
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.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter Two - 2013/14

2. Cabinet received information on the current position of the Council's capital commitment and resource together with all the live construction projects currently being managed by the Council.
3. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work, with the current project position showing that there are 72 live projects currently being managed by the Council with an overall project outturn value of £89.7 million. The majority of the projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Annual Canvass 2013/2014

4. The Annual Canvass forms the basis of the Register of Electors each year, and the current Annual Canvass commenced on 1 October 2013. An Annual Canvass Form was delivered to every property within the Borough and, where necessary, Reminder Forms were delivered to those properties from which a response had not been received.
5. Throughout December 2013 and January 2014, canvassers proactively called at properties to encourage the completion of outstanding forms to improve the completeness of the Register of Electors. Information on the Annual Canvass was also included in January's issue of the 'Darlington Together' magazine, and reminders were published on the Council's social media profiles, to encourage returns.
6. Work now continues to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the new Register of Electors ahead of publication on 17 February 2014.

Settlement

7. The Council's Finance Settlement was received on 18 December 2013 and the cuts allocated were broadly in line with what had already been anticipated. Whilst there was good news in that the proposed New Homes Bonus Top Slice to the LEP's was removed it was also very disappointing to find out the Local Welfare

Provision Grant used to provide crisis loans and emergency support to residents is to be scrapped from 2015/16. The fund was made up from the crisis loans scheme and community care grants previously administered by DWP, but transferred to local government from April 2013, as part of the government's welfare reform. For Darlington this is a grant of £486k.

Annual Audit Letter 2012/13

8. The Council has received the Annual Audit Letter for 2012/13. The Letter is very positive and, in terms of adequacy of the Council's arrangements for ensuring economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, PricewaterhouseCoopers has issued an unqualified value for money conclusion.

Mid-Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2013/14

9. Cabinet have recommended the revised Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and have received a half-yearly review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities. The mandatory Prudential Code, which governs Council's borrowing, requires Council approval of controls called Prudential Indicators, which related to capital spending and borrowing. The indicators are set in three statutory annual reports and this mid-year figure follows Council's approval in February 2013 of the 2013/14 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers

10. Cabinet has received an update on developments in relation to the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which enables 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.

Land Disposals and Acquisitions

11. The Agreement for Lease was completed between the Council and the DfE which will lead to the development of a BREEAM excellent office building of circa net 3100 square metres on the site of the former car park at the rear of the Town Hall. Archaeological investigations have been undertaken and construction is already progressing. The new building will link to the Town Hall offering huge collaboration potential between the Council and the DfE.
12. The sale of circa five acres at Faverdale East Business Park to Sub Sea Innovations Ltd has completed. Sub Sea have also been granted planning permission and are already on site progressing their site preparation works.
13. Terms have been agreed on the sale of land at Alverton Drive, High Grange to Railway Housing Association for the proposed development of 10 bungalows and

contracts are due to be exchanged.

14. The acquisition of the two restaurant premises on Parkgate adjacent to the booking office of the Civic Theatre have been completed which will facilitate the proposed refurbishment of the Civic Theatre should the Council's funding bid to the Northern Arts Council be successful in 2014.
15. Terms have been agreed and contracts are due to be exchanged shortly on the sale of Phase 1 of the former Eastbourne School site. The developer ESH are intending to be on site early in the New Year subject to being granted planning permission to build 74 houses of which 60 units will be affordable homes.
16. Contracts have been exchanged for the acquisition of 1-2 Green Street, which is required as part of the ongoing Central Park site assembly programme and for the proposed development of the CPI's Biologics building.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio