

COUNCIL
24 SEPTEMBER 2020

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

Council's Continued Response to COVID19

1. The Council continues to operate in challenging times, I am extremely proud to be Leader of this Council as its staff continue to do great things against the background of the pandemic. The vast majority of our services are back to "normal" although operating in different and safe ways. We look forward to the day when all services are back, in particular I look forward to the Hippodrome presenting magnificent new shows in our fantastic building. In the meantime, we are utilising the building for alternative entertainment and I hope many people will enjoy what is on offer.
2. Whilst things appear to be returning to "normal", I fear the risk of a surge in cases, we have seen it elsewhere in the Country and the risk is real. We as the Council, and Councillors need to be vigilant in setting the example for others to follow, and continue to remind people that the virus has not gone away, it is just held at bay and we all need to continue to follow Government guidance and be sensible to protect ourselves, families and the wider public.
3. The work of the Council during the pandemic has been exemplary and it has certainly brought our Public Health service to the very fore of our thinking. It is appropriate given this is the last Council meeting before our Director of Public Health, Miriam Davidson, retires and to put on record our thanks to her for all her work with the Council over the many years she has worked at the Council. Thank you, Miriam and best wishes, for your retirement.

Suzanne Joyner

4. As Members of the Council will be aware, Suzanne is leaving the Council next month to take up a similar post with Rotherham MBC and again as this will be the last Council before her departure, I would like to put on record the thanks of the Council for all the work Suzanne has done for the Council over the five years she has been with the Council. Thank you, Suzanne and good luck, for your new job.

Save our Loco Campaign

5. I have set up a cross party group to put pressure on the National Railway Museum and Science Museum Group that the NRM are part off. All local political leaders have requested support from their national leaders to help us retain Locomotion No 1 in Darlington which is its rightful home and has been for the majority of the past 160 years. Our local MP Peter Gibson has met with Dame Mary Archer DBE, chair of the Science Museum Group to put our case. The Mayor will be launching his intention to hold an international virtual event to bring together Mayors around the world where Railway firsts happened.

6. A strong plan is in place to engage the local community positively with Locomotion No 1 and instil a sense of pride and ownership within Darlington and the wider Tees Valley. This includes a specially commissioned contemporary dance piece to be both performed live and filmed for extensive use on social media, a dance flash-mob in the town centre involving participants from the local area, an exhibition in Darlington Hippodrome, and the Hippodrome's drama students voicing accounts of the Locomotion's first journey as imagined by local schoolchildren. Artwork for the public-facing campaign has been designed by Jonny Lancaster, a popular local artist who specialises in vintage rail-style posters. The petition will be relocated to Change.org to gain traction and momentum nationally and internationally.

Strategic Transport

7. The Tees Valley Combined Authority and Local Authorities have worked together to support the return to education. This has involved working with bus operators to secure additional services on the routes most likely to see an increase in demand when schools return. Let's Go Tees Valley launched a '**Back to School**' **behaviour change campaign** to help students get back to school/college safely. This behaviour change campaign is part of measures planned to help reduce demand on public transport due to schools reopening.
8. There have been a number of initiatives and announcements to support Active Travel in light of COVID-19. The Department for Transport announced an Emergency Active Travel Fund that would be released in two tranches. The Combined Authority and Local Authorities worked on schemes to submit to Government for tranche two in an incredibly short space of time seeking to deliver the priorities within the Tees Valley Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. The final bid included a scheme in Middlesbrough and a scheme in Darlington, the Darlington scheme focussing on improvements on Woodlands Road. We await feedback on the bid, but if successful the delivery of the scheme will need to be accelerated to meet the funding criteria.
9. The Tees Flex service launched in February 2020 and there was good uptake in the initial weeks. However, COVID-19 had an impact but there are signs of a recovery as lockdown has released with strong passenger numbers across Tees Valley. A number of additional destinations have been incorporated into the service following requests from the public and. The Combined Authority will be promoting the service again to ensure the communities where it operates are aware of the service. Members are asked to continue to promote this service in areas where it operates.

Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE
Leader of the Council Portfolio