

COUNCIL
18 JULY 2019

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

A New Council

1. I am very proud to have been elected as the first female Leader of Darlington Borough Council at Annual Council and I plan to do my best to serve the public of Darlington. I have stated on numerous occasions that I want to lead a collaborative and inclusive Council and all Councillors are elected to do the best they can to improve the lives of Darlington residents and, I want to ensure all Councillors have the ability to contribute to decisions that the Council and Cabinet make and I have set out in my report how I intend this to happen.
2. Local authorities must operate within a nationally set framework and do their best to achieve good outcomes for the public they serve. I intend to build on the work previously done and improve where it is possible. We are intending to take Cabinet meetings out of the Town Hall into the community. The first one will be at Firth Moor Community Centre on 10 September, and also encouraging Cabinet members to be more visible in the community.

Growing the Economy to Help All Residents

3. Darlington's economy is improving but there is much more to be done. I intend to place economic growth at the top of the Council's priorities as good sustainable employment is the key to improving life changes for all residents. I want to see growth that benefits all, helping build resilient communities that helps reduce the gaps in life opportunities within the borough, ultimately leading to reduced public sector service demands.
4. The recent Cabinet meeting highlighted just some of the good work the Council is doing to create the conditions for growth. The Town Centre Strategy which is being consulted upon, will take us forward, and enable us to utilise the £10m secured from TVCA for the Town Centre to be invested wisely having taken on board the views of key stakeholders. The opportunities offered by the improvements to the covered market are key to the strategy. I also look forward to seeing the plans become to reality as is the case with the new office block in Feethams.
5. I attended the Town Centre Reference Group on 19 June which is chaired by Councillor Alan Marshall. It was pleasing to see so many of our local businesses being passionately supportive of our Town Centre Strategy and the work we are planning to do to make our Town Centre an attractive and vibrant place.

Darlington Partnerships and Darlington Cares

6. Work continues on the Fairer Richer Darlington Charter at the Partnership, updates on progress were presented to the last Board which showed steady progress is being made. A report on how the Council will change its procurement approach will be coming to Cabinet shortly, with the aim of spending more of our money, and that

of partners, in the local economy to stimulate economic growth.

7. I had a recent update of the work of Darlington Cares which is a partnership of businesses and the Council to bring together businesses to help improve outcomes for residents of Darlington by harnessing the skills and resources of businesses. Many Councillors will be aware of the work Cares do in the environment such as the 'Pick, Pie and Pint' initiative but perhaps less aware of other less publicised general work they do. I have asked that a briefing on the work of Cares be prepared for Members after the recess.

The Corporate Plan

8. I will be working with officers over the coming months to review priorities and will be bringing a revised Corporate Plan forward for consultation. Although undoubtedly, there will be some new approaches and initiatives, I am not anticipating a whole scale change; the existing direction of growing the economy in an inclusive way whilst supporting the most vulnerable in our society will continue to be the backbone of our Corporate Plan, in-line with the Borough's Community Strategy One Darlington Perfectly Placed.

A New Approach to Inclusive Decision Making

9. Members will have received my letter on a new approach to ensuring all Members have the opportunity to be involved in Cabinet decision making by increasing visibility of future decisions and increasing the opportunity for pre-involvement by Scrutiny Committees. I trust Members appreciate this change and will use it appropriately, as we all understand that officer time is at a premium, so we need to ensure we use their time wisely. We will be reviewing Cabinet portfolios and dealing with overlap and balance the responsibility more equally with relevant Cabinet members.

Strategic Transport

10. As part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet I will be responsible for the Transport Portfolio and I will Chair the Transport Committee. Our Transport Network and Infrastructure is incredibly important and vital to support our growing economy. Over the summer the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan will be launched for consultation. The focus of this plan is on improving the transport system for local people and businesses. This means improving our walking and cycling networks and making sure that the public transport network, particularly buses, works for people now and in the future. However, very often improving local journeys requires action on a larger scale. For example, the frequency and service patterns on our local rail network are determined by the interaction of local trains at the national rail gateways of Darlington and Middlesbrough. Congestion and incidents on the main highway network, particularly the A19 and the A66, have a major impact on the operation of more local roads. I will be pressing for investment by National Infrastructure Agencies and Government to fund major infrastructure investments in Darlington and the Tees Valley to improve our transport and will be working with Mayor Houchen as his deputy on the Board of Transport for the North to secure investment.
11. Darlington hosted the Rail Future Conference in June and I spoke to the conference on the Rebirth of the Railways. Our rail heritage is something that we

are rightly proud of and something that we plan to celebrate moving forward towards the 200th anniversary of the Stockton to Darlington Railway in 2025. We will be bringing a report to Council before the end of the year on progress to date. We want to celebrate our past but also see investment and the creation of modern railway that strengthens Darlington's excellent connectivity.

Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE
Leader of the Council Portfolio