
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 :-
 - (a) **Corporate Information Governance** – To ensure that the Council's Information Governance Policies are fit for purpose, a comprehensive review of the Council's information governance policy and delivery framework has been undertaken. Following this review, a revised Corporate Information Governance Policy and Strategy has been approved by Cabinet and an Information Security Policy has also been developed and approved.
 - (b) **Designation of two small areas of land for new allotment plots** – Cabinet have agreed to a proposal to appropriate two small areas of land from their current designation as agricultural and as public open space to a new designation of land available for allotments. The need to find extra areas of land for allotments is well understood across the UK with waiting lists for allotments growing rapidly and the designation of these areas of land will help the situation in Darlington where demand is far outstripping supply. The proposal would result in a further six plots to the existing Council owned site at Hummersknott and a brand new site to the rear of houses on Ridgeway which would allow a further eight and a half plots and which would be administered by the existing allotment association at Glebe Road.
 - (c) **Asset Management – Allocation of Land** – A number of Council owned sites have been allocated for potential residential development in connection with the Local Development Framework and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment process. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment identifies land suitable, available and deliverable for residential development over a period of 15 years and guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government requires that for Council-owned land to be considered for residential development, a Council resolution should be made expressing an intention to sell. Declaring these areas of land surplus does not commit the Council to selling the land at a future date.
 - (d) **Procurement Plan Update** – Members will be aware that, in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, Cabinet are required to approve the designation of contracts as strategic and non-strategic and the Annual Procurement Plan was agreed at the Cabinet meeting on the 28 April, 2009 and updated on the 2nd November, 2009. Since that date, a number of additional contracts which were not included on the Annual Procurement Plan are to be tendered and, in light of that, we have considered an updated Plan and determined, again, in accordance with the criteria, which of those

contracts shall be delegated to Officers and which are deemed to be strategic.

- (e) **Prudential Indicators Update and Treasury Management Half-Year Review 2009/10** – We have recommended the revised prudential indicators to Council for approval and have received a half-yearly review of the Council’s borrowing and investment activities. The mandatory Prudential Code, which governs Council borrowing, requires Council approval of controls, called Prudential Indicators, which relate to capital spending and borrowing. The indicators are set in three statutory annual reports and this mid-year update follows Council’s approval in February 2009 of the 2009/10 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy. Training has been provided, which was open to all Members and which was tailored for the new role of the Audit Committee, which was agreed at the November Council meeting. I have also had separate discussions with Officers about the Council’s treasury management policies and procedures.

- (f) **Release of Funding – North Lodge Bandstand** – Funding has been achieved to refurbish the bandstand in North Lodge Park. Officers have been working with Friends of North Lodge Park, to achieve a funding package and total funding of £216,000 has been achieved from Council capital resources, Heritage Lottery Funding and Big Lottery Community Spaces Funding to carry out the refurbishment.

- (g) **Site visit to joint Darlington/Stockton Computer Room** – I accompanied officers to review progress on the fit-out of the new computer room in the basement of the Town Hall. I am pleased to report that good progress is being made with most of the cooling equipment, emergency power units and server racks already installed. The room is expected to be finished by the end of February 2010 ready for the phased installation of computer servers. Members will recall that this new facility was included in the Xentrall Shared Services Business Case and is being funded by efficiencies generated from the partnership between Darlington and Stockton.

- (h) **Redeployment Procedures** – I recently held a meeting with Human Resources to look at the effectiveness of the Council’s Redeployment Policy as this is a vital area for the Council in terms of trying to avoid compulsory redundancies and other job losses. I am assured that the Council has a very sound Redeployment Policy which allows those under threat of redundancy or losing their job for other reasons (e.g. health or performance capability) to have prior consideration for suitable vacancies. This policy has worked successfully for a number of years and will together with proactive vacancy management become increasingly important for us in trying to mitigate the impact of the financial climate upon our workforce. In the past nine months 4 employees facing redundancy have been successfully redeployed.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio