
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.

Disposal of Surplus Land - Bates Avenue, Hartington Way and Red Hall Stables

2. Cabinet has agreed to dispose of two parcels of Council-owned land at Bates Avenue and Hartington Way to help meet an immediate demand for more new housing which has arisen because of a shortfall in new house-building against plan targets since the adoption of the Council's Core Strategy in 2011. The release of these sites will now also help to provide an alternative source of housing land supply to offset a reduced expectation of new house-building at Central Park.
3. In addition, Cabinet has also granted delegated authority to the Director of Economic Growth to enter into an Option Agreement with Keepmoat Homes Limited for the Red Hall stables site.

Lease Surrender and Disposal – 30 Station Road

4. Cabinet has approved terms for the surrender of the lease by the existing leaseholder and declared the property at 30 Station Road surplus to Council requirements.

Proposed Write-off of Irrecoverable Debts

5. Cabinet has written-off sundry debtor invoices with individual values greater than £500 which are considered irrecoverable; this equates to 0.4 per cent of collectable debt, in which, during 2015/16, it has become apparent that no further practical or economical steps can be taken to recover the sums due. The Council works continually on debt collection to minimise loss of income by speeding up collection times and reducing the need for invoicing debt by maximising up-front payment for services wherever possible, however, there are some services which we are obliged to provide which cannot be withheld prior to payment.

Darlington Register Office

Annual Performance Report

6. I am pleased to report that the General Register Office has stated that Darlington has achieved high levels of service for 2015/16 and congratulated the Council on the Register Office's service performance.

Relocation

7. Work is on schedule to relocate the Register Office to the Town Hall in the Autumn. Refurbishment of the Council Chamber and Committee Suite area will commence late July and should be complete mid-September with the first Ceremonies booked for October. Internal building work to the Customer Services Centre will begin at the same time to provide the repository for the historic records held by the Register Office.

EU Referendum

8. During the lead up to the Referendum held on 23 June 2016, an increased number of applications to register were received which saw the number of registered electors in the Borough increase by over 3,000, from the 1 December 2015, when the 2015/16 Register of Electors was published up until 9 June 2016, which was the cut-off date for registering to vote at the Referendum. The number of applications to vote by post and by proxy also increased for the Referendum with nearly 2000 additional applications to vote by post and over 500 applications to vote by proxy being applied for during the six weeks prior to the Referendum. The total number of people on the Register of Electors currently (12 July 2016) stands at 79,313.

Annual Canvass

9. This year's Annual Canvass commenced during July with Household Enquiry Forms (HEF's) being delivered to every property in the Borough. Residents have the opportunity to respond to the HEF either through the automated service (e-mail, on-line, telephone or text) or by completing the form and returning in the pre-paid envelope provided. Where appropriate, further reminders will be issued during August and September to those households who do not respond to the initial form, together with a personal visit to the property. Where new electors are identified, Invitations To Register (ITR's) will be sent to those electors to complete the registration process. Again, a series of reminders will be delivered where necessary, together with a personal visit. The new Register of Electors will be published on 1 December 2016, and work will continue to encourage as many residents to register prior to publication.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio