

**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

---

**Regional and Tees Valley Updates**

1. I attended a meeting on 20 October 2016 with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid. At the meeting we discussed devolution, Government commitment to address regional growth imbalances and our Strategic Economic Plan. We were assured that the Government intends to honour the terms of the devolution deal agreed in 2015 and took the opportunity to set out our desire to see the Mayor operate within a Cabinet model of governance. As a consequence an item elsewhere on this meeting's agenda seeks the Council's views on the Mayoral Combined Authority Constitution prior to a decision by Cabinet and consideration by the Combined Authority. With the consent of all parties the Order will be placed in Parliament to progress arrangements for the election of a Tees Valley Mayor in May 2017.
2. On 11 October I attended a Virgin Trains Stakeholder Summit in York where I was able to discuss the upgrade of Bank Top with the Senior Management Team from Virgin Trains. I am pleased to report they remain firmly committed to our aspirations.
3. As the Tees Valley lead on the 'Key Cities' group of Councils I attended the most recent full meeting in London on 28 October 2016. We discussed the RSA Growth Commission work, opportunities for collaborative working on key growth sectors and stronger links with the LGA Cities Board.
4. I have continued to use my role in the Tees Valley Combined Authority to press for more investment in our transport infrastructure. I represented the East Coast Mainline Authorities group at a Parliamentary reception in Edinburgh and issued an invitation to the Scottish Transport Minister to meet with the Tees Valley. I also attended a workshop in London on HS2 East, the lobbying group of authorities working to ensure that the eastern leg secures the levels of investment required to really unlock the economic potential.
5. The Combined Authority Board met on 2 November, and amongst other items, agreed two initial allocations of the first tranche of the devolution grant from Government. Funding will be directed to extend the scope and impact of the Youth Employment Initiative which is supporting young people up to the age of 29 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Further funding will help to extend the roll out of super-fast broadband coverage to both residential communities and employment and business parks. I am delighted to know that with a good performance from the contractor, BT, our residents and businesses will be able to take up a much better service than currently experienced.

6. Highways England arranged a Yorkshire and North East regional stakeholder briefing on 7 November 2016, which was unfortunately cancelled. Highways England was launched in April 2015 and, the purpose of the briefing was to provide an update on achievements to date, future projects and opportunities to work together. Other items to be considered at the briefing were the introduction of the next Road Investment Strategy, including updates on Route Strategies and the Strategic Economic Growth Plan, and an update by Transport for the North on shaping future investment strategies. It is planned that the meeting will be re-arranged to February 2017.

### **General Updates**

7. I was pleased to attend Family Help Darlington CIO (Darlington Women's Refuge) Annual Open Meeting on 19 October 2016. After formally presenting the Annual Report and Accounts for 2015/16 there were a variety of speakers with anecdotes and reminiscences of their involvement with Family Help over the last 40 years. I was proud to have been able to share my story of support to this important and valued organisation and to know that the Council continues to work closely with staff and board.
8. The Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling announced plans on 19 October 2016 to fund a £1.1m scheme to improve the A68 at the Rotary Way Roundabout. The scheme forms part of a package of road improvements that will unlock up to one million square foot of business land in Faverdale, and up to 1,200 homes in the West Park Garden Village. Work is due to commence in 2017 and once complete it will have a huge beneficial impact on jobs and business in Darlington.

### **Darlington Partnership**

9. At the October meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board we heard of the recent developments of Darlington Cares. Darlington Building Society now hosts the initiative and a new Programme Manager, Simone McNeill has been appointed. To date Darlington Cares achievements include:
  - (a) 22 organisations as members;
  - (b) 11,000 hours of employee supported volunteering delivered;
  - (c) 75 successful projects;
  - (d) over 120 Busy Readers volunteers trained;
  - (e) over 3,000 children benefited from the Busy Readers scheme; and
  - (f) over 850 young people have benefited from an employability skills programme.
10. Simone and Colin Fyfe, Chief Executive of Darlington Building Society, outlined the ambitious plans for the initiative which aims to grow its membership and its activity. It looks to the Partnership to help advise it on areas of greatest need and is keen to measure the impact its activities are having.

## **Community Safety**

11. In my last report I commented I had chaired the last meeting of the Darlington Drug and Alcohol Board (DAAT). I gave an undertaking that this agenda will continue to be a priority and I can inform Council that a Drug and Alcohol Forum will take place in December involving a wide range of partners. The Drug and Alcohol Forum will be a sub group informing the CSP Board of key substance misuse issues.
12. Since the last Council meeting, the Darlington Community Safety Partnership Board (CSP) met at the end of September. Agenda items considered included :-
  - (a) Domestic Abuse;
  - (b) HMIC Inspection;
  - (c) key messages from the Adult Safeguarding Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board;
  - (d) Hate Crime; and
  - (e) the British Social Attitudes Survey on Alcohol reflected significant public support for minimum unit price and other measures which if implemented would reduce alcohol related harm.

**Bill Dixon**  
**Leader**