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**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

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1. I, along with my Cabinet colleagues, have been working with the Council's Chief Officers Executive, in collating the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2013/17. The financial settlement received just before Christmas confirmed officers' projections for the next two years. Darlington faces an unprecedented challenge to its ability to meet the needs and aspirations of residents. We shall be bringing forward proposals to examine what level of service the Council can provide over the coming months.
2. I continue to Chair meetings of the Shadow Health and Well Being Board and a further meeting of the Board has been held since my last report to Council. A number of issues were discussed at the meeting, which enabled debate and discussion to take place between the Council, health and voluntary organisations in advance of the public health functions transferring from County Durham and Darlington to this Council on 1 April 2013. A report on the future public health configuration was discussed at the meeting which described the operating model for public health from 1 April onwards.
3. I was pleased to note that the Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group had a successful Authorisation visit in December.
4. Cabinet considered and approved a number of development principles for the regeneration of the Town Centre, at its meeting held on 4 December, 2012. As part of the regeneration work, consideration was given to a vision for the Town Centre, the future of the Town Hall and the use of Council land for development.
5. The Darlington Partnership has overhauled its website and now has a linked facebook and twitter account which will help it communicate and engage more effectively. The Community Workstream of the Partnership which Councillor Andy Scott has established has elected Jan Cossins, Kevin Nicolson and Neil Campling as its three representatives to the Darlington Partnership Board. All the targets that were set for creating opportunities for young people and joint working between businesses and schools have been exceeded. The Partnership Board is committed to ensuring the future of the initiative as it is clearly succeeding in improving the vocational prospects of young people in Darlington. A celebration event led by the Partnership's patron, the Archbishop of Canterbury Elect, the Right Reverend Justin Welby was held on 11 January, 2013. The Partnership is also working with the police and voluntary sector in expanding the scope of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to take a particular interest in elderly people in the community. The Partnership has supporting the elderly as one of its 'Action Priorities' for 2012/13.

6. I attended the Partnership Board meeting held on 9 January 2013 at which the public sector agencies summarised their current budget position and strategies going forward. In addition a presentation was given on Darlington Cares which is an initiative that brings together the skills and expertise of businesses and other local employers and their employees to make a positive difference to the local community. A Partnership Assembly which addresses Welfare Reform was held on 25 January. The reforms which come into effect in April 2013 introduce wide ranging changes and will affect a significant number of people in and out of work in Darlington. The aim of the Assembly was to raise awareness and to ensure all sectors were working together effectively to support people in accommodating the changes.
7. The Community Advice Partnership (CAP) arranged a stakeholder funder networking event on 30 November 2012, which I was invited to attend in order to celebrate what has been achieved to date and to discuss and plan for the future of advice services in Darlington. Jenny Chapman MP was one of the key-note speakers at the event.

### **Regional and Tees Valley Updates**

8. I have also attended a meeting with other East Coast Leaders, Chief Executives and Officers with the Rail Minister in order to discuss the priorities for the East Coast Line and the franchising process.
9. I attended the ANEC Leaders and Elected Mayors Group on 18 December where we discussed Rail Decentralisation and the LGA 2013/14 Business Plan; the TVU Special Leadership Board on 10 January regarding City Deal; and the TVU Leadership Board on 23 January, again for the City Deal. I met with Lord Shipley on 11 January in relation to City Deal.
10. A special meeting of Tees Valley Unlimited Leadership Board was held on 10 January 2013, to discuss City Deal. City Deal was launched by the Government in December 2011 with the aim of creating powerful, innovative cities that were able to shape their economic destinies, with civic and private sector leaders freed to look outwards to businesses and communities rather than upwards to central government for solutions. Eight 'core cities' were appointed in the first wave deals and twenty 'city' areas have been invited to apply in the second wave. The Tees Valley sub-region, of which Darlington is part, has been invited to apply in the second wave, and the Board meeting agreed our Expression of Interest.

### **Policing and Community Safety**

11. The work around the establishment of Community Panels is progressing and approval has been given to recruit the Co-ordinator. The Community Panels are a continuation of the successful work around Restorative Justice that has taken place in Darlington in recent years. The current project is funded through the Performance Reward Grant.

12. Mr Ron Hogg was elected as the first Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in County Durham and the Community Safety Partnership will be working closely with him to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the future. A Police and Crime Consultation Day entitled 'Your Money, Your Police, Your Say' was held in Darlington on 13 December 2012, at which the newly appointed PCC outlined his vision and priorities. Presentations were also given at the event on the work being undertaken in a number of areas including supporting victims; operational policing priorities; and the police budget and precept options.
13. In addition to attending the consultation day, I met with Ron Hogg and Lesley Davies, Chief Executive of Durham Police Authority, to discuss the role of the PCC and support for Darlington. At that meeting, it was agreed that Ron Hogg will spend one day each week in Darlington.
14. The Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) has entered into commissioning dialogue with the newly elected Police Crime Commissioner and had an initial meeting, to be followed up in the New Year.
15. Crime for the 12 months to November reduced by 15 per cent compared to last year. In Darlington, this means there were 1300 fewer victims of crime. Anti-social behaviour for the same period reduced by 39 per cent - a massive 3574 fewer victims.
16. A number of successful community safety initiatives have been developed in the town for example 'Operation Sledgehammer' was set up to tackle the high rates of metal theft in the area. This resulted in a reduction in metal theft and also played a part in influencing a recent change in the law which will help reduce this crime locally and nationally.
17. On 21 November 2012, I chaired a launch event at The Gate to open the new adult, integrated drug and alcohol 'Connected Recovery' treatment service. The event also launched the refresh of the Borough alcohol strategy, 'Safer Drinking – Safer Darlington 2012-2015 the Next Steps'. The event was well supported with a key-note speech from the National Treatment Agency national Recovery Lead, Mark Gillman.
18. The Public Health Grant Allocation for the forthcoming two years was announced in January (£6.798m in 2013/14 and £6.989m in 2014/15), prior to the move of drug and alcohol commissioning, with Public Health, into the local authority from April. As part of this transition, I attended an event in December, which acknowledged the work of the local providers and commissioners in delivering drug and alcohol treatment across the North East of England, reflecting on the role local authorities have played and will play in the future.

**Bill Dixon**  
**Leader**