

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

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.

Strategic Transport

Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme

2. Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has been successful in its application to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas round 2 bidding competition. £7.8m has been secured from the Department for Transport, with bus operators contributing a further £22.2m.
3. The project will see the roll-out of 62 electric zero emission buses and associated charging infrastructure. These are split between Arriva and Stagecoach and there will be coverage across the following services:-
 - (a) Stagecoach will run 40 single decker buses on routes 36, 37 and 38 out of their Stockton depot. 20 chargers will be installed at their Stockton depot.
 - (b) Arriva will run seven single decker buses on service 63 out of their Redcar depot. Four chargers will be installed at their Redcar depot.
 - (c) Arriva will run 15 single decker buses on service 2 out of their Darlington depot. Eight chargers will be installed at their Darlington depot.
4. The deployment date is still to be confirmed, but it is anticipated to be by the end of 2025.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund

5. TVCA has been successful in its £6.5m bid into the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure fund. The focus of the fund is on increasing at scale low powered, on street electric vehicle charging infrastructure to support residents who do not have off street parking.
6. TVCA is working collaboratively with each local authority on the next stages of the process.

Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant

7. TVCA has secured £2.5m from the Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant, the second highest allocation of any authority in the country. The funding will be used to upgrade traffic signal systems, replacing unreliable and obsolete equipment to improve reliability and link to investment in new traffic management systems. The funding will be apportioned equally between each of the five local authorities and TVCA is working with all local authorities to agree which traffic signals will be replaced.

Darlington Station

8. Good progress continues to be made on the Darlington Station project. Cladding work is continuing for the car park and new concourse, with the concrete pouring of the final ground floor slab and associated ramps due for completion imminently. Internal and external blockwork has commenced, along with the first electrical installations. Preparatory work has commenced for the short stay car park/interchange area.
9. On the eastern side, Network Rail has completed the platform 1 hoarding and installation of the temporary ticket office. Automatic ticket gates have been relocated and partial hoarding to platform 4 installed. Work continues at Smithfield Road bridge to prepare for the new track, which is expected to continue until the end of June 2024.
10. On the western gateway preparatory work is continuing. In March 2024, TVCA received confirmation that it has secured £1.3m of Active Travel England funding through a competitive process, which will enable them to deliver the full planning approved scheme. It is anticipated that the remaining demolition will be completed by the end of 2024, with the associated highways works completed by Summer 2025 with the final programme subject to confirmation on the appointment of a contractor.

East Coast Mainline Timetable

11. A major new timetable for the East Coast Mainline, also covering other services in the Tees Valley / North-East, has been in development by the rail industry for some time with the expectation that it would be implemented in December 2024. An announcement on the current position regarding the new timetable is expected soon and I will provide further updates in due course.

Climate Change

12. The successful Zero Emissions bus application will see an investment of £30m in zero emissions bus fleet across the Tees Valley and the £2.5m investment in new traffic signals equipment will ensure the most efficient LED units are utilised saving on electricity usage.

Tees Valley Combined Authority

13. On the 15 April I attended a briefing session about work being undertaken to address the 28 recommendations that were made as a result of the Independent Review of The South Tees Development Corporation and Teesworks. A number of briefing sessions have been convened for Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee members of the Combined Authority with further planned. Work on responses to the recommendations has been ongoing by the statutory officers of the combined authority. Meetings have also been convened with statutory officers from the constituent councils to facilitate wider input. This will result in a number of changes of approach including amendments to the constitution of the Combined Authority.

External Meetings and Engagement

14. I have attended a range of external meetings and engagements, and some of these are as follows:

- (a) I attended the count night for our Member of Youth Parliament. There were 4 fantastic candidates: Stephen Adenuga, Charlie Cela, Jack James, and Jack Parvin. Each had spent the last several weeks campaigning, promoting their manifestos to young people across Darlington. Over 4,400 votes were cast in the election. Stephen was the successful candidate – congratulations.
- (b) Darlington Cares held an event to conclude and celebrate all the volunteering hours that were donated in the preceding year in some of our parks. Thanks are due to many volunteers from Darlington Economic Campus, Redde Northgate, Cummins Inc and EE.
- (c) From the world of health, I've had catch up meetings with TEWV (Brent Kilmurray – Chief Executive, Dave Jennings – Chair, Patrick Scott – Managing Director of Durham and Tees Valley), and NEAS Chief Executive Helen Ray.
- (d) Rachel Bacon our new Chief Constable, and Dean Haythornthwaite, returning Chief Inspector.
- (e) The Darlington Towns Board for a regular progress meeting.
- (f) At the request of Rail North, Minister Huw Merriman MP met with Leaders across the North of England to discuss the December 2024 railway timetable.
- (g) Along with Ian Williams and Anthony Sandys I met with Paul Bilbao, Head of Asylum Support Contracts and Finance at the Home Office
- (h) I attended the most recent Citizenship Ceremony to welcome our newest British citizens. As ever, the new citizens came from many different countries across the globe.
- (i) And, finally, I attended the Mayor's Ball. This was a fantastic event, with people attending from many different communities and organisations of Darlington.

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council