
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

1. Throughout March a series of roadshows were held by the Local Government Association (LGA) to engage with regional partners, and enable dialogue on the future role of local government, its sustainability, and funding. I attended the Durham roadshow on 26th March 2013, and discussion included sustainable funding, growth, the future of social care, welfare reform, and a new, independent model for local government.
2. Whilst at the roadshow, the Chief Executive and I had the opportunity to meet with Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell, the Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and Chair of the LGA, who will be part of the team conducting the Corporate Peer Challenge in Darlington from 4-7 June 2013.
3. Preparations continue for the Corporate Peer Challenge, which will address five core components, plus three additional areas requested by the Council. The core components are understanding local context and priority setting, financial planning and viability, political and managerial leadership, governance and decision making, and organisational capacity, with the three additional areas being to look at the actions taken to deliver change and drive down costs, test and constructively challenge current plans and proposals, and identify any other potential measures to manage down demand, reduce or deliver services in more cost-effective ways, including through whatever delivery mechanism.

Cabinet

4. At its meeting on 9 April 2013, Cabinet accepted the Business Case for Three Borough Collaboration, establishing the viability of a People Services collaboration between Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Councils, and it was agreed that the governance arrangements for the oversight and strategic direction of the project comprising Leaders, Lead Members, Chief Executives and Directors of People Services, be continued.
5. Cabinet also received an update report on the Council's performance for the period 1 April to 31 December 2012, including progress against key performance measures targets and outcomes identified within the Council's agreed performance management framework. A number of service areas were identified as performing well and operating above agreed targets, and the report also highlighted a number of organisational and service achievements.

Health and Well Being Board

6. In my capacity as the Chair of the Health and Well Being Board, I attended a presentation from Professor Mike Kelly, Public Health Excellence Director, National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 23 April 2013. The informative presentation on the role of NICE, and its involvement with local government, was followed by an in-depth question and answer session.
7. Following the transfer of responsibility for Public Health from the NHS to Local Government, it is important that the Council continues to receive such support and advice to ensure that we work as effectively as possible to improve health and tackle inequalities.

Department for Education (DfE)

8. A strong case has been made for the DfE to say within Darlington when it moves out of Mowden Hall. A range of good sites is available to DfE, and the town centre hub option provides an innovative and deliverable option. I, Jenny Chapman MP, the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Opposition have worked together with other officers to ensure all relevant people in Government are well aware of the case.

Darlington Partnership

9. Darlington Partnership Board at its meeting in March agreed one Action Priority for 2013/2014 – to support communities and overcome isolation through the Good Neighbour Scheme. The Board's Executive Group has since been working through ideas to take this forward, and how best to involve a range of voluntary and community groups. The Chair of the Partnership Board, Alasdair MacConachie, will be personally taking responsibility for this action over the next year.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

10. Work is progressing on negotiating the Tees Valley City Deal with Government.

Policing and Community Safety

11. The Co-ordinator for the Community Panels has been appointed and started during the week commencing 18 March. Expressions of interest from potential volunteers have started to come in and are being followed through with a view to starting training and preparing for the first panel.
12. The Good Neighbour Scheme, which aims to support vulnerable people in their community, through Neighbourhood Watch volunteers, continues to develop and is expected to become operational at the end of this month.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

13. As of 1 April, the DAAT has moved into the authority as part of the Public Health Team, transferring in from the disbanded PCT. Business continues, with all DAAT commissioned drug and alcohol services issued with DBC Contracts for 2013-14 by 31 March.

Town Twinning

14. Preparations have commenced to mark the 60th Anniversary of Darlington's Town Twinning, and I have been involved in meetings and discussions in relation to the arrangements. The celebrations will take place 6 to 9 June, which will also coincide with the 150th Anniversary of Darlington Markets.

150 years of Darlington Markets

15. I have also been involved in arrangements to mark the 150th anniversary of Darlington's Covered Market Hall and Clock Tower. To celebrate the event, the Council will be holding a Victorian-themed weekend of fun, activities and events in the Market Square and Covered Market Hall over the weekend of 7 and 8 June 2013.

**Bill Dixon
Leader**