
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.

Allotments

2. Cabinet has given approval to the Springwell Terrace Allotment site becoming a self-managed site and has authorised the Director of Economic Growth to grant a new 20 year lease to the successful association.

Middleton St. George Parish Council By-Election

3. On 18 August 2017, a Notice of Vacancy was published and displayed on behalf of Middleton St. George Parish Council. The Notice advised that two vacancies existed in the office of Parish Councillor on Middleton St. George Parish Council.
4. Rule 5 (2) of the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 allows ten electors for a Parish in which the casual vacancies exist to request the Returning Officer to hold an election to fill those vacancies. That request must be made in writing within 14 working days of the date of notice.
5. On 31 August 2017, the Returning Officer received a request to hold an election to fill the vacancies, and a by-election was subsequently held on 9 November 2017.

Mowden Ward By-Election

6. Following the resignation of Councillor Bill Stenson on 21 September 2017, a Notice of Vacancy was published on 29 September 2017. The Notice advised of the casual vacancy, and stated that a by-election to fill the vacancy could be requested, in writing to the Returning Officer, by two local government electors within the local authority area.
7. A request to hold a by-election was duly received and the election took place on 16 November 2017.

Red Hall and Lingfield Ward By-Election

8. On 6 October 2017, a Notice of Vacancy was published and displayed advising of a casual vacancy in the office of Borough Councillor for the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward, following the resignation of Councillor Lynne Haszeldine, and the Returning Officer duly received a request to hold an election to fill the vacancy. The

by-election took place alongside the Mowden Ward By-Election on 16 November 2017.

Hurworth Parish Council By-Election

9. On 9 October 2017, a Notice of Vacancy was published and displayed on behalf of Hurworth Parish Council. The Notice advised that two vacancies existed in the office of Parish Councillor on Hurworth Parish Council, following the resignations of Councillors Paylor and Wood.
10. In accordance with Rule 5 (2) of the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006, a request to call an election to fill the vacancies was received by the Returning Officer on 13 October 2017, and a by-election is scheduled for 30 November 2017.

Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration)

11. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 7 July 2017, and Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were delivered to every property in the Borough. Residents were provided with a number of different options as to how they could respond, including on-line, by telephone, by text, or by completion and return of the form itself.
12. Where appropriate, reminders were issued to those electors who had not responded. The initial set of reminders were issued with effect from 11 August 2017, with subsequent reminders being issued from 22 September 2017, where required. Visiting Officers have also been visiting properties throughout August, September and October to encourage the completion of outstanding forms.
13. Invitations to Register (ITRs) were delivered to any identified new electors, and, again, a series of reminders have been delivered where necessary, together with a personal visit to the property, when required.
14. Personal visits to follow up outstanding HEFs and ITRs have continued throughout November, however, at the time of writing, the response rate in relation to HEFs has already surpassed that of this time last year, with 85 per cent of HEFs returned. It is hoped that this figure will be even higher once the new Electoral Register is published on 1 December 2017.

Discretionary Rate Relief

15. The Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme for 2017-2012 has been approved. As part of the budget in March 2017, the Government announced that it would make available a discretionary fund of £300 million over four years from 2017-18 to provide additional help to those businesses that faced the steepest increases in their Business Rates bills as a result of the April 2017 revaluation. It will also assist new businesses setting up in the Town Centre.

Procurement Plan Update

16. Cabinet has received an update to the Annual Procurement Plan in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules.

Land

17. Cabinet has agreed to terminate the Commercial Street Development Agreement and to the retention of the beneficiary interest in third party land.
18. It has also agreed to the sale of 2.2 acres of land at Faverdale East Business Park.

Darlington Register Office

19. An annual review regarding processes and management information has taken place on Tell us Once with the Partnership Account Manager from the Department for Works and Pensions. In terms of capturing Tell us Once information from informants registering births and deaths, it is pleasing to note that Darlington continues to be one of the highest performing Register Offices in the County.

ICT Update

20. Since the last update to Members, ICT Services has continued to pass PCI DSS quarterly tests. These are the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards. ICT have also been successfully audited by the British Standards Institute on both its ISO standards (Quality Management System and Information Security Management System) and as part of this audit process it has also migrated to the new Quality Management System standard regime (ISO 9001:2015).
21. In addition to the above, progress has also been made on a number of architecture projects which include :-
 - (a) the on-going roll-out of a new mobile contract across the Council;
 - (b) implementing the final stages of the upgraded network;
 - (c) further investigation and preparations on the future of desktop services, including piloting Microsoft Office 365;
 - (d) successful GCSx (Government Connect Secure eXtranet) contract migration (secure email facility e.g. used for Council Tax returns and 'Tell us Once');
 - (e) successful implementation of Contact Centre call routing; and
 - (f) Wi-Fi Implementation completed in Central House.

Councillor Stephen Harker
Cabinet Member with Efficiency and Resources Portfolio