

How to build a healthy economy

Social care, often seen as a millstone for councils facing financial challenges, has been turned into an opportunity by Stockton-on-Tees BC to create inclusive growth and tackle health inequalities all at once, writes **Heather Jameson**

Endless hours of political debate, column inches and public sector man-hours have gone into debating the problems facing adult social care and the rising costs of looking after an ageing population.

Most of local government, from time to time, stops to acknowledge it is a nice problem to have: that our loved ones are living longer, albeit with extra support.

But Stockton-on-Tees BC chief executive Mike Greene says local government often sees health and social care as ‘a millstone, not an opportunity’. He is turning that on its head, creating a health and social care-led regeneration programme to harness the potential of the multi-billion-pound sector.

Greene summarises the place: ‘Stockton is a microcosm of the North of England.’

Built on a collection of towns and villages – Stockton, Norton, Billingham, Thornaby and Yarm – it is a small unitary, with a long history of community pride. ‘People connect with their communities, rather than the boundaries of the borough,’ the chief executive explains.

Situated in the centre of the Tees Valley, the borough is within easy reach of the North East and Yorkshire. ‘The connectivity is great,’ Greene says.

There is a diverse economy – with everything from Quorn to Fuji Film based in the borough – and high levels of educational attainment, with 97% of schools rated outstanding. ‘Productivity is high. By hour worked, it is higher than Manchester or Newcastle,’ he adds.

Stockton-on-Tees is also home to some of the wealthiest parts of the North East, living ‘cheek by jowl with high levels of deprivation’, he explains, and the borough faces some of the biggest gaps in health inequality in the country.

But with financial pressures on budgets, the council is keen to improve outcomes as well as making savings. It sees economic growth as the best route out of financial pressures.

As part of its economic plans, Stockton has concentrated hard on building up its town centre and cutting back on retail space. Part of the plan was to create a more vibrant community.

The monolithic 1970s Castlegate shopping centre that blocked views of the River Tees has been demolished to create the Stockton Waterfront urban park. Three times the size of Trafalgar Square, the park provides a huge community space, linking the town centre back to the riverside.

It is part of the transition for the town from an industrial heartland, with a dirty, working river, to the modern post-retail city it is set to become. The brave decision to buy and scrap the centre is one many councils would not have taken lightly, but Stockton worked with the community to get them on board.

It is the care and health innovation zone – still in its infancy – that will build the future vision for the place, designed as it is to tackle several issues for the council at once.

Rather than viewing care and health as a problem to be solved, in Stockton it is being used as an opportunity to create jobs and training, regenerate the town and increase the health and wellbeing of local people, boosting the life expectancy of those who need it, focusing on early intervention and prevention.

‘We are viewing health and care in an economic sense,’ Greene explains. Rather than a millstone, it has become a unique selling point – and digital health in particular has



become a real growth area.

The council aims to build a large-scale care and health cluster at Teeside Business Park and the nearby Tees Marshalling Yards, transforming 110 hectares of brownfield land – mainly from disused rail property.

Under the council’s vision, the site will become home to

Labour’s local vision for

Adam Fineberg says Labour’s new localist Industrial Strategy is a manifesto aimed at reaping the benefits of more widely distributed growth across the country



The Labour Party has launched a local elections campaign predicated on its new localist Industrial Strategy for growth. This follows 16 years of terrible national growth performance and the cost of living crisis.

National productivity figures are woefully poor and declining. The Conservative Government’s performance since 2010 – tinkering with the principles of an Industrial Strategy, but opting instead for Levelling-Up, having introduced austerity and the significant managed decline in public services – has left its toll of impending doom for the party at the ballot box.

Labour’s new strategy, *Power and Partnership, Labour’s Plan to Power up Britain*, is a return to a focus on how the local state can proactively contribute to national goals for economic growth with direct benefits for local citizens. It sets out a framework for bringing together state, private and third sector actors locally to address national needs through a series of themed approaches to join up local state functions alongside private sector investment and organised community activity.

The framework is predicated on the belief that national prosperity is driven by the success of local economies and



Stockton-on-Tees waterfront: The council demolished the Castlegate shopping centre to create a new public realm, while (inset) plans for a wider health-based regeneration are under way

businesses and research facilities covering care and health. There will be teaching and training, including the existing Stockton Riverside College, as well as housing for those living and working in the area.

It pulls together partners across local government and health, strengthening the integrated care system. Born

out of a partnership between the council, Tees Valley Combined Authority; Stockton Riverside College; Teeside University; Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, it has partnership at its heart.

The ambitious plans of the council – resolving the

issues facing the high street, creating economic growth for financial stability, integrating care and health, creating life chances and boosting life expectancy – all put health and wellbeing at their heart.

For Stockton, care and health is an opportunity to grow, not a problem to solve. ▀

growth

the sum total is not reaching its potential. This results in a patchwork of varying productive local underfunded public services with differing benefits and outcomes for citizens and the state alike. It seeks to raise the economic and social productivity of all local areas – a plan for action for growth that funds essential services that have been lacking of late.

Apart from through national fiscal policy, such an approach is the only way to both promote national growth for increased public expenditure, address the inefficient state, and tap into its potential, with benefits for all of the population.

My work on the ‘growth coalitions’ project began in the noughties. It sought to drive growth in all local economies on the basis that what is good for local people – good

housing and education, a good environment, etc – is good for local business. It was focused on the need for an overarching economic or growth-driven strategic vision, making local services work better for local people and the national economy by utilising the ‘tools of government’, partnering with the private sector. This would lead to a rationalisation and co-ordination of local services and the development of the local area.

Labour’s new strategy is a return to a focus on how the local state can proactively contribute to national goals

The challenge now is how Government and local public service providers can square the circle and ensure local citizens as well as UK PLC can best reap the benefits of growth.

Many of the proposals enshrined in the ‘growth coalitions’ project ring true today and can assist with this conundrum. Perhaps if we had maturing growth coalitions then, by now, many local economies would not be faring so badly from the current financial crisis.

By advancing devolution to local areas – creating an active centre to power up Britain through partnerships of leading local actors – Labour has created a new manifesto for a constitutional change to address significant themes through local action.

Local economic performance, housing and skills, environmental protection, regulation and energy development, industrial enablement and public services will all be addressed through local vision, participation and stakeholder action supported by the national, enabling state. It is a manifesto for all – reaping the benefits of more widely distributed growth across the country. ▀

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