

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17

1. As the Local Government Finance settlement was not known when the budget was considered in December 2015, it was agreed that a two stage process to revising the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would be adopted, with no significant decision on service levels and spending reductions for the usual four year period being recommended until after the full implications of the settlement were understood.
2. Accordingly, at a special meeting of Cabinet on 1 December 2015, amendments to the existing MTFP, a budget for 2016/17 and a Council Tax increase of 3.99 per cent, were agreed, for consultation. This initial MTFP and Council Tax level for 2016/17 will be considered and agreed by special meetings of Cabinet and Council in February.
3. Following extensive representation from the Local Government Association (LGA) and others the Government acknowledged the severe pressures facing local authorities in meeting obligations for adult social care, and proposed that Councils levy a 'precept' of two per cent on top of the current council tax referendum limit to help fund the increasing cost of social care.
4. Proposals for the MTFP from 2016/17 to 2019/20 will be presented to Cabinet and Council in February for consultation, with the final decisions on the revised MTFP for 2016/17 to 2019/20 being considered and agreed at special meetings of Cabinet and Council in June. The settlement does not substantially alter planning figures in terms of scale of challenge the Council faces.

Darlington Station Masterplan

5. Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is supporting the Council's ambitions for Bank Top Station by funding the development of a business case for investment. The Council commissioned consultants (ARUP) who, presented their initial Masterplan and Business Case to a special Scrutiny Committee in November. It demonstrates a strong business case for the nation to invest in the East Coast Main Line at Darlington Bank Top Station to ensure both the national and local priorities for economic growth are facilitated by improved intercity connectivity.
6. The Masterplan takes many of the principles already agreed through the Town Centre Fringe (Skerne Valley) Masterplan and the 'Whole Industry and Regeneration Approach' agreed by Cabinet in May 2012.

7. ARUP is continuing to talk with key stakeholders including those from the rail industry and business to make sure that the proposals best meet the objectives. The next stage will include the preparation of a preferred option including business case underpinning for the Masterplan.

General Updates

8. Visits to Business Central and the National Biologics Manufacturing Centre were arranged for all Members on 23 November 2015. The visits enabled Members to see first-hand these excellent facilities that will help us secure new businesses and job opportunities for the Town.
9. I was pleased to open the first North East Transport Summit on 24 November 2015 in my capacity as Tees Valley lead for Transport for the North.
10. I was also pleased to meet the Princess Royal, as Patron of the Butler Trust as she re-visited Darlington on 2 December 2015 to acknowledge the work of the Council's Youth Offending Service. HRH met with staff, support agencies and key partners within the service.
11. On 10 December 2015 I spoke, on behalf of the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) on the Devolution deal for the Tees Valley and what that means for business in Darlington and Transport for the North.
12. I took the opportunity to visit Hurworth School with Paul Booth, Chair of Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) and I was particularly pleased to visit the recently opened engineering suite. This will undoubtedly encourage engineers of the future and bring with it, career opportunities for the Borough's young people.

One Darlington Partnership

13. A new 'Ingenious' brand for Darlington has been developed by a group of senior local business representatives, aided by the Council, predominantly to support inward investment. The brand has been adopted by a significant number of businesses in Darlington following a 'soft launch'. A major launch is planned later in the year. In developing the brand, 'authenticity' has been a key concern so that local people can identify with the brand.
14. In addition, the importance of a strong cultural offer to the economy has risen in prominence with a North East Strategy recently launched and a Tees Valley Capital of Culture bid for 2025 announced. 2025 is also the year marking the 200th anniversary of the birth of the passenger railway in Darlington with significant events already being proposed for that year. Again engaging local people will be vital in generating an event of significant scale.
15. Therefore a Summer fair celebrating the ingenuity of Darlington is being planned. The event will be held on 8 and 9 July 2016 in the Market Square and Dolphin Centre. The ambition is not only to showcase the larger engineering companies of Darlington but also give an opportunity for smaller businesses in Darlington to

demonstrate their ingenuity. The event will aim to engage children and adults in fun and entertaining interactive activities.

16. The Partnership's Foundation for Jobs initiative will play a central role as its 'Ingenious Engineering' event will be held in the Dolphin Centre which involves pupils from all the secondary schools in Darlington working on engaging activities. The intention is to fund the event entirely from sponsorship and fees charged to participating companies.
17. The next Best of Darlington awards will be held on 6 May 2016. A call for nominations opened this month. The categories for this year are:-
 - (a) Contribution to Sport;
 - (b) Performance in Sport;
 - (c) Volunteer of the Year;
 - (d) Contribution to the Community;
 - (e) Young Person's Contribution to the Community;
 - (f) Vocational Excellence;
 - (g) Academic Excellence;
 - (h) Exceptional Student;
 - (i) Contribution to the Environment;
 - (j) Contribution to the Arts;
 - (k) Public Sector Hero;
 - (l) Business – Contribution to the Community;
 - (m) Business – Bringing Success to Darlington; and
 - (n) Most Ingenious

18. As in previous years the event will be funded entirely from sponsorship.

Tees Valley Combined Authority

19. Officers from across the five Tees Valley (TV) Local Authorities continue to progress work in preparation for the establishment of the Combined Authority from the beginning of April 2016. Three workstreams are underway – Organisational, Functions, Communications and Governance, all of which will report into the TV Combined Authority Governance Group chaired by Amanda Skelton.
20. Decisions to recruit a Managing Director for the Combined Authority (Stephen Catchpole retires in March 2016) and to appoint a Strategic Transport Director on a two year fixed contract to lead the Combined Authority Transport work have been approved.
21. I have been involved in meetings with Lord Heseltine who is preparing a report for Government on ways to further enhance economic growth in the Tees Valley. I have taken the opportunities to stress the importance of effective transport connections, and the potential that the Biologics Innovation Centre presents.

Rail

22. The winning bidders for the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises starting in April 2016 are Arriva Rail North Ltd (Northern) and First TransPennine Express Limited (TransPennine Express). Both franchises will be managed in Leeds by a Rail North / Department for Transport partnership team. The Northern franchise will run for nine years with a possible one year extension and the TransPennine franchise will run for seven years with a possible two year extension. During the term of these franchises:-
- (a) over 500 new-build carriages, including 125mph intercity bi-mode trains (that run on both diesel and electric), will be introduced across both franchises;
 - (b) pacer units will be withdrawn by 2020;
 - (c) free wi-fi, media servers with on-demand entertainment and real-time passenger information screens will be introduced on all trains by 2020;
 - (d) stations will be improved, with over £30m of investment, including ticket vending machines and 45 currently unstaffed stations will be staffed for at least part of the day;
 - (e) more train services will run in the week, including on Sundays;
 - (f) there will be improved customer service and challenging targets for customer satisfaction; and
 - (g) there will be increased support and funding for Community Rail.
23. This means improved services for the Tees Valley and for Darlington specifically it means:-
- (a) additional trains per hour from Darlington to Leeds and Manchester;
 - (b) an extra five trains per day to provide a full hourly Northern service between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. Most or all of these will operate as through services to/from Middlesbrough. All services will call at intermediate stations (North Road, Heighington, Newton Aycliffe and Shildon);
 - (c) improved Northern service frequency in the evenings between Darlington and Middlesbrough, with two additional services per day arriving in Middlesbrough after 19:00. These additional services will call at intermediate stations (Thornaby, Eaglescliffe, Allens West and Dinsdale); and
 - (d) the Northern franchisee will provide dedicated management resources to support the North East Business Unit.
24. The new franchises are designed to improve rails services in the North and will bring:-

- (a) significant economic benefits for the region, supporting business, tourism and job growth and contributing to the prosperity of the North of England through better connections and faster journeys;
- (b) reduced crowding – more seats at the busiest times and fewer people having to stand;
- (c) improved customer service and increased passenger satisfaction; and
- (d) customer and community engagement – better communications with passengers and local communities.

Policing and Community Safety

- 25. Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP) continues to support the new Checkpoint Initiative. The programme is aimed at reducing reoffending by diverting low, to mid-level offenders from the criminal justice system. To date, there have been 457 referrals with 141 offenders having completed the programme. Thirty-seven people have failed the programme either through failure to engage, re-offending or other reasons. An evaluation of the initiative will be carried out during 2016.
- 26. The community engagement project run by Mutual Gain, which began in Northgate in 2014, is being extended into Redhall and we look forward to seeing how this develops and helps to develop community participation.
- 27. I am also pleased to support the introduction of Mini Police in Darlington which officially launched this month. There are five schools involved – Middleton-St-George, St Augustine's, Red Hall, Corporation Road and Heathfield and the programme will provide a fun and interactive volunteering opportunity for children in years 5 and 6. The Mini Police support the Force priorities, through participation in community engagement events. Those involved can look forward to developing a confident voice through enjoyable experiences. Children who become part of the programme help to tackle local issues, as highlighted by their own communities. By assisting the Police Service, they also carry that ownership and pride back into the community they live in.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

- 28. The Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Board met in December to discuss key elements of the substance use agenda. These included an update from the Police on recent alcohol research, progress towards Tees, Esk and Wear Valley Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust becoming smoke-free across all its sites, including Darlington's West Park Hospital, by a 'No Smoking Day' on 9 March 2016 and the recent government announcement that a new national drugs strategy is to be launched early in 2016.

29. The local Substance Use Strategy 2015/18 will reference the national aims and objectives and cover the three elements of Prevention, Control and Recovery treatment, setting indicators for adults and young people and across drugs, alcohol and tobacco under each strand. Consultation on the draft Needs Assessment summary is now complete. Analysis is being carried out on the findings, which will be incorporated into the draft strategy. This will then also go out for wider consultation.
30. A pilot pathway was launched on 30 November 2015 between the region's prison treatment services and the local Recovery and Wellbeing Service. The pathway will mean that every individual discharged from prison back to Darlington, who requires a substance use related prescription, will have a prescription covering the first seven days of release, provided by the prison healthcare scheme. This is one of the only such pilots running in the Country and aims to improve the health and safety of individuals at this risky time in their lives and contributes to the prevention of drug related deaths.
31. The Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS/Legal Highs) Stakeholder Group continues to develop and progress a local action plan to tackle associated harms. Recent work includes a Student Design competition to create posters and other information to be used on social media. The winners of the competition were presented with prizes at the recent Recovery and Wellbeing Service launch in November 2015. Further work with the journalism students at the College is on-going to produce an awareness raising video to be used across multiple agencies and settings.
32. The DAAT worked with partners to plan for the 2016 Dry January campaign. A Healthy Lifestyles week of interventions took place at the Dolphin Centre in the first week of January 2016, with the Thursday including stalls and information from multiple partner agencies and a focus on sign up to the Dry January campaign.

Bill Dixon
Leader