
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Medium Term Financial Plan

1. The second phase of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2016/17 to 2019/20 was considered and approved, for consultation, by a special meeting of Cabinet on 11 February 2016. The Council has to reduce its expenditure significantly as a result of the reduction in the level of grant that it receives from the Government. The Council can only just fund the services it must provide at a cost of £87.5m in 2019/20, leaving only £2.5m per annum to invest in services it does not have to provide but which add great value to Darlington and its residents. The final MTFP will be considered special meetings of Cabinet and Council on 22 and 29 June 2016, respectively.
2. As part of the consultation process, public meeting were held on 16 March 2016, to enable members of the public to ask questions directly of myself and Cabinet colleagues on the budget proposals.

One Darlington Partnership

3. At its meeting on 13 January, the Partnership Board considered a paper which identified emerging priorities for Darlington in the medium term. The Board agreed its priorities should be:
 - (a) alleviating poverty and its impact on families, children and the disabled;
 - (b) tackling isolation of the elderly and vulnerable;
 - (c) improving the skills, qualification and employability of local people, particularly young people; and
 - (d) responding to the growing issue of in-work poverty by advocating an economic policy which creates jobs which offer equitable pay rates and are accessible by the local workforce.
4. Whilst recognising there was very limited potential to find additional public sector funds the report concluded that adherence to a shared vision and a concerted effort from the Partnership could generate action that could help improve a lot of struggling households and give them a brighter future, and not all of them required substantial investment or sacrifice.
5. A report considering what these actions might be was considered at the last meeting of the Board on 9 March. Three areas requiring action were identified to be

taken forward, namely :

- (a) Working together better. How public sector agencies and the voluntary sector provide services in communities could be greatly improved through better coordination.
 - (b) A focus on the next generation. How can we work together better, create a different culture to make a big difference to the future lives of our children.
 - (c) Create a menu of areas for businesses to support. The private sector are willing to provide more if there were greater opportunities presented to them whether it be to support lunch clubs or adopting local land to maintain.
6. The Partnership will work up proposals around these themes and consider at the next meeting.
 7. The Board also considered a presentation on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

8. The Tees Valley continues its progress towards a formal launch of the Combined Authority on 4th April. Following the five Council's Annual Meetings, membership of the Scrutiny, Transport and Audit Committees will be confirmed.
9. Lord Heseltine continues his work preparing a report on options to enhance growth in the Tees Valley. Progress has been made in securing short term Government support for the SSI site and the Leaders are working with Ministers and Civil Servants on the right investment vehicle for this and other strategic sites. The option of accelerating a Mayoral Development Corporation specific to the SSI site is under consideration and Lord Heseltine and Ministers are developing an Advisory Board to progress this in consultation with the Tees Valley Leaders.
10. It will be important as these discussions progress to secure absolute clarity on the funding for the SSI site as its scale and level of contamination, could distort Tees Valley investment priorities for many years. I am keen to explore a clear separation between a vehicle for SSI, and the Mayoral Development Corporation envisaged within the Devolution Deal.
11. We continue to make good progress presenting the case for our strategic transport priorities. I have met with John Cridland, Chair of Transport for the North, and David Brown, CEO of TfN. Presentations have also been made to David Higgins, Chair of HS2. In a number of settings, the clarity and coherence of the Tees Valley asks on transport, and the constructive nature of our engagement, is being recognised.
12. TVU are currently in the process of recruiting a new Managing Director and I have been involved in the process of appointing a successor to the current Managing Director Stephen Catchpole.

Rail Updates

13. I attended the first Virgin Trains Stakeholder Summit in York on 9 February 2016. The event was facilitated by David Horne, Managing Director of Virgin Trains, who gave an update on the progress being made since they took over the franchise of the East Coast Mainline.
14. I was pleased to open the HS2 procurement event held at Lingfield point on 12 February 2016. Representatives from HS2, Crossrail and CompeteFor were in attendance at the event, providing valuable information to local business on the procurement process and how to compete for contracts for HS2.
15. I continue to attend meetings of the Rail North Board, Rail North Association and the Consortium of East Coast Main Line Authorities. At the last board meeting on 25 February 2016 a number of issues were discussed including governance matters, resources, network enhancements, station devolution, smart ticketing and fares.

General Updates

16. A developer day for the Feethams Office Development was held earlier today in order to gauge interest in the site.

Policing and Community Safety

17. The Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners for Cleveland and County Durham have jointly commissioned Safe in Tees Valley to run the new Victim's Service. This is a two-year contract, which begins in April. Information days about the implementation and operation of the new service were held at the end of February.
18. The Durham Constabulary Community Hub, which was opened in Priestgate in the weeks leading up to Christmas, proved a success, providing a venue where residents could come and express views and concerns about community safety issues. Consideration is being given to whether to open the Hub again in the coming months.
19. The Community Safety Partnership Board is about to begin the process of reviewing current structures to ensure that all appropriate links are in place with other Boards in the town and to streamline the system to provide a more co-ordinated approach.

Drug and Alcohol and Tobacco Team (DAAT)

20. The Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Board met at the beginning of March to start discussions about the future of governance arrangements for the substance use agenda in Darlington. This is in the light of the MTFP proposals currently under consultation.

21. The Board also heard updates from partners and providers in relation to on-going projects that the DAAT Team are involved in, or have commissioned. These include a debrief of the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust's project to become smoke-free across all its sites, including Darlington's West Park Hospital, by 'No Smoking Day' on 9 March 2016, the Young People's Floating Support Service, the CRC-led Desistance Project and the substance use Pathways Development work.
22. Progress on development of the local Substance Use Strategy 2015/18 is on-going to provide a draft for consultation. However, completion has been deferred to include incorporation of any new national trends/changes that may be outlined when the new National Drugs Strategy is published (due in March 2016).
23. 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 further work with the journalism students at the College to produce an awareness raising video to be used across multiple agencies and settings. Members of the group were invited to present at a national forum on NPS, citing Darlington's work as an example of good practice. Members of the group and some of the students, also delivered a workshop at a Regional NPS Event, hosted by Public Health England, in Darlington earlier this month.

Bill Dixon
Leader