
OVERVIEW OF EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work under my Efficiency and Resources Portfolio.

Former Depot Premises, rear of Tandridge Court, off Woodland Road

2. Cabinet has agreed to declare the former depot premises to the rear of Tandridge Court, off Woodland Road, surplus to requirements and has granted authority for it to be disposed of. The site, formerly used by the Council as a satellite depot, has recently been used by the contractor undertaking the Heritage Lottery funded improvement works to the Denes and for storage purposes, however, work had now ended and there is no longer a use for it. The disposal of the premises will remove the Council's potential maintenance and security liabilities and will achieve a capital receipt for the Council.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter two 2012/13

3. Cabinet received information on the current position of the Council's capital commitments and resource together with all the live construction projects currently being managed by the Council.
4. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work, with the current project position statement showing that there are 65 live projects currently being managed with an overall project outturn value of £70.4 million. The majority of the projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Annual Audit Letter 2011/12

5. Council has received the Annual Audit Letter for 2011/12. The Letter is very positive and, in terms of adequacy of the Council's arrangements for ensuring economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, PricewaterhouseCoopers has issued an unqualified value for money conclusion.

Procurement Plan – Update

6. In accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, Cabinet have considered the Procurement Plan and determined, again, in accordance with criteria, which contracts for the forthcoming year shall be delegated to the Officers and which are deemed to be strategic. Subsequent contracts will necessitate a revised Plan

being brought to Cabinet.

Land at Albert Road/North Road

7. Cabinet has approved the conditional sale of land at Albert Road together with the inter-related sale of land at Forge Way Industrial Estate.

Land at Buxton Moor Crescent and Edgemoor Road

8. Cabinet has also approved the conditional sale of land at Buxton Moor Crescent and Edgemoor Road.

Land at High Faverdale – Data Centre

9. Cabinet has given authority to enter into an Option Agreement for the grant of a Right of Way, to include the construction of a vehicle access across Council-owned land at High Faverdale Farm.

Accommodation Review

10. The current phase of the Accommodation Review has seen over 70 Xentrall ICT staff relocate from the Studios at Lingfield point to the north end of the 2nd floor of the Town Hall. The successful move was completed in December 2012 without any impact on service delivery. This will save the Council over £0.100m per annum in a full year. In addition, space is being prepared to accommodate Public Health staff transferring to the Council from the NHS. There are also advanced discussions with the CCG (Clinical Commission Group) which should see them in the Town Hall by their inauguration on 1 April 2013.

Social Media Services

11. During the recent winter weather the Council's web team have been doing the early morning shift working with school support to provide updates to parents and children about school closures. This has been a very popular service and has seen rises in sign-ups to our social media sites every year as a result. This year we have added gritting updates through social media so that the operatives can tell residents when the gritters are going out and the routes being gritted. This has also proved very popular and has resulted in very positive comments on the site from members of the public thanking the staff in street scene for their work.

Customer Services

12. In December the Blue Badge issuing service was integrated into Customer Services Centre. This enables customers to get an immediate answer over the telephone about whether their application has been successful and enables customers to have their photographs taken at the Customer Centre in the Town Hall before the Badge is issued through a central government department. This is better for the Customer and cheaper for the Council to deliver. The transition has been extremely smooth with Customer Services guiding over 250 new and existing

customers through the process, and issuing more than 100 badges in the first 6 weeks.

13. In November the Customer Centre took over all the switchboard calls to Central House. These integrations are part of a programme of service improvements which help to cut down costs whilst improving the service to the customer, they also give us better information about the service we provide to Customers and who is using our services.

ANEC response to the Local Government finance Settlement

14. ANEC have provided a response to the DCLG on the finance settlement which was informed by and supported by a cross party member-led resources task and finish group. This response has been circulated to all members. It recognised the challenging fiscal and economic circumstances, however was concerned that the proposals will directly impinge on North East councils ability to manage the rising cost and demand pressures they face. In summary the following was asked of Government:

(a) In 2013/14 to:

- (i) Rethink the top-slice of unnecessary cuts of £115m to reduce the impact on council budgets;
- (ii) Give clarity on the missing detail in the cut for the Early Intervention Grant;
- (iii) Review the operation of New Homes Bonus (NHB) as a matter of urgency to provide more equality across the scheme;
- (iv) Re-balance the central share/relative needs block without cutting the needs block;
- (v) Resolve the business rates appeals issue;
- (vi) Find a more effective damping protection solution to remove the perverse outcome for some councils.

(b) In 2014/15 to:

- (i) Lower the New Homes Bonus cuts approach;
- (ii) Separately identify and protect council tax support at the funding level advised by OBR consistent with a 10% cut in 2013/14 only; we are concerned that in effect Council Tax Support has been rolled into the central grant and has been cut by an average of 8.6% - an additional cut on top of the current distribution;
- (iii) Ensure Council Tax Resource Equalisation is maintained in real terms from 2014/15 onwards.

**Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**