

COUNCIL
30 NOVEMBER 2023

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

Transport Committee

2. Tees Valley Transport Committee met for the first time since the elections and new Members of the Committee were brought up to speed on the extensive programme of activity and investment. The committee members agreed to review schemes currently in the programme, receive more information on bus services including an overview from Arriva and more information on Tees Flex. Electric vehicle charging is also something the committee want to learn more about and understand the plans moving forward.
3. Cllr McCollom and I visited the new Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) centre in Middlesbrough. This a partnership across all Local Authorities and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). The partnership has historically been based around the management of traffic signals and other traffic control systems, but the system is being developed to improve traffic across the sub-region. Significant investment has taken place to get the backbone of a system in place and now improvements will start to be rolled out over the coming years using data-driven decision making to deliver traffic flow optimisation to reduce congestion, improve travel times and lessen environmental impact.
4. Working collaboratively with emergency services, National Highways & Network Rail, UTMC will improve road safety, enhancing emergency response and will deliver bus prioritisation to encourage public transport use.
5. All traffic signals will be connected to allow for faster maintenance and remote changes for event and incident management. Vehicle, cyclist and pedestrian counter information from existing Darlington counters and new UTMC counters will be interfaced into UTMC to make informed decisions.
6. This will see the Tees Valley leading some exciting developments to improve traffic management for residents' businesses across the Tees Valley.

Darlington Station

7. Work on the project continues to progress. On the Eastern Gateway part of the scheme the steel frame for the new station building and multi storey car park is being erected and this is scheduled to be completed by January 2024. Network Rail have begun mobilisation work to establish their site compound on the east side of the East Coast Main Line to start the works to the track. They will also begin to put up hoardings within the existing station building to enable initial works to commence in late November. This will mean temporary

ticket office arrangements. The Department for Transport (DfT) have announced ticket offices are going to remain following their consultation on closures.

8. On the Western Gateway preparatory work is underway for the demolition of the properties that have been acquired.

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Round 2

9. An £8.8 billion second round of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS2) was announced at Spring Budget 2023 for the period 2027/28 to 2031/32. In early October the government announced an additional £8.55 billion of funding available for CRSTS 2 and published the indicative allocations for each of the eligible areas. The indicative allocation for TVCA is £978m, this includes monies announced in the Spring Budget, and additional monies from the cancelled HS2 project.

Bus Services

10. Following an independent adjudication, the Arriva concessionary fares settlement for 2023/24 has now been agreed in favour of TVCA and the local authorities. As reported previously, some of the £1.5m Tees Valley Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP+) funding for 2023-24 has been used to mitigate the impact of the service withdrawals made by Arriva including the new Stagecoach service 6 / 6A (replacing the former Arriva service 12) which now provides additional connectivity to Teesside International Airport and now continues onwards to Eaglescliffe, Yarm, Ingleby Barwick and Stockton. In addition, TVCA has now been allocated a further £1.5m of BSIP+ funding for 2024/25.
11. Furthermore, TVCA has been given an indicative allocation of £3.851m of BSIP funding. Further details are currently awaited but this money is for TVCA to continue to work with government to deliver ambitious improvements set out in our bus service improvement plans. Actions in the Tees Valley BSIP are structured around a five-point delivery plan:-
 - (a) Sustainable network for the future
 - (b) Bus priority improvements
 - (c) Improved fares offer
 - (d) Enhanced customer experience
 - (e) Decarbonising the bus fleet
12. Nationally, the DfT funded £2 fare cap has been further extended and will now be in place until December 2024.

Climate Change

13. The Climate Change Cross Party Working Group met again on 26 October. Much of the discussion centred around the recently published climate emergency scorecards. We are particularly concerned that the methodology used for this study, and in particular the change in methodology part way through, has resulted in incorrect marking for us, and likely for many other local authorities as well.
14. The Sustainability and Climate Change Officer has done her best to correct the major errors that we can see, but there is no guarantee that changes will be made to our final score. The Local Government Association has said that these league tables are not useful.

External meetings and engagement

15. I have attended a number of visits and meetings: Cummins, ECMA Consortium, ANEC, Darlington College, CPI, Stronger Communities Awards, Citizenship Ceremonies, Theatre Hullabaloo conference, Remembrance Sunday, Rail North, Care Leavers Awards.
16. Darlington Library - I attended a meeting of the Crown Street Library Trustee Board Annual meeting which was held on 19 October 2023. This was held in the Crown Street Library (previous meetings having been via Teams because of the pandemic or the library refurbishment). The Library Manager gave a well-received presentation about the restoration and refurbishment of the building.

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council Portfolio