

**COUNCIL**  
**30 January 2020**

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**OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main area of work undertaken under the Resources Portfolio.

**Annual Audit Letter 2018/19**

2. Cabinet has received our external audit report once again confirming that the Council's accounts give a true and fair view for the year ending 31 March 2019 and that the Council have in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources.

**Delivery of New Homes Programme – Joint Venture Proposal**

3. We continue to fund new ways to raise income for the Council and Cabinet has approved the establishment of a Joint Venture Company between the Council and Esh Homes Limited to acquire land, deliver and build private sale and affordable homes over a nine-year programme.

**Review of Outcome of Complaints made to Ombudsman**

4. Cabinet has received an update on the outcome of cases determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman. There were no identifiable themes running through the complaints considered by the Ombudsman and actions have been taken to ensure there is no re-occurrence.

**Customer Services Performance**

5. Our Customer Services team has reported improved performance for November 2019, with average telephone call waiting times at two minutes and 21 seconds, compared to three minutes and 37 seconds in November 2018. In addition, waiting times for visitors at the Customer Contact Centre are now four minutes and 31 seconds, compared to eleven minutes and two seconds in November 2018.
6. We have completed improvements to the Customer Contact Centre, with the number of computers available for customers to access Council Services doubling from four to eight. Additional floor walking staff have also been made available to assist our customers who require additional support to access the Council's digital services.

**Estates and Property & Business Investment**

7. Terms for another Town Centre Strategic Acquisition have taken place with the purchase of the Union Street Congregational Church and Hall, 10-12 Union Street expected to complete by the end of January 2020. The property is vacant and a target for vandalism and it is proposed that the building be demolished at the

earliest opportunity. Negotiations with the owners of the adjacent former nightclub building are continuing.

8. Refurbishment works to the Council's shop premises at the corner of Skinnergate and Duke Street are progressing well and are expected to be complete by mid-January 2020. The refurbished unit previously occupied by the Co-op Bank has been let to Queensway Dental Practice who are already in Darlington on Yarm Road and also have practices in Billingham and Jesmond.

### **UK Parliamentary (General) Election 2019 – Thursday, 12 December 2019**

9. A 'snap' UK Parliamentary (General) Election took place on 12 December 2019, with the Democratic Services Team co-ordinating the arrangements for the election in the Darlington Constituency, and for those parts of the Sedgefield Constituency that lie within the Borough boundary.
10. Given the short notice period in terms of calling the election, and the overlap with the ongoing Annual Canvass, the Team worked within incredibly tight timescales to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place in terms of staffing, securing venues as Polling Stations and liaising with our printers to produce the required paperwork. A total of 145 staff were employed and trained to work at 54 Polling Stations throughout the day, and 82 staff were employed to work on the Count later that evening, with a significant number of staff allocated to other key roles in the lead up to the election.
11. In the weeks approaching the election much consideration was given to the potential for adverse Winter conditions, with appropriate contingency arrangements put in place. This presented the team with unprecedented challenges and created much additional work.
12. This election represented the third significant electoral event of the year (and the second unscheduled election), following the Local Government (Borough) Elections on 2 May 2019, and the European Parliamentary Election on 23 May 2019, and Democratic Services once again delivered a professionally administered process.

**Councillor Charles Johnson**  
**Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio**