
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.

Housing Complaints Reforms (The Localism Act 2011)

2. The Localism Act 2011, has introduced two key changes which have affected the way in which the Council is required to handle complaints about social housing and Cabinet has approved a Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure to ensure compliance with the Act.
3. The two key changes are that any complaints against the Council, as a social landlord, will, in future, be considered by the Housing Ombudsman, following investigation under the Council's own complaints procedure; and the appointment of a 'designated person/democratic filter' who will become involved, prior to the involvement of the Housing Ombudsman, if a tenant is not satisfied with the Council's response to their complaint.

North Cemetery House and Chapels, off North Road

4. Cabinet has agreed to dispose of North Cemetery House and Chapels which are surplus to Council's requirements. The sale of these properties will remove the Council's potential maintenance and security liabilities and will achieve a capital receipt which will be re-invested in the maintenance of the cemetery.

Budget Advisory Panels

5. Work is on-going on preparing the detailed information to inform the panels. It is a detailed and time consuming exercise but one that is very necessary to enable Councillors to undertake the challenge of the Council's budget against a background of diminishing resources and increasing service demands. Meeting dates have been scheduled and Member training/briefing sessions will be arranged in advance of these meetings.

Feethams Office Development

6. Cabinet has endorsed the offer made to the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to its decision to retain an office in the North East when they relocate from Mowden Hall. The offer includes the development of an office building to the rear (east) of the Town Hall should the DfE provide written confirmation that this is its selected property option. As Members will be aware the Council has been working

very closely with the DfE to identify property options within the Borough to enable them to retain an office within Darlington which will meet their site selection criteria.

Annual Procurement Plan -

7. In accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, Cabinet has considered the Annual 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.

Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Savings Proposals

8. Cabinet has approved a number of budget savings proposals by changing how it operates. The majority of the savings would not have been approved in normal circumstances, however, given the Council's financial challenge they have been approved to protect front line services. The savings will deliver £2.252 million in 2013/14 and £3.337 million, following full implementation.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio