
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 2 – 2016/17

2. Cabinet has received information on the current position of the Council's capital commitments 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 statement showing that there are 36 live projects currently being managed with an overall project outturn value of £95.370 million. The majority of projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2016-17 – Quarter 2

4. Cabinet has considered the quarter 2 forecast of the 2016/17 revenue budget outturn. The Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2016/17 are £15.386 million, which is £0.099 million worse than the phase 2 2016-20 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) position and includes a brought forward amount of £0.272 million from 2015/16.
5. The two major pressures which contribute to the £0.099 million are within Children's Services and relate to management costs and the cost of agency staff within that Service area. The management costs are a one-off cost during 2016/17 as a result of the interim measures which had been put in place following the Ofsted inspection and should not be an on-going pressure in future years and Officers are currently looking at recruitment strategies to try and ease the pressure relating to the cost of agency staff.
6. Departmental reserves are projected to be overspent by £1.216 million and corporately managed resources are forecast to be underspent by £0.845 million.
7. Of the projected reserves of £15.386 million, there is a risk reserve balance of £4.330 million, leaving £11.056 million one-off funding to further support the general fund moving forward and Members will be aware that £9.345 million of balances is already identified within the 2016-20 MTFP for usage between 2017-18 and 2019-20.

Land adjacent to Former Springfield School – Acquisition and Disposal

8. Cabinet has agreed to acquire a piece of land adjacent to the former Springfield School site from Durham County Council and declare that and a further area of land in Council ownership surplus to requirements. These areas of land will have the potential for residential development and combination will allow better quality residential development and permit the developer to improve economies of scale.

Jack Horner Public House and Adjacent Land

9. Cabinet has approved the terms of the sale of the former Jack Horners Public House site at Whitby Way, together with an adjacent plot of open land, for a small residential development, subject to the granting of planning permission. Discussions with the potential developers are not yet concluded.

Allotments

10. Following a request by seven allotment associations to become self-managed, in accordance with the Council's previously approved Allotment Strategy, Cabinet has agreed to allow six of those associations to become self-managed and to be granted new 20-year leases and has deferred a decision in respect of one, pending the resolution of a number of issues which are currently affecting that site.
11. In addition, in order to pass any responsibility to keep the Council-owned sheds, poly tunnels and greenhouses at the Lascelles site in good repair, Cabinet has agreed to transfer ownership of the sheds to that allotment association and the poly tunnels and greenhouses to the individual allotment holders.

Darlington Register Office – Unannounced Inspection

12. In order to provide assurance to the General Register Office (GRO), Darlington Registration Service was selected for a 'no-notice' inspection on 20 December 2016 with the following scope :-
 - (a) full check of secure certificate stock issued to all principal officers for reconciliation against records held by the Registrar General
 - (b) review procedures in relation to receipt, control and issue of certificate stock and associated record keeping
 - (c) review wider security arrangements over locality and storage of certificate stock
 - (d) review of the security of and access to registration records and information
 - (e) review data storage arrangements

13. The Register Office was assessed against a list of ten criteria and a level of assurance was given each of those criteria.
14. It is reassuring following the recent relocation of the Register Office to the Town Hall to have feedback that overall, the GRO Compliance and Performance Unit team has concluded that a 'High' level of assurance has been achieved with limited scope for improving existing arrangements and no Significant action is required. There were also a number of observations made during the Inspection in relation to good practice currently undertaken in Darlington.

Electoral Registration

15. The Elections Team have been engaged in the process of refreshing the electoral register. This has involved mail shots, publicity and door knocking. The returns from the Household Enquiry Forms were 83.59 per cent, which is an increase of just under 9 per cent on last year's return rate.
16. Electoral registration staff also subsequently undertook a large amount of 'data mining' work to identify electors at properties from which a response was no received.

Election Preparation

17. Planning and preparation is underway in readiness for the Election of a Mayor for the Tees Valley Combined Authority, which will be held on 4 May 2017. Stockton Borough Council will be leading on the election, however this Council's Elections Team have been tasked with attending to the arrangements for polling in Darlington.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio