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**OVERVIEW OF EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

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

(a) **Consultation on the Local Government Resources Review – Business Rates**

**Retention** – We have been made aware of proposals to allow local authorities to retain their locally raised business rates. The Department for Communities and Local Government have published a consultation paper setting out proposals for a business rates retention scheme which would replace the current local government finance system, under which business rates are distributed as part of formula grant. Technical papers to assist in understanding the mechanics of the proposal were also circulated in August, 2011, with a consultation deadline of 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.

The Council contributed fully to the development of the Association of North East Council's (ANEC) response to the consultation and has responded in support of the contents of the ANEC response.

- (b) **Tell Us Once** – The Register Office launched a new national service, Tell Us Once, on 11<sup>th</sup> October. Tell us Once is a national project between the Department for Work and Pensions, other central government departments and local authorities which allows individuals to inform central and local government departments just once about a birth or death.

The project to launch service had been on-going for approximately 18 months and Darlington Register Office was the first in the North East to offer the service for death registrations. When registering a birth or death at Darlington Register Office, if the informant wishes, arrangements will be made to pass details on to a number of relevant central and local government departments (including the Pensions Service, Passport Service, DVLA, Blue Badges, Housing, Housing Benefits, Adult Services, Council Tax, Electoral Registration, Children's Services, Libraries and Child Benefit Agency) removing the need for the individual to contact several departments/agencies to provide the same information. Departments will then contact individuals direct to follow up any required action. Tell us Once also removes the need, in the majority of cases, for original copies of birth or death certificates to be forwarded to those departments/agencies.

It is anticipated that Tell us Once will reduce administration costs within the Council and improve customer care by reducing the number of departments/agencies informants need to contact. Early indications are that almost everyone who is eligible has taken up Tell us Once service. Feedback has also been very positive.

- (c) **Transformation Programme** – I have attended a regular meeting with the Leader, Chief Executive and the Director of Resources where we discussed the overall progress against the Darlington 2015 Transformation Programme. Progress against the projects to assess options for Place Services and potential collaboration with Hartlepool Borough Council for the delivery of services for People were discussed and both are working to develop a business case against a series of options which will be presented to Cabinet in due course. There were also some positive outcomes from a recent Lean Rapid Improvement Event to streamline the processes involved in Housing Repairs and Maintenance. A number of improvement actions have been put in place and a number will be implemented over the coming months and the benefits (both quality and financial) will be monitored and reported.
  - (d) **Revenue Budget Monitoring 2011-12 – Quarter 2** – Cabinet considered the Quarter 2 forecast of the 2011-12 revenue budget outturn. The report indicated projections showing an overall improvement of £2.093M compared with the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2011-15. This is an improvement of £1.379M compared with those previously reported to Cabinet on 19th July, 2011.
  - (e) **Darlington Golf Club** – Cabinet agreed to grant of an easement to Darlington Golf Club to allow them to create a new access across Council owned land at Sparrow Hall Drive to the Golf Club and Elm Tree House farm. Outline planning permission for the new access has been approved by the Planning Applications Committee subject to the Golf Club entering into a S106 agreement to close off Green Lane.
2. In addition to meetings of Cabinet, I have attended various meetings since the last meeting of Council :-
- (a) Briefings with various Directors and Assistant Directors
  - (b) Xentrall Partnership Panel – 30<sup>th</sup> September
  - (c) Citizenship Ceremony - 3<sup>rd</sup> October
  - (d) HR Appeals Panel – 17<sup>th</sup> October
  - (e) HR Panel – 7<sup>th</sup> November
  - (f) Four Star Awards – 7<sup>th</sup> November
  - (g) Joint Consultative Committee – 18<sup>th</sup> November

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