term Financial Plan. Members will be aware of the ongoing challenges the Government is facing in balancing the nation's budgets following the investment it has made in responding to the recession. This will inevitably have an impact on Local Government funding, and this Council, like all local authorities, is facing a significant financial challenge in the short to medium term in light of a likely significant reduction in income from the Government. In order to respond to this financial challenge, a new Business Model for the Council has been produced. This Business Model comprises of three strands, namely, focussing on securing efficiencies; reliance upon 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed' to support the process of prioritisation for service delivery and investment; and the development of a more mixed economy in terms of arrangements for delivery of services.
3. The Council is continuing to put arrangements in place to mitigate the effects of the recession, where possible, and to plan for a sustained programme of initiatives in response to it. The Council has invested heavily in its partnership working and the strength of relations across the sectors is paying dividends in ensuring that a co-ordinated response is being developed. A number of initiatives are planned or are already underway, some of which are detailed in the business engagement section of this report below.
4. I chaired the meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership Executive Group held on 21st October, 2009, at which Philippa Corner of the Audit Commission gave a verbal presentation on the Comprehensive Area Assessment pre-publication report and Miriam Davidson, the Director of Public Health, gave an overview of the effect of the economic downturn on health. A number of other issues were discussed at the meeting including a report on Service Planning; the project, which was currently being undertaken by eVOLution, in partnership with this Council and Jobcentre Plus, into worklessness; and the work being undertaken to increase apprenticeships in public agencies.
5. I attended the Darlington Partnership Board held on 11th November, 2009. The main focus of the meeting was the current economic downturn, and consideration was given to the response to the downturn in Darlington and the implications for the Council as a result of the likely reduction in Local Government funding. A report was also considered outlining the current position and timetable in relation to the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

6. The Darlington Experiment, which was launched in September, is progressing well. This is an exciting new project, aimed at putting the Borough on the map by getting everyone involved in raising the profile of Darlington on-line, through the use of social media websites. It is hoped that the experiment will boost visitors to the Borough, encourage businesses to move here and help to make it an even better place to live, work and visit.

### **Economy Portfolio**

7. It is pleasing to note that the £370,500 Future Jobs Fund funding for 2009/10 and 2010/11 has been released to provide 57 job placements, on behalf of a wider partnership that are committed to assisting medium-term unemployed residents of Darlington into sustainable employment. The scheme is aimed at 19 to 24 year olds from across Darlington and particularly those from unemployment 'hotspots' to help them back into sustainable employment by addressing barriers to employment and offering training opportunities.
8. Tees Valley Regeneration (TVR) is to be wound up as a company by the end of March 2010 and Cabinet considered and approved successor arrangements for its functions. TVR has been successful in working towards its objectives and now is an appropriate time to integrate its work more closely with the wider work of Tees Valley Unlimited, which has evolved since TVR was formed. This change will create more effective arrangements for driving forward the delivery of complex physical regeneration projects and business investments in the Tees Valley as well as creating efficiencies, greater clarity and improved accountability by bringing functions together under Tees Valley Unlimited.
9. A draft Revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been approved and published as the basis for public and other consultations. The key changes made to the SCI have been made to ensure that it aligns with changes to the development plan system and development management procedures, processes and protocols and the Council's own organisational changes.
10. **Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF)** – The DCSF have been granted planning permission for the construction of a contemporary five storey office building allowing staff to be relocated from outdated accommodation at Mowden Hall.
11. **University of Teesside** – The University has gained planning permission for a satellite campus development at Central Park which will provide for undergraduate and post graduate courses. The opportunity for a University education in Darlington means local people can now access training and education in the skills that will help them to drive Darlington's future growth and prosperity.

## Town Centre

12. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board held on 12th November, 2009, at which a presentation was given on the National Retail Skills Academy. A number of other reports were considered at the meeting including evaluations of the Darlington Food Festival 2009 and the Events Programme 2009; proposals for the Winter Programme of events for 2009; an update of the current activities of the Town Centre Management Team, including recent footfall statistics for the Town Centre; requests to access the funding given by the Government to help town centres through the current economic downturn; and the progress of the Town Centre Traders Association.
13. **Dine 3** - A survey on the scheme was sent to all members. Example questions were 'how often they use it', 'which restaurants they use it at' and 'which offers are mostly used'. From the returned completed questionnaires more than 50% of those stated that they eat out more regularly because of the scheme. Virtually 100% state that they thought the regular dine newsletter was informative and helpful and also virtually 100% thought that dine was a good scheme.
14. **Unique 2** - Membership of the 'unique members' scheme' continues to increase at a healthy rate. There are now over 2,000 members signed up - a very encouraging number of people expressing an interest in shopping at the town centre's unique independent retailers.
15. **Shop Local Campaign** has now started. 50 Darlington buses are advertising the scheme as well as it being promoted in a two page spread in the Town Crier, on the Darlington Borough Council and Visit Darlington websites and through press coverage. This campaign will run until the 22nd November.
16. **New TV Ad** - Work in partnership with the Darlington Town Centre Traders Association is currently being undertaken for the new Darlington Town Centre Television advert. This partnership working has allowed us to extend the amount of coverage of the advert with both the Association and the Council paying for a set number of viewing slots. This will increase the viewing slots from the 20 we had for the last advert to 30 for this Christmas.

## Business Engagement

17. **Graduate Internships** - Discussions have taken place with the University of Teesside, eVOLution and Jobcentre Plus. We have secured 2 graduate internships funded through Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) to be hosted at the Town Hall for a 3-month internship. The interns have been tasked with looking at the issue of worklessness to assist in developing a strategy for Darlington.
18. **Apprenticeships in the Wider Public Sector** - The Borough Council is leading on examining the appetite for apprenticeships across the wider public sector in Darlington. Following the launch of the new National Apprenticeship Service in April 2009, there has been a drive to encourage the public sector to take a lead in increasing apprenticeship numbers. At present, DBC employs 27 apprentices across a wide range of occupational areas.

19. **Events & Seminar Programme** - The Business Engagement team is now committed to delivering at least one business seminar each month and is seeing good numbers of businesses in attendance. Recent seminars have included 'Social Networking for Businesses Seminar' on 7th October which considered the business applications of Facebook, YouTube and other social networking (62 attendees); 'Bite Size Business Basics' – Captain Sparky's PR Toolkit' on 20th October which provided practical advice on PR activity and drafting press releases (32 attendees). The latest scheduled seminar was 'How to Do Business with the Public Sector' on 12th November. This event offered an insight to local businesses of how they might seek future opportunities with Darlington Borough Council and the wider public sector. The event also provided an opportunity to 'Meet the Buyer' from a wide range of public sector organisations.
20. **Encouraging Engineering Project** - Funded through the BAT Legacy, this project seeks to promote engineering as a career option to gifted and talented youngsters in Darlington – aiming to address the issue of graduate retention and counter the effects of an ageing workforce. Employers involved are CTC Marine Projects, Cummins, Mech-Tool Engineering and Henry Williams Limited. The project will offer a subsidy of £1,000 per term for the 4-year duration of a Mechanical Engineering degree (the monies to be paid against agreed expenditure). The employers will offer a mentoring relationship together with paid summer vacation placement opportunities. The project was launched to students on 11th November with a hosted tour at Cummins.
21. **'Darlington Into Work' – Employability Project** - Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit and the Borough Council have successfully secured monies through One NorthEast to deliver 'Darlington into Work' – this project will provide information, advice and guidance together with training support to residents that have been unemployed for less than 12 months to assist them in securing employment. A tender exercise has recently been conducted to secure a delivery organisation and the successful tenderer will be announced shortly.
22. **Employ a Young Person Campaign** - Over 230 businesses - each employing over ten people - were contacted by a letter from Alasdair MacConachie on behalf of the Partnership, highlighting the growing problem of youth unemployment in the town, and encouraging businesses to consider taking on an additional young person. The Business Engagement team is presently following up this letter with telephone calls to each employer to gain intelligence in respect of potential recruitment and to raise awareness of the support available to local employers. Additionally, completion of the Darlington Employer Skills Survey is also actively being encouraged through telephone dialogue.

**John Williams**  
**Leader and Economy Portfolio**