

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

1. Work is progressing well on the Tees Valley Strategic Transport priorities on which I lead. Transport for the North (TFN) has in its Strategic Transport Strategy, accepted that our two key roads projects – a new Tees Crossing and the A66 East West: Northern Relief Road - should sit within the first phase of priorities for investment. There has also now been acceptance that the proposals for faster and more frequent rail services between Leeds and Newcastle should connect with the Tees Valley at Darlington, and this strengthens the case for investment at Bank Top. At the TFN Board and in briefings with Department for Transport (DfT) officials, I have joined calls for the investment that is required to make the Northern Powerhouse a reality.
2. With Ben Houchen, Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, I initiated displays and communications to business and travellers at Darlington Station on 18 September 2017. Members are encouraged to view the displays at the Station and to express their support for the project to improve Darlington Station, entitled 'Darlington 2025 – A Modern Rail Hub for a Modern Economy'. There are major concerns across the North that historic performance on the current rail investment programme will limit what can be achieved in the short term and I am pressing hard for this not to be the case for Darlington and the Tees Valley.
3. The Transport Committee signed off the plans for a Tees Valley Transport Strategy that will set our goals for all types of transport, from buses and cycling to road, rail and air. Consultation will be taking place in the early new year.
4. In terms of the A66 East-West Connectivity programme I have with the Cabinet Portfolio holder received representations and queries and have been interested to hear diverse views as part of the consultation.
5. The Tees Valley CA is progressing its Investment Programme and I am pleased to note the support for Darlington priorities, including Experience Darlington, new Town Centre Office developments and logistics infrastructure.
6. The new Tees Valley Routes to Work programme, with devolved funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) will greatly enhance the scope of the Council, with its voluntary sector partners, to enable those farthest from the labour market, to take advantage of the jobs being created.

Cabinet

7. A draft Corporate Plan for 2017/21 was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September 2017, together with a supporting framework for performance management, as a basis for wider Member consultation. The new Corporate Plan is an overarching high level strategy for the Council detailing how it contributes towards the outcomes set out in the wider Sustainable Community Strategy 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'. It aims to provide a clear accessible summary for Members, partners and residents of the Council's priorities over the next four years together with key planned activities.
8. Given the sharp fall in resources the Council has been dealing with, I am pleased to note both the scale of our ambitions for Darlington, and the improvements in services and outcomes that are clear across the board. I commend the plan to Members.

Darlington Partnership

9. The Board continues to focus on the outcomes of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, taking a view on current progress and emerging priorities and in particular identifying any collective action required of the Board. The focus at recent meetings has been on More People Healthy and Independent, and the Economy. The Board is examining ways to improve support and advice for victims of domestic abuse in particular, and seeking to harness the good will and support of employers. Mental health also came up as a concern in discussion and it was agreed to invite Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust to join the Board.
10. The second Festival of Ingenuity was held on 22 and 23 September. This was the culmination of an exciting Business Week, and the celebration of 150th anniversary of Darlington's Charter of Incorporation. The Festival included a focus on Darlington's heritage, with a display highlighting the significant events of the last 150 years, and talk from Chris Lloyd of the Echo. An Ingenious Trail gave retailers opportunities to promote the diverse and lively town centre to families, while the Tees Pumping Station and Head of Steam were accessible from free vintage bus rides.
11. The Festival is an important showcase for the strengths of our town centre and our economy, and with growing interest and enthusiasm from business and retailers I see it flourishing.

Community Safety

12. Since the last meeting of Council, the Community Safety Partnership met for a planning and development session on 8 September and then a full board meeting on 26 September. Matters considered included the Government Drug Strategy (2017), feedback from the County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy Group and actions from the Health and Justice Board.

13. The High Sheriff, Caroline Peacock, visited the Youth Offending, Anti-Social Behaviour and Darlington Recovery and Wellbeing Services and also had a tour of the Darlington Hippodrome on 22 August 2017.
14. There were a number of presentations delivered during the initial visit, including tackling anti-social behaviour, case management, victim care, youth intervention and reparation activities. At the Recovery and Wellbeing Service she had further presentations on harm reduction, recovery and prescribing before meeting service users and young people services.
15. At the conclusion of the event the High Sheriff commented that her visit had been most productive and she had gained a most valuable insight into the youth justice system and recovery and wellbeing services. Furthermore, the High Sheriff acknowledged the dedication and professionalism of the agencies involved.

Bill Dixon
Leader