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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.

**Individual Electoral Registration (IER)**

2. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was introduced in England and Wales on 10 June 2014, and residents are now required to make an application to appear on the Register of Electors on an individual basis.
3. In order to apply to appear on the Register of Electors, new applicants must now provide their National Insurance Number and Date of Birth. This information is then used to confirm that the person making the application is who they say they are by verifying the information with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It is anticipated that this will reduce the risk of electoral fraud, and inaccurate entries on the Register of Electors. For the first time, new applicants may also now register on-line using the website [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote), or by telephone.
4. A confirmation exercise to verify those electors already registered prior to the introduction of IER was undertaken on 9 July 2014 and this exercise returned an 86 per cent match rate, which rose to a 90 per cent match rate once a local data matching exercise with other approved sources had been completed.
5. The Annual Canvass commenced on 1 August 2014, and as part of the Canvass process confirmation letters have been issued to the 90 per cent of electors whose names could be verified as part of the confirmation exercise. Work continues to verify the details of those electors whose details failed to match with the DWPs records (10 per cent), and identify and register any new electors. The new Register of Electors will be published on 1 December 2014.

**Electoral Review of Darlington**

6. Members will recall that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) started an Electoral Review of the Borough on 25 June 2013. The Review was required as one ward, Faverdale, had 46 per cent more electors per councillor than the average for the Borough. The three main considerations of the Electoral Review were to ensure equality of representation, reflect community identity, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

7. The LGBCE published its final recommendations on 12 August 2014, and has recommended a Council size of 50 Members, comprising 10 two-Member wards and 10 three-Member wards. The changes proposed will now be implemented by order, subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, and a draft Order will be laid in Parliament in due course. The draft Order will mean that the new electoral arrangements for Darlington will be implemented at the local elections in 2015.

### **Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review**

8. Further to the report submitted to the last Ordinary Meeting of Council, the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review commenced on 1 September 2014. The review will take into consideration the existing warding arrangements, and subsequently the changes to the warding arrangements that will come into effect at the local elections in 2015.
9. As part of the initial scoping exercise, consultation has taken place with a number of interested parties, including elected representatives, Darlington Association for Disability, G.O.L.D., Presiding Officers, Polling Station Inspectors, and Head Teachers, to ascertain views on existing Polling Districts and Polling Places, and to encourage alternative suggestions for venues. Members of the public have also been encouraged to make representations via social media and press releases.
10. Findings from the initial consultation phase are currently being reviewed, and there will be a further consultation phase on the draft proposals formulated, with the final recommendations being submitted to the next Ordinary Meeting of Council scheduled for consideration by Members.

### **Insurance Renewal**

11. The Council's insurance contract is due to be renewed in June 2015. The value of this contract is currently around £1 million per annum for insurance premiums and we are looking at alternatives to reduce costs, for example, by self-insuring on a greater scale than at present. This would require the authority to review its risk exposure and in order to understand the scale of this, work will be carried out on assessing our insurable risks across the Authority prior to tender.

### **Land Sales**

12. The sale of Council-owned land at Alverton Drive, High Grange to Railway Housing Association was completed in June. This will see the development of ten bungalows
13. The sale of the plot of land, Glebe Road North to the Thirteen Group is imminent. Planning Permission has been granted for 34 affordable units and building is due to start shortly.

## ICT Update

14. The ICT architecture programme continues and includes :-
- (a) a successful external health check of the Council's PSN (Public Services Network) connection which forms part of an on-going comprehensive programme of compliance works. A submission for re-certification takes place during August;
  - (b) the successful completion of the large scale desktop roll-out programme which has either upgraded or replaced all of the Councils PCs and laptops as part of the implementation of Windows 7 and Office 2010;
  - (c) progressing the network and telephony renewal projects into procurement stage, with roll-out planned for later this year; and
  - (d) Initial discussions with suppliers regarding the future of the Council's mobile voice and data network and associated services.
15. Since the last update, various ICT service based projects have been completed and upgrades and enhancements to various systems have included :--
- (a) Upgrade of the Customer Service Centre queuing system;
  - (b) Improvements to the ICT disaster recovery systems;
  - (c) Improvements to the system managing ICT user accounts and permissions; and
  - (d) Replacement of the environmental system which monitors the racks of ICT equipment

## Building Services

16. The former Options for Place project included a staff restructure within Building Services and this has now been achieved resulting in cost reductions of £208,000 for Maintenance work and £406,000 for Construction. A further £92,000 was saved in Highways and in total a reduction in staffing levels of around 18 full time equivalent posts has been achieved ranging from an Assistant Director to Operational Trades. As a result of falling turnover over the lifetime of the MTFP the sustainability of these cost savings is anticipated to be in the region of £550,000.
17. Other efficiency savings are currently being captured from a range of management interventions including :-
- (a) the decommissioning and retendering of the Council's Stores, resulting in the appointment of five local suppliers providing goods relevant to their specialisms;

- (b) introduction of a standard price per job for the majority of housing repairs to reduce administration and accounting costs;
- (c) installation of trackers to operatives vans;
- (d) empowering operatives to make their own decisions and reduce pre-inspection levels for repairs; and
- (e) provision of embedded Procurement cards to enable operatives to easily purchase the materials they need from our suppliers whilst providing management with high quality data and control on spend.

18. Building Services have also been successful in undertaking several high profile capital projects including :-

- (a) the new Council Depot and Salt Barn at Allington Way;
- (b) seven new classrooms at Mowden Infants and Junior School;
- (c) new Customer Contact Centre; and
- (d) work in six schools to enable them to comply with the new requirements for offering places to Year 2 children.

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