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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) **Procurement Plan** - In accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, we 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.
  - (b) **Regulation of Investigatory Powers** - Cabinet have received an update on developments in relation to the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. Members will be aware that the provisions contained within this Act enable Council's to carry out certain types of surveillance activity, as long as specified procedures are followed, and that any information obtained as a result of surveillance activity can be relied upon in Court proceedings provided that the provisions of the Act are complied with.
  - (c) **Council Tax Empty Property Discounts** – As part of the Local Government Finance Bill, the Government have introduced a number of technical changes to the administration of Council Tax in relation to empty homes. As a result of this, Cabinet have agreed a number of proposed changes to Council Tax discounts for empty dwellings and the introduction of an empty homes premium for long-term empty dwellings. The proposed changes will now be consulted on prior to approval and implementation from April 2013.
  - (d) **Revenue Budget Monitoring 2012/13 – Quarter 2** - Cabinet considered the Quarter 2 forecast of the 2012-13 revenue budget outturn. The report indicated projections showing an overall improvement of £2.969M compared with the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2012-16. This is a reduction of £0.046M compared with those previously reported to Cabinet on 10th July, 2012.
  - (e) **Land to the North of Darlington Arena** – Cabinet have agreed a request by Darlington Mowden Park Rugby Football Club to acquire Council-owned land to the north of the Darlington Arena for the development of playing pitches and sports related facilities and have authorised the Director of Resources to conclude negotiations, agree terms and settle compensation in accordance with the Head of Terms within the report. The Borough Solicitor will conclude the legal documentation.

- (f) **Annual Canvass 2012 (Register of Electors)** - The Annual Canvass takes place every year, and is designed to obtain the name and address of every person who should be on the 'Register of Electors'. The Register of Electors is also used to call people for jury service in England and Wales, and is increasingly being used as the basis for credit referencing and proof of a person's identity. The Register of Electors is usually published on the 1st of December each year.

This year, however, the Council was required to publish the Register of Electors by the 16th October 2012, ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner Election which took place on 15th November 2012. The Annual Canvass commenced in July 2012, and, despite the tighter timescales involved and the competing work pressures associated with the Police and Crime Commissioner Election, the Register of Electors was published by the revised schedule, and in doing so the Section exceeded its 94% response target.

- (g) **Police and Crime Commissioner Election – Thursday, 15th November 2012** - The Police Reform and Social Responsibility (PRSR) Act 2011 replaced Police Authorities in England and Wales with directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). On 15th November 2012, residents had the opportunity to elect a Police and Crime Commissioner, who will be accountable for how crime is tackled in the Durham Constabulary area.

Whilst the election was overseen by the Police Authority Returning Officer (PARO) in Durham, the Council's Election Team co-ordinated election arrangements in Darlington, and ensured the successful delivery of a well-run election for voters and candidates.

- (h) **Medium Term Financial Plan Update** - The preparation of the MTFP is continuing in terms of preparing the detailed budgets and identifying options for cost savings to be implemented in 2013/14. As Members are aware, the financial challenge the Council faces was always challenging however it appears to have got significantly worse as following recent announcements by the government relating to the implementation of Council Tax increases and reduction in grants. The approach agreed by Cabinet means that the 2013/14 budget agreed in March 2013 will not see significant service changes however proposals will be developed following the Local Government Finance settlement in December this year for consultation in the Summer of 2013. The magnitude of the financial challenge cannot be under estimated, latest projections suggest we will need to reduce spending by more than £15m and given our current budget is £80.5m and we have already agreed savings of £24m, Members will understand the challenge. The proposals in 2013 have the potential to significantly change the Council as we know it today and will require a good dialogue with the public so we can understand their priorities as well as our own as democratic leaders. The conversation will need to focus on what the Council can provide and what level of taxes and charges the public are willing to pay for such support and services.

(i) **Council Tax Support consultation** - The Council are currently consulting on their draft Council Tax Support scheme, due to be introduced in April 2013. The following provides an update on the consultation activities :-

- a) We have written to the major precepting authorities about the draft proposals. So far we have received a response from the Police Authority;
- b) We have provided an on-line survey for residents to complete about the draft proposals. So far we have received 31 responses;
- c) We have advertised the consultation process in the October and November editions of the 'Darlington Together' magazine and in the autumn edition of 'Hot News' for Council Tenants;
- d) We have written to all the current working age recipients of Council Tax Benefit who could potentially be affected by these proposals (6,900 residents) and provided them with a paper copy of the survey. So far we have received 734 responses;
- e) We have arranged meetings in November with external agencies to discuss the proposals. These agencies include the Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK, DAD and the Private Landlords Association;
- f) A full equalities impact assessment will be completed; and
- g) The Revenues and Benefits section will start to compile all the responses from the consultation during November.

The consultation ends on 14th December 2012.

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