
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

1. I am continuing to work with my Cabinet Colleagues, the Chief Executive and Directors in respect of the Council's finances, to ensure that the Council continues to provide quality services to the residents of the Borough, through the current difficult financial climate. As part of this work a draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/15 was considered at a special meeting of Cabinet held on 22nd November, 2011. The plan is now out for public consultation and will be considered at a future meeting of Council scheduled to be held in March 2012.
2. The annual letter of the Local Government Ombudsman was considered by Cabinet on 4th October, 2011, which provided the Council with a summary of statistics on complaints made about the authority for the year ending 31st March, 2011. It was pleasing to note that although more people chose to exercise their right to refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, which is expected in light of the pressures on public services in the current financial climate, the Council did not receive a single maladministration report.
3. Since the last report to Council I have attended a number of Business Engagement Visits, including Orange, where I met with the site Manager for Darlington and the Director of Operations. As a main employer in the area, we discussed a number of initiatives that we can collectively engage in, including their corporate social responsibility and how they can work with schools and colleges.
4. I was pleased to accept an invitation from John Orchard, Director of Marchday, to tour Lingfield Point. During the visit the various opportunities available for businesses on the site were highlighted to me.
5. I have continued to attend a number of introductory meetings since becoming Leader of the Council, and since my last report to Council I have met with Martin Phillips, who has taken over the role of the Director of the PCT; Paul Garvin, Chair of the North Tees NHS and Alan Foster, Chief Executive, regarding Health Care in the Tees Valley, proposed cuts in services and implications for the residents of Darlington; and Steve Gill, Durham Tees Valley Airport Director. Steve was appointed as Director on 1st September 2011. Steve is responsible for planning, directing and managing the day to day operations of both Durham Tees Valley Airport and Robin Hood Airport Doncaster Sheffield, under the direction of the Peel Airports Chief Operating Officer with support from the wider Peel Airports team. Steve joins Durham Tees Valley at an important time in the Airport's development and is under no illusions over the challenging times ahead, not just for the Airport but the industry as a whole. He is however confident that the Airport can capitalise on the tremendous support that it continues to receive both from the public and organisations across the region, despite what is currently a difficult time for the airport.
6. A meeting was held between Arriva management and officers of the Council, which I attended, with the aim of developing a strong partnership at senior management between

Arriva and the Council.

7. At its last meeting held in September, the Darlington Partnership Board agreed a new structure and working arrangements for the Partnership. In the previous structure there were three sectors involved, namely public, private and third sector. Community has now been included as a fourth 'work stream'. Though still in development this will relate to the work being developed through the emerging 'Darlington Together' model. In the new arrangements greater expectation is placed on each sector to organise its contribution. The Partnership's work will now be organised under three headings, namely Developing Action Priorities; Planning for 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'; and Support for 'Darlington Together'. As a result of these changes the Board meeting held on 9th November, which I attended, considered and agreed the priorities that the Partnership would focus on. In addition to this it also considered proposals on the skills agenda for Darlington and the governance of the Darlington Arts Project.
8. The decision to close Darlington Memorial Hospital's Hyper Acute Stroke Unit and make the unit at the University Hospital of North Durham, the main treatment centre in County Durham, was backed by NHS Darlington and County Durham, at a meeting of the Primary Care Trust Board held on Tuesday, 1st November, 2011. This decision was made despite strong opposition from Darlington to the proposals and I personally was very disappointed with this decision.

Celebrating Success

9. I was pleased to be involved in the judging and awarding of the 4* Awards for Council staff who have excelled in their roles. This year's winners included Charles Groves, Excellence in Service Delivery; the Procure to Pay Team, Outstanding Creativity and Innovation; the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Effective Partnership Working; Eldon Street Children's Centre, You're a Star; Karen Fowler, Excellence in Management; the Head of Steam Team, Outstanding Team; Marion Ogle, Outstanding Employee; and Lesley Blundell received a Special Recognition of Achievement Award.

Policing and Community Safety

10. I regularly liaise with officers and Cabinet Members regarding community safety matters. The introduction of Police Crime Commissioners is likely to have a significant impact on the Police and the Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Elections for this position will be held in November 2012 and in the meantime I will continue to take part in discussions regarding the implementation of this new post. Domestic Abuse continues to be high on the agenda of the CSP and a needs analysis and strategy have recently been completed, which it is hoped will help to provide even more effective support for victims of domestic abuse and their families.

11. I continue as Chair of the DAAT Board and oversee continued performance improvement across adult and children and young people's services. The adult substance misuse and alcohol services are currently out to tender for a single provider, integrated service. Meanwhile, there is a significant increase in the number of people successfully completing treatment, in line with changing local and National strategy/policy in this area.
12. Consultation is currently taking place on the suggested new police headquarters for the town. One of the public consultation events took place at the Town Hall which I attended.

Transformation and Business Model

13. I continue to liaise directly with officers and Cabinet Members in respect of the Transformation Programme to provide strategic leadership and attend meetings accordingly. A number of programmes were reported to Cabinet earlier in the year and there will be more to follow in the coming months.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

14. An event was arranged by the Association of North East Councils for Members to attend on 11th November, 2011, to discuss the Localism Bill and the 'Open Public Services' White Paper. The introduction of the Localism Bill will have far-reaching implications for local government over a range of topics including planning, housing, standards, elected mayors and local referendums. The White Paper sets out the Government's proposals for increasing choice, decentralising services and opening up public services to a wider range of providers. Again this will have a major impact on every local authority. The event considered the latest position regarding the Bill and the White Paper and considered the implications for Councils in the region.
15. I attended a meeting of Tees Valley Unlimited's Leadership Board which considered skills needs for manufacturing, progress on the Enterprise Zone and on Regional Growth Fund, the TVU Business Plan, agreements with UK Trade and Investment (on inward investment protocols) and the Environment Agency, decentralisation of Department For Transport budgets, Local Enterprise Partnerships' involvement in process industries, and an Employment, Learning and Skills Framework.
16. I was pleased to see Cummins secure funding for development from the Regional Growth Fund. This will further enhance their competitiveness.
17. I attended the Association of North East Councils Leaders and Elected Mayors Group held on 4th November, 2011, where we considered reports on the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games/Legacy Trust UK; the Cultural Development Task and Finish Review; Sector Led Improvement and Efficiency; the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011; Child Poverty; and update reports on the Implementation of Regional Scrutiny following its review of the Ex-Service Community; the Local Government Resource Review; and Health.

Bill Dixon
Leader