

5 : CABINET MEMBERS' REPORTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31 MARCH 2001

A REPORT OF THE LEADER

Introduction

- 1 This is the first of a series of what I hope will be adopted in the new Council as bi-monthly reports from the Cabinet Members.
- 2 Their purpose is to enable Cabinet Members to report on some of the major issues and events which have affected their portfolio area in the previous two months or so (longer on this initial occasion) and to cast an eye forward over the next two months.
- 3 The intention is not in the main to report on Executive decisions made either individually or collectively by the Cabinet. There are other mechanisms for recording and reporting on these matters. Rather the aim is to allow Cabinet Members to explain the context of their work, and to draw attention to issues in which the Council as a whole may be interested and on which Members may wish to ask questions or seek further information.
- 4 I intend to provide an introductory overview, and also to refer to some of my external work on behalf of the Council.

Modernisation Pilot

- 5 The Cabinet model has now been operating on a pilot basis for nearly five months. We have made a good, safe and steady start, and have already achieved some notable successes. Final decisions will be made by the full Council on 24 May and our submission based on these will be forwarded to the Minister shortly afterwards.

Local Government Association

- 6 As Members will recall, I serve on the Policy and Strategy Forum of the Local Government Association (effectively the Cabinet of the LGA). At its most recent meeting we discussed the way in which the Government's proposals for Care Trusts appear to tip a supposedly level playing field firmly in favour of the Health Service. However, I am delighted to report that after I had urged the LGA to make representations about the undemocratic way in which Local Authority appointments to trusts was to be made, the Health Minister has given a commitment to change the proposals for the better.

Regional Issues

- 7 As Chairman of the South East Regional Assembly I recently attended a meeting of the Regional Assemblies Network where John Prescott and Hilary Armstrong gave a number of indications of how Government would intend to proceed with regionalism, should the present Government be re-elected. The message was clear: full steam ahead, with optional referendums in all regions. In the North East, preparations are already being made to write a constitution for Regional Government. A Green Paper is likely to be issued in the autumn. We need to reflect, and be prepared to act, on what these developments may mean for the future of County Government. I have no doubt that it represents a great opportunity for us to seize.

South East Leaders

- 8 I meet regularly with the Leaders of the other County Councils in the South East. We are currently particularly concerned about the potential loss of elements of the Area Cost Adjustment (ACA). Work is actively being undertaken on both Education and Social Services costs. A major seminar on ACA is planned for 30 April in Kent, and we will be making an important contribution to that.

The Council Plan

- 9 The Cabinet's first priority at the beginning of the new Council will be to deliver the Council Plan, in particular to ensure that the Flagship Projects are launched effectively. One Flagship Project that I hope the Council will pursue with vigour is the development of a Public Service Agreement with the Government, which will both help us to improve performance in key areas and also bring increased resources (potentially over £8m) to the County.

**DAVID SHAKESPEARE
LEADER**