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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. The new Register of Electors was successfully published on 1 December 2014. This is the first publication since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in June 2014, and provides the first real snapshot of the transition to IER. As Members will recall, eligible members of the public are now required to register to vote individually, whereas under the previous system a 'head of household' completed a registration form on behalf of all members of the household.
3. Residents who applied to be included on the register during the 2013 canvass, before the introduction of IER, but did not transfer to the new register automatically and who have not subsequently provided the additional information required to confirm their registration under IER, have been carried forward to the new Register of Electors. These residents will remain on the register, however are not able to vote by post or proxy until such time as they register under IER legislation, and will therefore need to vote in person at their allocated polling station in the UK Parliamentary (General) Election, and Local Government Elections, in May 2015.
4. A local public awareness campaign to promote registration for the UK Parliamentary (General) Election, and Local Government Elections, will begin on 5 February 2015, to coincide with National Voter Registration Day. This campaign will include a write out to all properties to confirm the names of those residents who are registered to vote at each address, and encourage registration by those who are not currently registered. Key messages and deadlines will also appear in the 'Darlington Together' magazine, and on the Council's social media profiles, as part of the ongoing campaign.

**Elections 2015**

5. Preparations are underway for the holding of the Parliamentary and Local Elections on 7 May 2015. Other authorities in the Tees Valley will also be holding both local and Parliamentary elections whilst Durham County Council will be holding Parliamentary only. The conduct of the election raises a number of practical issues for the organisation. This is the first time since 1979 in Darlington that the Council will have both elections occurring on the same date. In addition to any Parish Elections, there will be 20 separate local elections (i.e. 20 ballot papers will be produced) in the new wards and two parliamentary elections in the Darlington and Sedgefield constituencies.

6. The proposal is that at least the count for the Parliamentary election and the verification for the local elections will be held on the night of the poll. It is likely that the count of the local elections will also take place on the night although depending on the timing this could be suspended until the following day.
7. Due to the size of the election and the count together with the timing requiring a very long working day, there is a need to recruit more staff than usual. This will have an impact on some other services for that day. Communications have therefore gone out to all staff to request expressions of interest as well as requests to those with relevant experience outside the organisation. The size of the election will have an impact on the resources within Democratic Services in the lead up to the election.
8. The local elections will be held on the new ward boundaries with the election of 50 councillors to 20 wards. The register published on 1<sup>st</sup> December is based on the existing ward boundaries but preparation of the new register is underway and is likely to be published before the beginning of February.
9. Purdah will commence no later than publication of the notice of election on 30 March although this may occur earlier. The period in which it is necessary to hold an election in the event of a vacancy has passed and therefore in the event of a vacancy this can be held until the elections in May.

### **Local Government Finance Settlement**

10. The Council has been notified of its government grants for 2015/6 and as this represented the second year of a two year settlement the figures were pretty much as expected in terms of the Revenue Support Grant(RSG). Although the figures were as expected they are very disappointing, a cash reduction of £6.955m (28.1%). The overall reduction includes the abolition of the Local Welfare Provision Grant of £486,000 as a specific grant and its inclusion now as part of RSG. Members will recall this grant was available to support the most vulnerable in society and the responsibility for administering the grant was recently passed from the department for works and pensions to local authorities and at that time the level of funding was reduced.

### **Revenues and Benefits Postal Services**

11. The Council's Revenues and Benefits service has successfully tendered for its postal services. Each year the Council sends out over 250,000 Council Tax bills, Business Rates bills and Benefit letters to local residents and businesses. The Council currently prints, envelopes and dispatches these, in what are largely manual processes.
12. A private contractor will now provide this service from March 2015, which will fully automate the printing, collating, enveloping and sorting of all outgoing Revenues and Benefits mail. In addition, the Council will also be able to take advantage of more favourable postage rates from Royal Mail.

13. It is expected that the Council will save over £30,000 each year from this contract.

### **ICT Update**

14. The following is an ICT Update for the period October to December 2014 (last ICT update given to Members was in September).

15. The ICT architecture programme continues and includes :-

- (a) successful audit for continued connection to the Government's PSN (Public Services Network);
- (b) successful completion of telephony and network procurements;
- (c) implementation of remote PC management tool for the ICT Service Desk providing better facilities for the remote fixing of PC problems;
- (d) implementation of automatic server patching programme to maintain server performance, security and resilience;
- (e) implementation of email archiving to release high performance disk space;
- (f) implementation of a new server logging tool for security and audit purposes;
- (g) implementation of a new Cisco digital telephony core and commencement of telephony roll-out across services, replacing the old Siemens telephony system;
- (h) implementation of corporate Wi-Fi service throughout the Town Hall allowing corporate phones and laptops, as well as guests and visitors to remain connected wherever they are;
- (i) implementation of new corporate Spam/virus management system to protect the Council from external threats;
- (j) successful move of the data centre backup generator as part of the cinema build; and
- (k) successful installation of an automatic backup generator to provide resilience for the backup and disaster recovery site at Stockton.

16. Since the last update, the ICT service based projects to be completed have been :-

- (a) successful implementation of ICT Infrastructure for the multi-disciplinary RIACT team at Hundens Lane;

- (b) successful implementation of ICT Infrastructure for the Healthy Darlington Hub/Wellness Suite at the Dolphin Centre and
- (c) implementation of server based CACI demographic information system.

### **Department for Education (DFE)**

- 17. The DFE building was completed almost four weeks ahead of schedule and on budget. DFE staff have now started to occupy the building and the shared facilities will be available to Council staff and Members.

### **Arts Centre**

- 18. Contracts for the sale of the Arts Centre have been exchanged with two parties. The first is for a redevelopment of the rear part of the site and the other for a refurbishment of the front part of the site for a conversion to residential use, retaining the majority of the existing buildings. Both sales are conditional upon the grant of planning permission. Both parties will be working on their design and then public consultation with a view to submitting planning applications not later than Summer 2015.

### **Feethams Cinema/Leisure Complex**

- 19. The work on the Feethams Cinema/Leisure Complex started in October 2014 with the groundworks completed before Christmas 2014. The main build is now underway and completion is expected by Summer 2016.

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