

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

General Updates

1. I continue to play an active role in ensuring that Darlington remains well connected by rail. A meeting of the Consortium of East Coast Mainline Authorities was held on 3 February 2014 at which the emerging Strategic Business Case was reviewed. The plans on how best to engage with shortlisted bidders for the InterCity East Coast (ICEC) franchise were also discussed at the meeting. I have been nominated on behalf of Tees Valley to sit on the Rail North Leaders Forum.
2. I was very pleased to meet with John Clayton, the new Managing Director of Star Radio North East. I also met Marie Fallon, newly appointed North East Area Manager of the Environment Agency. Marie's background is primarily with Local Authorities, most recently Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council. We were able to share our priorities and look at developing relationships to achieve better outcomes for people and the environment in the North East.
3. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub was officially launched on 7 February 2014, which I attended.
4. The ancient traditional welcoming ceremony for the new Bishop of Durham, The Right Reverend Paul Roger Butler, took place on 21 February 2014, on Croft Bridge, Darlington. During the ceremony the legendary falchion was handed over to the new Bishop of Durham, as he was welcomed into the Diocese and into County Durham from North Yorkshire. The event was part of a number of events leading up to the new Bishop of Durham's Installation and Enthronement at Durham Cathedral on 22 February 2014.
5. The Commonwealth Flag was raised over the Town Hall on 10 March 2014 to commemorate Commonwealth Day, while the Commonwealth Affirmation was read by the Mayor. A Commonwealth Flag was provided free of charge to all 413 local authorities to ensure that the day was properly kick-started throughout the UK, providing a successful platform on which to build in years to come.
6. The newly appointed Director of Economic Growth, Ian Williams, will start work on the 14 April. There will be a short handover with Richard Alty.

Cabinet

7. Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2014, approved a revised scheme of delegation, following the decision to make changes to the management structure of the Council.

Darlington Partnership

8. At the last meeting Darlington Partnership Board began to map out its work programme for 2014/15. As ever it is eager to work with the Council in taking forward 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'. In addition it will be refreshing its 'Action Priorities'. The Partnership Board agreed in September 2011 that, in addition to oversight of the delivery of 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed', it would focus on only a limited number of 'Action Priorities', the aim being to instigate action which visibly addressed issues facing Darlington.
9. The criteria applied were:
 - (a) is the issue significant;
 - (b) would addressing it rely on the contributions of each sector, private, public, voluntary and community; and
 - (c) could a measurable impact be made in the short term (12 months).
10. The Action Priorities process has led to some notable successes. The Foundation for Jobs initiative was a Partnership response to youth unemployment which it had identified as an Action Priority. Since it began operating in April 2012 it has been responsible for securing 240 additional apprenticeships for young people in Darlington and having provided meaningful links with businesses and industry for over 2,000 school age children in Darlington.
11. The 'Good Friends' initiative which launched in October is another Partnership response to an Action Priority. Good Friends encourages people to keep a watchful eye on older, isolated and/or vulnerable neighbours. They provide support, friendship and assist with a range of issues which if left unaddressed could compromise their ability to live safely and independently. To date there have been over 300 Good Friends recruited supporting over 130 neighbours.
12. The Partnership will consider what it has learnt from these initiatives as it sets out its Action Priorities for 2014/15.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

13. A special meeting of the Tees Valley Unlimited Leadership Board was arranged to discuss the strategic priorities for the Strategic Economic Plan. The Plan, and the associated Local Growth Fund bid, provide significant opportunities to highlight and seek resources for the exciting plans for Darlington's economy, as set out in Councillor McEwan's and Councillor Lyonette's reports.
14. I continue to attend meetings of the ANEC Future of Local Government Task and Finish Group meetings. As part of the Group's work, I also attended the LGA Regional Roadshow, on 10 March 2014, entitled 'Rewiring Public Services'.

Policing and Community Safety

Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill

15. It is expected that the above Bill will receive Royal assent by the end of March and will be introduced by late summer. Therefore the Community Safety Partnership is in the process of establishing a number of temporary groups to ensure that appropriate systems and procedures are in place to enable the effective use of the new tools and powers. Of particular note is the introduction of the Community Trigger and the Community Remedy both of which are designed to ensure greater community and victim involvement in addressing anti-social behaviour.
16. The Community Trigger allows victims to request a review of their case by relevant partner agencies if it remains unresolved after the trigger point is reached. The trigger can be agreed by partners in each locality but cannot be more than three complaints in a six month period.
17. The Community Remedy gives the victims a say in the out of court punishment of offenders for low level crime and anti-social behaviour. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has a duty to consult with members of the public and community representatives on what punishment or rehabilitative actions they consider appropriate to be on the Community Remedy Document.

Community Safety

18. The Government's plans for changing Probation services are progressing. The current Probation Trust will be dismantled by the end of May 2014, replaced by two new organisations, a National Probation Service and a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). A competitive process will determine ownership of a shareholding in the CRC, covering Durham and the Tees Valley areas. A local consortium of council, health, housing, community safety, skills and training and private sector organisations is working towards submitting an offer by mid-June 2015. This is subject to due diligence, including detailed financial and risk assessments.

Hate Crime

19. A joint working group with membership from Darlington and Durham Community Safety Partnerships and the PCC's office has been in place since November to implement a number of actions to enable victims of hate crime to report more easily and receive effective support when they do so. One of the actions is the establishment of a Safe Places Network across Darlington and Durham. This will see the establishment of a range of organisations with trained personnel to act as a point of contact for victims. It is also intended that some organisations will provide more detailed help and support for those who need it and will act as a Third Party Reporting Centre. It is expected that the first safe places will 'go live' in the early summer.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

20. The DAAT is working with treatment service providers to increase awareness of substance misuse service provision across settings including GPs, hospitals, schools and colleges. This will include planning a stakeholder event for the adult Connected Recovery Service.
21. The Recovery Centre is up and running and has submitted a capital bid for Public Health England to fund an Arts and Music Project.
22. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has made a third unannounced inspection of the Connected Recovery Service since the launch in 2012 and it has passed with flying colours and no recommendations once again.
23. The D2Digital Project phone pilot in the adult service is now in a position to recruit service users to the scheme, having recruited an independent evaluator and trained staff in the Connected Recovery Service, and is set to go live at the end of the February.
24. The DAAT is contributing to regional work, led by Public Health England, into the emerging issues around the growth of the use of Novel Psychoactive Substances and other 'legal' highs.

Bill Dixon
Leader