
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

1. I am continuing to work with colleagues from across the region to put this Council's case to the Government to try to retain some level of funding to maintain local services, following a recent Local Government Association (LGA) report which highlighted the potential impact on local authorities should the Government continue its existing financial plans by 2020. The LGA report predicted a 29 per cent short fall between Council revenue and spending demands and highlighted that should there not be a significant change to the way social care is funded, then it is likely that the majority of local government spending will be needed to pay for social care.
2. I continue to Chair meetings of the Shadow Health and Well Being Board and two meetings of the Board have been held since my last report to Council. A number of issues have been discussed at these meetings, which enables debate and discussion to take place between the Council, health and voluntary organisations.
3. The Council is continuing to work with the Darlington Partnership, Northern Echo, public and private sector organisations and the Bishop of Durham to deliver the 'Foundation for Jobs' campaign and with neighbouring local authorities to provide the 'Flexible Support Fund' which provides a grant to employers to take on unemployed young individuals (between 18 and 24 years of age) and provide on the job training. We still need more companies to join these worthwhile schemes.
4. The Foundation for Jobs held a Low Carbon Engineering event on 13th July, 2012, at Lingfield Point. Around 100 pupils from Darlington's secondary schools attended the day where major engineering companies delivered interactive sessions aimed at engaging young people's interest in engineering. Representatives from firms including Nissan, Cummins, Banks Group, C & A Pumps, Thorn Lighting and training organisations including the Skills Academy for Sustainable Manufacturing and Innovation (SASMI) run by Gateshead College and South West Durham Training attended. The event received praise from pupils who took part and their schools but also the businesses involved who appreciated the opportunity to engage with young people.
5. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 12th September, 2012, at which a number of items were discussed including the Economic Strategy and operational arrangements for how the Partnership Board will oversee its key areas of activity.

6. Mark Edgell, the Principal Adviser for the Region, Local Government Association, met with me to discuss the Council's Economic Strategy. I also met with Emily O'Hara and Jack Sowerby, Youth MP and Youth Deputy MP respectively to talk about continued involvement of young people.
7. A stakeholder event for the new Police and Crime Commissioner for County Durham and Darlington was held at the Dolphin Centre on 25th September, 2012. During the event a representative from the Home Office gave an overview of the Government's Vision for the Police and Crime Commissioners and representatives from Durham Constabulary, the Community Safety Partnership and Durham County Council addressed the stakeholders on the changes that were to be introduced and role of the Police and Crime Panel.
8. I continue to work with the Leaders and Elected Mayor of Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Councils on the proposed collaboration of People Services. Anticipating a report to Cabinet in the next few months, we have briefed the relevant Scrutiny Chairs and asked for their support in making sure that the emerging proposals are robust.
9. Councillor David Lyonette and I met local and regional managers from Arriva on the 14th August to explore further the presentations given to the Place Scrutiny Committee. The meeting was positive and I was reassured that Arriva were taking Members feedback seriously and plans to improve services were being put in place.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

10. Significant discussions are taking place with other local authorities in the north of England about the Government's plans for devolution of rail franchising. Both I and the Chief Executive have been involved in ensuring that the interests of Darlington and the region are promoted.
11. The Tees Valley Unlimited Leadership Board has been discussing the potential for a 'City Deal', working arrangements with the North Yorkshire LEP, economic problems of the house building sector and the rail devolution issues.

Policing and Community Safety

12. The DAAT can report an excellent start to the implementation of the new adult drug and alcohol Connected Recovery treatment service, with all staff now in place in the new delivery model and volunteers and peer mentors being recruited and trained. In the first four months, a number of service users have gained academic qualifications and many long term methadone maintenance clients are beginning a reduction programme and looking towards sustainable recovery.
13. Work continues with partners and stakeholders to refresh the local alcohol harm reduction strategy. It is planned to launch this with the official launch of the Connected Recovery service in Autumn.
14. The major transition work for drug and alcohol commissioning, with Public Health, moving to the local authority in 2013, is also in progress.

15. The first stakeholder meeting to look at developing Community Panels as part of the restorative justice approach was held in July to begin to shape the project and will continue to meet regularly in coming months to ensure the successful implementation of the project.
16. Recent figures on re-offending rates published by the Ministry of Justice show a significant downward trend in adult re-offending rates in Darlington, which is very welcome news and reflects the excellent partnership working in this area.

Bill Dixon
Leader