
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.

Procurement Plan

2. Cabinet has considered the Annual Procurement Plan and determined again, in accordance with the criteria, which contracts for the forthcoming year shall be delegated to the Officers and which are deemed to be strategic. Subsequent contracts will necessitate a revised Plan being brought to Cabinet.

Release of Capital Allocation in the MTFP Planned Maintenance

3. Cabinet has agreed to release funding, allocated in the Capital MTFP 2016/17 2019/20, to undertake planned maintenance works. The funding will be used to meet the costs of additional work which has been identified as part of the roof repairs to the Darlington Railway Museum and to replace the boiler at McNay Street Children's Centre, with the balance of any allocation being retained and targeted to essential items of planned maintenance.
4. The Council has a statutory and legal obligation to safeguard the condition of its land and buildings and the release of this funding will enable it to meet those obligations.

ICT Update

5. In terms of governance, ICT has successfully recertified to the Government's Public Service Network standard. This means the Council continues to be part of the national government secure IT network infrastructure which is used for transferring data and secure e-mails between public bodies.
6. Progress has also been made on a number of architecture projects which include :-
 - (a) continuing the roll-out of a new ICT network across the Council, with all network equipment now refreshed and some remaining links to be upgraded;
 - (b) completion of the procurement exercise for a new mobile carrier for the Council's mobile phones, tablets and laptops. Work is now underway planning the cut-across from old to new providers;
 - (c) upgrades to the GIS (Graphical Information System) tools and systems;

- (d) the procurement of a new e-forms solution to further develop on-line services via the Council's website;
 - (e) seamless upgrades of several server management and ICT management systems, with no downtime or impact on services; and
 - (f) Completion of further works in relation to ICT security and resilience, particularly in relation to anti-virus and threat detection.
7. The ICT Team has also continued to oversee the work of Northumberland County Council as they migrate its ICT services and equipment to Darlington and Stockton as part of an ICT hosting agreement made with Xentrall last year.

Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election 2017

8. The Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election took place on 4 May 2017, and Officers from Stockton Borough Council co-ordinated the arrangements for the election in the Tees Valley area. In advance of the election, work continued locally to encourage electoral registration and participation.
9. Poll cards were initially delivered between 22 and 27 March 2017, with a booklet, providing information regarding the election and the candidates, delivered to every registered elector over the Easter weekend. The Tees Valley Combined Authority also produced its own leaflet to promote the election, which was issued to a number of public buildings for distribution.
10. In the lead up to the election, staff continued to use the Council's website and social media channels to promote the alternative methods of voting and all relevant deadlines.

UK Parliamentary General Election 2017

11. On 18 April 2017, the Prime Minister announced her intention to call a UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) on Thursday, 8 June 2017. The following day, in line with the Fixed Term Parliament Act 2011, sufficient MP's voted in favour to achieve the required 2/3rd majority.
12. Despite the workload from the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election, the Elections Team has worked within incredibly tight timescales to ensure that arrangements for the poll are in place, securing venues as Polling Stations, liaising with our printers and making staffing arrangements accordingly.
13. Information as regard the UKPGE has been published on the Council's website, via the Council's social media profiles, and an advert advising of key election deadlines has been published in May's issue of the 'One Darlington' magazine. Poll cards for the UKPGE will be posted over the course of the next few days.

Long-term Empty Properties

14. The Revenues and Benefits team has recently been successful in obtaining bankruptcy and forced sale orders through the courts for some long-term empty properties in the Town.
15. There are over 600 domestic properties in Darlington that have been empty for six months or more and 100 of these have been empty for more than two years. In some cases the owners have left the properties in disrepair causing misery to neighbours and thousands of pounds of unpaid Council Tax.
16. As the Judge in a recent case where a forced sale order was granted on an abandoned property in Borough Road commented, 'enough is enough'. We are committed to tracking down these individuals and pursuing them through the courts to bring them to account. Not only will the Council recover the outstanding money it is owed, but properties that have been a blight on our communities will come back into use, providing much needed housing in the Town.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio