

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

1. The responses received to the consultation on the Council's budget (MTFP) which closed on 10 January 2014, are currently being considered. Cabinet will meet in February to propose the Council's MTFP to Council. The consultation on the budget was different this year, with the public being asked for their views on the savings being proposed and on the plans for the future. The proposals fell into three main categories, namely Building Strong Communities, Spending Wisely and Growing the Economy.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

2. The Association of North East Councils (ANEC) hosted an event in Darlington on 28 January 2014 regarding the work of Credit Unions. The purpose of the seminar was to look at the practical steps local authorities and their partners can take to support the work of credit unions, in providing services to people and communities, and to assist credit unions to widen access to their services. The seminar explored good practice in joint working between local authorities, major employers and credit unions.
3. The Government announced the Tees Valley City Deal on 13 December 2013. The deal gives opportunities to capitalise on key economic assets. As Vice Chair of Tees Valley Unlimited, I was part of the team that presented the Tees Valley City Deal to the relevant Minister. The Deal secures £12m of funding, with a further £22m previously announced. It has three main areas of focus : providing the conditions to enable increased investment in processing, chemicals and green technology industries; taking industrial carbon capture and storage forward; and creating new businesses. TVU predicts that the City Deal will play a part in helping to deliver 3,500 supply chain or indirect jobs, safeguarding 800 existing jobs, and £10m of private sector investment.
4. TVU is now working on its Strategic Economic Plan and bid for Local Growth Fund.

Cabinet

5. Cabinet at its meeting held in December, approved the refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy 2011, and associated action plan. The Strategy, which was developed by the Darlington Community Safety Partnership, has been updated to highlight the widened definition of domestic abuse adopted by the Government and the local achievements that have taken place since the original strategy was written. The strategy includes the national and local policy contexts for this work and provides

an analysis of relevant data.

General Updates

6. The final contracts to build the multi-million pound office block that will keep 400 civil service jobs in Darlington have been signed, and this marks the successful end of a campaign to save the Government jobs for the Town.
7. Following the announcement by Subsea Innovation, that it intends to expand its business, I was delighted to accept an invitation to attend the 'turf cutting' ceremony on 8 January 2014. The new development at Faverdale, will see the construction of a 40,000 square foot manufacturing and office facility and the workforce double to 70. It is great to see this Darlington company successfully winning contracts across the world, and deciding to expand within Darlington. I am pleased that the Council was able to facilitate this on our land.
8. I continue to engage with businesses on a one to one, giving them an opportunity to discuss any pressing matters where the Council may be able to offer assistance.
9. The opening of Marchbank Free School took place on 17 January 2014, which I attended. The school opened in September 2013, in the Old Hall on the Mowden Hall, Department for Education site, which has been sympathetically renovated, for primary aged children with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Marchbank is the fifth school in the Education Village Academy Trust (EVAT).
10. Darlington held the annual ceremony to commemorate the Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2014 at the Dolphin Centre, to mark the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day was 'Journeys'. The ceremony included a welcome from The Mayor, Councillor Charles Johnson, a personal testimony from Mrs Slesenger, a representative of the Association of Jewish Refugees, an interpretative dance from St Bede's R.C. Primary School, drama from Windermere Productions, readings, prayers and music. An exhibition of work produced by BTEC L3 Extended Diploma Art and Design Students from Darlington College was available to view following the Ceremony.
11. A new system of registering to vote, entitled Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has been introduced by the Government. Under the new system, all new applications to register to vote will need to be made by individuals, rather than one person completing a form for the household, and they will need to provide 'identifying information', such as date of birth and national insurance number. The aims of IER are to reduce electoral fraud and to increase public confidence in the system; make individuals responsible for their own registration; and modernise electoral registration by allowing individuals to register online. The new provisions will be phased in and there will be a transition between June 2014 and December 2015. Darlington has been given a provisional 'Confirmation Live Run' date of 8 July 2014, when the records held on the current electoral register will be forwarded to the Department for Works and Pensions for confirmation.

Darlington Partnership

12. The Partnership held an Assembly in November. The purpose of the assembly was to consider how we can support our communities to be strong and thrive in face of the harsher conditions we are now experiencing.
13. The first focus was on how we might encourage a shift in individual's personal responsibilities. The Assembly preceded the 'Which Side of the fence are you?' litter demonstration event so litter was featured as an example.
14. Following that, different models of collective responsibility were explored. Initiatives from around the country were considered and how they might be applied in Darlington.
15. A particular focus was on how elected members can engage with their residents differently in order to boost social capital and bring about change.

Policing and Community Safety

16. The Neighbourhood Resolutions Scheme was launched on 6 November and now has 36 volunteers. The project which aims to resolve low level anti-social behaviour (ASB) using restorative approaches, has received nine referrals since the launch. One of these has been successfully concluded and the rest are in progress. Seven referrals were neighbour disputes, one was a common assault and the final one was in relation to a parking issue.
17. A community engagement project lead by an organisation called Mutual Gain will begin in Northgate in the New Year. The aims of the project, which will take place over a six month period, are to:-
 - (a) enable the Police to build a better relationship with communities and enable them to shape and participate in the policing of the area in which they live;
 - (b) re-energise partnership working with an emphasis on determining and delivering community priorities;
 - (c) enable the Police, residents and partners to work together and reduce crime; and
 - (d) enable communities to have a greater insight into policing in their area with a view to increasing levels of confidence.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

18. Recruitment has begun for participants for the digital engagement pilot to maximise the use of technology, such as texting services, to increase retention, leading to more sustainable outcomes for service users.

19. The Recovery Centre had a successful launch in November and was officially opened by the Mayor and Mayoress.
20. A Project Steering Group is now in place and a full review of the young people's service, SWITCH, is underway to build on excellent performance to date and determine the nature of the service in the future.

Bill Dixon
Leader