
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.

Release of Capital Allocation in the Medium-Term Financial Plan – Former Hopetown Carriageworks

2. Cabinet has released funding allocated within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to undertake repair works to the former Hopetown Carriageworks. The external condition of the former Carriageworks is in need of significant repair in order to reinstate the Grade II Listed Building to an acceptable condition and external consultants who specialise in the repair of listed buildings have indicated that the remedial works required to rectify the appearance of the building can be addressed within the capital sum allocated within the MTFP of £150,000.

Charges for Taxi Testing/MOT's

3. As Members will be aware, as part of the relocation of the Depot from Vicarage Road to Allington Way, an MOT testing station has now been installed in the Fitting Shop and the Council is now in a position to be able to undertake MOT's for both Registered Taxis, Council vehicles and vehicles of the general public. Cabinet has agreed a schedule of charges for this new service.

Annual Procurement Plan

4. 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.

Customer Services Centre

5. The new Customer Services Centre opened to the public on 1st April and I am sure that those Members who attended the preview visits or have been to the Centre since its opening will agree that the Council has a first class facility for its Customers as well as providing customers with a range of options to do business with the Council.
6. In addition to the Council's services in the Centre, the presence of the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Credit Union will hopefully provide our residents with the best financial advice with a view to achieving long term financial stability and

viability and support our residents in the use of appropriate forms of lending and deter the use of short term high interest lending.

Darlington Football Club

7. Following an Extraordinary General Meeting of Darlington Rugby Football Club (DRFC) on 24th March, the club voted unanimously to the proposal of a ground sharing arrangement with Darlington Football Club. The Council is supportive of the proposal and are in discussions with DRFC with a view to allowing part of the Council's adjoining farmland to be used for additional car parking mainly at weekends and on the occasional week day to cover sporting fixtures.
8. DRFC has confirmed that the main purpose of the additional parking (up to 350 spaces) is to accommodate the anticipated visitors to Blackwell Meadows as a direct impact of Darlington Football Club but also as a result of the additional five football pitches created on the land to the east of the club, two of which are already in use by Darlington College during the week and for Sunday Junior Football and the other three will be available shortly, all to be managed by DRFC.
9. Blackwell Meadows already hosts Rugby Union, Rugby League, Football and Archery. The Council is continuing to work with DRFC to assist in developing Blackwell Meadows into a Community Sports Hub.

Employee Survey

10. An employee survey is underway and at the time of going to print 459 have been returned. The last few years have been challenging for staff, there has been no team unaffected by restructuring or resource reductions. There are more challenges to come and therefore a good time to take a health check on how things are, so we can understand the main issues and do all we can to support staff in these challenging times.

Individual Electoral Registration

11. As some Members will be aware following the Briefing before the last Council meeting, in June, after the European Elections, any person who wishes to register to vote will be required to provide their national insurance number and date of birth to do so. Their identity will then be matched against the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) database and, if necessary, local datasets e.g. Council Tax database before they can be added to the Register. There is an exceptions process for any person who cannot provide their NI number or date of birth or who cannot be matched against other data. To minimise the disruption to electors, the process will allow for a copy of Darlington's Register to be data matched with records held by DWP and where a match is found, those people matched will do nothing and their name will be carried forward or passported to the new Register.
12. There will be a period of transition between June this year and December 2015. Whilst people will be able to apply to register under IER from around 10th June the major part of the transition will be in July, when the latest version of the electoral

register is sent to be data-matched against DWP records. Based on a full run through referred to as 'a confirmation dry run' where Officers did a trial run of matching Darlington's register with DWP records, somewhere around 82 per cent of Darlington's existing electors can be matched against DWP data at their current address. This 82 per cent will be automatically passported onto the new register and people will not need to do anything to stay registered, unless they move. The remaining 18 per cent (approximately 9038) will be matched against local data to try and reduce this figure, and the remaining electors still not matched will be sent an invitation to register to vote under IER.

13. The postal vote statistics show how many current postal voters could be passported straight to the 2014 register with their postal vote intact and how many could lose their postal vote (1598) if they do not register individually. These postal vote electors will remain on the 2014 register as polling station voters but some will potentially drop off the register altogether in 2015 (before the local and parliamentary elections) if they still do not individually register.
14. The Electoral Commission will be running a comprehensive national public awareness campaign during the transition and again in advance of the 2015 elections. Darlington will also run a campaign to support this, but particularly for our harder to reach groups we need to be proactive and to talk to our residents via trusted channels, not just via advertising campaigns. Councillors will have an important role in helping to get these messages across and to get the channels right so that we can have the greatest impact in individual wards and therefore across the Borough. Members are asked to act as IER champions, encouraging residents in their wards to register, and providing basic information about the changes when the time comes and signposting people to where they can get more information. Each Member will be provided with information on IER before the transition starts so that they have the information they need to talk about IER to residents.

Health and Safety Update

15. Work has been on-going over the last few months to review and update the Council's COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) and Manual Handling procedures. Revisions to both arrangements have now been completed and communicated.
16. The Think Safety Steering group has drawn up an action plan of initiatives to ensure Health and Safety remains in focus and is maintained as part of the Council's day to day working. A message of the month programme is being developed starting with ~COSHH and how it impacts on all employees.
17. There have also been a number of arrangement updates to assist employee carrying out their Health and Safety responsibilities including :-
 - (a) The Violence and Aggression arrangement
 - (b) Employee Protection Register guidance
 - (c) Accident, violence and near miss reporting

18. It is positive to note the Quarter 3 accident statistics show a reduction in reportable accidents in comparison to the previous year.

ICT Update

19. A significant programme of work by Xentrall Shared Services to improve and secure the Council's ICT infrastructure is coming to a close. The following has recently been undertaken :-

- (a) The Council's network has been reapproved as secure by the Cabinet Office which enables the Council to continue to share information electronically with Government departments. This approval required further improvements to the network and a substantial submission of evidence and testing to the Cabinet Office.
- (b) ICT services has retained its ISO270001 information security management and ISO9001 quality management systems following recent audits.
- (c) Significant progress has been made within the Desktop Optimisation Strategy which has seen all PC's and laptops either upgraded or replaced to facilitate the implementation of Windows 7 and Office 2010 which are business critical software upgrades. The roll out of PC's and laptops will be completed in June.
- (d) The networks within both Central House and the Town Hall have been renewed.
- (e) The Print Consolidation project successfully completed, with Multi-Function Print Devices being installed across Council offices.
- (f) Behind the scenes a new system backup regime has been implemented which underpins the Council's servers and systems.
- (g) The Council's email system has been upgraded as has WebOutlook (remote email access).
- (h) Bring Your Own Device has been implemented which allows staff to use their own smartphones and tablets securely for Council emails, calendar and contacts.
- (i) A new email encryption service has been deployed to facilitate the secure electronic transfer of sensitive and personal information outside of the Council.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio