
OVERVIEW OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work under my Resource Management Portfolio :-
 - (a) **External Audit Service Plan 2003/04** - We have received a presentation from Mark Nicholson of PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the Council's appointed external auditors, on the External Audit Service Plan 2003/04.
 - (b) **Sickness Absence Task and Finish Review Group** – We have supported the continued work the Resources Scrutiny Committee have done in relation to sickness absence within the Authority and have expressed our thanks to all those involved in the review. Sickness absence within the Authority will continue to be reviewed and challenged.
 - (c) **Consultancy Support** – We have approved plans by the Director of Development and Environment to rationalise its consultancy support by entering into a framework partnership. The proposals will represent a rationalisation and improvement of existing arrangements and will also move them in line with best practice.
 - (d) **Audit Services' Annual Report 2003/04** – In accordance with the Council's Corporate Governance Arrangements, we have received the Audit Services' Annual Report 2003/04.

2. Other areas which might be of interest are :-
 - (a) **Discretionary Rate Relief** – We have granted discretionary rate relief to a number of charitable and non-profit making organisations for the financial year 2004/05.
 - (b) **Financial Assistance 2004/05** – A number of charitable and non-profit making organisations and individuals have been successful if receiving financial assistance.
 - (c) **Schedule of Transactions** - A number of transactions, provisionally made by the Director of Development and Environment, have been approved.
 - (d) **Proposed Write-off of Irrecoverable Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax** – To enable the Council's accounts to be maintained in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules, we have, subject to the implementation of further action if, and when, future contacts are made, agreed to write off non-domestic rate arrears amounting to £102,850.60 and council tax arrears amounting to £31,810.90. All practical steps have been taken to try to recover the sums due.

- (e) **Middleton St. George Primary School** – We have agreed to the disposal of 0.809 hectares of land at Middleton St. George Primary School to the Anglican Diocese of Durham and have also agreed to make a 20 per cent contribution to the future project costs.
- (f) **Commercial Street** – We have reconfirmed our previous decision in relation to the proposed Commercial Street development in light of further work undertaken on the development agreement and changes to the boundary of the site and have also approved the use of statutory powers by the Council in endeavouring to achieve the proposed development of that site.
- (g) **Faverdale East Business Park** – Infrastructure works to open up Phase I of the business park are well advanced and ahead of programme. Archaeological and ground investigations for the proposed development by Argos on the Phase II land are also progressing on site.
- (h) **Association of Local Authority Risk Management (ALARM) Awards 2004** – Darlington Borough Council was ‘highly commended’ at the ALARM Awards Ceremony last month in the Partnership Working Initiative Category.

The successful partnership working arrangements between the Darlington Borough Council Building Control Division and the Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service were recently recognised on a national level by ALARM, the National Forum for Risk Management in the Public Sector.

Council Officers from the Building Control Division are now located within the Darlington Fire Station and closely work with their colleagues within the Fire Service. This has enabled both services to work more efficiently together, and has resulted in improved communication and the sharing of information and inspection responsibilities which has led to a much improved service.

Councillor Don Bristow
Cabinet Member with Resource Management Portfolio