

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Medium Term Financial Plan

1. I, along with my Cabinet colleagues and the Chief Officers Executive have been working on next year's budget proposals. The initial proposals were considered by Cabinet in December and those proposals are currently being consulted upon. A report proposing the Medium Term Financial Plan will be considered by a special meeting of Cabinet on 17 February 2015 where the results of the consultation will be considered prior to proposing the MTFP to full Council for approval.
2. This Council has been pro-active in adapting to an environment of significant service pressure and resource reductions. During the period 2010/11 to 2015/16, the Council has seen a £22.8M cash reduction in government grant which in real terms (after taking inflation into account) equates to £33.3M, a 41 per cent real reduction with more cuts to come. The majority of the spending reductions to date have been achieved without direct impact on the public, however, there have been a significant number of jobs that have been lost in the process. Although the report does not recommend any further reductions to service levels, the recent Autumn Statement indicates further significant savings will be required from 2016/17.

General Updates

3. I chaired the meeting of the Health and Well Being Board on 27 January 2015, at which a number of reports were considered, including a report on Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group's Draft Commissioning Plan; and County Durham and Darlington Urgent Care Strategy.
4. I attended the annual ceremony to commemorate the Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2015 at the Dolphin Centre, to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day was 'Keep the Memory Alive'. The ceremony included a welcome from The Mayor, Councillor Gerald Lee, a testimony, contributions from Carmel College, readings and song.

Cabinet

5. Approval was given by Cabinet to this Council participating in the arrangements for greater influence over rail services across the North of England, in collaboration with the Department for Transport (DfT). The 30 local transport authorities have been working under the brand name 'Rail North' to steer and influence the development of the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises, commencing from their renewal in February 2016.

6. A governance structure has been developed for two bodies that would allow authorities to influence the development of the franchises, reflecting the economic needs of the North. I was formally nominated to represent the Council on the Association of Rail North Partner Authorities, known as 'The Association' and to become a Director of Rail North Limited, to represent the interests of the Tees Valley Local Authorities.

Darlington Partnership

7. On 28 November I opened the Darlington Partnership conference 'Prosperity for All' at the Dolphin Centre, Darlington with over 180 representatives from various sectors including education, voluntary, business and government from across the region.
8. A panel discussion, chaired by Jenny Chapman MP, focussed on what actions could be taken locally to improve the financial wellbeing and life chances of those currently living in poverty in Darlington. The panel consisted of:
 - (a) The Right Reverend Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham;
 - (b) Kate Roe, Principal, Darlington College;
 - (c) Mike Matthews, Managing Director of Nifco UK Ltd and European Operations Officer;
 - (d) Margaret Whitehead, Chair, Inquiry on Health Equity for the North; and
 - (e) The Right Honourable Alan Milburn, Chair, Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.
9. The conclusions of the conference are on the Darlington Partnership website www.darlington.org.uk. The Darlington Partnership Executive Group are considering how to respond locally to the conclusions from the conference and a report will be submitted to a future meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board.
10. A video broadcast of the event is also included on the Darlington Partnership website which can be accessed through the link above. In addition it will be shown following the policy briefing to be held in advance of this Council meeting.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

11. Progress has been made on establishing a Combined Authority for the Tees Valley to achieve our economic goals and to receive greater devolved powers. A report, including the draft Terms of Reference has been produced and considered by each of the five Tees Valley Authorities. Consultation is currently on-going on the proposed establishment of the Combined Authority with various partners and key stakeholders.
12. I attended the Association of North East Council and Elected Mayors Group on 12 December 2014, at which a number of issues were discussed including the Budget for 2015/16; welfare reforms; the North East Better Health at Work Award; general health updates; and an update on the education and skills initiative.

Policing and Community Safety

13. An event was hosted by the Police and Crime Commissioners for Durham, Cleveland and Northumbria to demonstrate the progress made in respect to their joint strategy for tackling 'Violence Against Women and Girls'. Presentations were given by representatives from all three areas demonstrating a range of new initiatives that have been introduced or piloted during the last twelve months. We will continue to play our part to support the implementation of the strategy during the next twelve months.
14. An initial meeting has been held to consider the implementation of the new 'Checkpoint' initiative, which is due to go live in the spring. 'Checkpoint' is a multi-agency programme that aims to support offenders who have been involved in certain offences through a range of critical pathways to prevent their offending behaviour from escalating. Pathways include debt, housing, employment, domestic abuse, drugs and alcohol misuse and relationships. It is hoped that this support will address the causes of offending behaviour and the initiative will be evaluated by Cambridge University to determine its effectiveness.
15. The Police and Crime Commissioner published the Police and Crime Plan for 2015/16 at the end of December 2014. Guided by this, the Community Safety Partnership will continue to meet throughout the New Year to determine priorities and agreeing the structure and content of the new Darlington Community Safety Plan.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

16. Cabinet approved a contract award to the successful bidder, following a recent commissioning and procurement exercise, for an all age, all substance, Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Service for Darlington. The contract will be awarded for three years with the option to extend for a further two years, subject to no queries and delays and will be in place from 1 April 2015.
17. On-going work for the DAAT and the existing and new providers will focus on the smooth transition to the new service between January and March 2015 and its successful implementation during 2015/16.
18. In 2014, this Council received the award of Alcohol Concern's 'Dry January Council of the Year'. This year, the Council, in partnership with Durham Constabulary, Darlington College and other organisations, hosted an Alice in Wonderland themed 'Dry Hatter's Tea Party'. The event was held at Darlington College Glass House venue on 22 January 2015 and was open to staff, partners and the public to come along and enjoy afternoon tea, or drop in and purchase cupcakes. The event was opened by Councillor Andy Scott, Cabinet Member for Health and Partnerships, and all proceeds will go to support local, non-commissioned recovery and support initiatives led by ex-service users.

Bill Dixon
Leader