

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 6 January 2016

GOVERNANCE

1. Democratic Services Review

I asked for and recently chaired, two consultation meetings with members on their priorities for future service levels within 50% budget savings that needs to be delivered within Democratic Services as part of the Change Programme (a level applied to non-front line services throughout the Council)

Parts of the savings have already been delivered, but the review was put on hold on a planned basis due to additional staffing levels required for the 2015 elections.

As part of this process will be a new electronic system designed around members' needs to submit 'onestops'. I have agreed to work with the company concerned as a Member Champion on this and I will consult further with members at a later date.

I felt it was important that members have an input into the service that will be delivered to them in the future and also to play a part in delivering savings in this area.

2. Councillors and Social Media

Members may be aware of a recent case, reported in the local press, where libel damages were awarded against councillors following comments made on social media.

This illustrates the fact that the laws of defamation apply to members of the council (and members of the public) just as much online as they would in letters to or articles in a printed paper like the Gazette. This local case follows high profile national example of Sally Bercow/Lord McAlpine. The days of social media being a 'wild west' free-for-all where anything could be said with impunity are long gone and can potentially cause those involved serious financial hardship.

3. Electoral Registration

The revised electoral register was published on 1 December 2015 following the first proper canvass since the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The Council has experienced a reduction in the return rate of canvass forms closing at 79.13% (91921 electors), this is lower than in 2013/14 (pre-IER) which had a return of 84.42% (95,644 electors). However, there is a potential for a further 7461 electors still to be added i.e. electors that were identified during the household canvass but have not

yet returned their completed individual application. These potential electors are actively being encouraged to return their forms by Electoral Services. The reduction in return rate is reflected across the country, with returns reportedly reduced overall by 10%. Within the north east region we are placed 5th out of 11 authorities for return rates.

Members can assist in getting more people to register by

- Asking constituents who come to them with issues if they are registered (or checking on their own register) and encouraging them to do so-ideally online
- Raising the issue at Community Councils residents' groups or community events
- Promoting on social media or in ward newsletters
- Putting up posters around their local community. Copies of a poster will be circulated separately
- Promoting via local schools and colleges

4. IT

The implementation of iPortal is continuing to progress through a phased rollout plan across all services. All staff should be trained by the end of February. All of Wellbeing Care and Learning have been trained and are using the system, which has been successfully integrated with the Children's Case Management system "LCS" and the Adults Case Management System "LAS". Implementation in these areas has already seen benefits by allowing staff to more effectively share information as a resource. Senior Care Home staff now share information relating to each of the Homes managed by the Council and the Troubled Families and Education Psychology teams have worked to develop a single, shared case file for service users. Legal and Democratic Services have also been trained and gone live, with Economic Development, Organisation and Governance, Supporting Communities, IT and HR and Improving Public Health also trained and commencing work to transfer their documents on to the new system. The iPortal team are now preparing to rollout to Environment Services, with Finance and Investment forming the final phase. Work has also begun to integrate iPortal with the councils new Planning Portal. This seamless integration will enable planning application documents to be securely stored on iPortal but viewed through the Planning System.

5. Coroners Merger

Plans for a formal merger between Teesside and Hartlepool Coroner's Services – explored following a direction from the Ministry of Justice – have been put on hold.

Members should be aware that putting the merger on hold will not affect the vastly improved coroner's service we now have in place on Teesside – in fact quite the opposite is true. When a business case for the merger between Teesside and Hartlepool Coroners' Services was first put forward it was in order to achieve improvements in the efficiency of how inquests are run. As has been covered extensively in the media these improvements have been achieved already– possibly over and above all of our expectations – and the potential risks of a merger now outweigh the benefits. Whilst these risks remain it would be wrong to impose changes unnecessarily and so Teesside and Hartlepool Coroner's Services will continue to work

together without a formal merger, which has proven very successful, until such a time that those risks are lessened or removed.

6. Balanced Scorecards Pilot

The 2015/16 pilot phase of the Council's new performance management framework, based around Balanced Scorecards, is progressing well.

Balanced Scorecards will provide a single 'traffic light' view of performance for officers and members across four perspectives – Customer, Business, Finance and People – at the Council's three senior management levels. These four perspectives are considered equally important to the Council's success, and reflect the four business skills of the Middlesbrough Manager Competency Framework. In essence, Balanced Scorecards will answer the question: what percentage of its targets is the Council achieving overall?

Balanced Scorecards have now been piloted for three quarters from Year End 2014/15, with consolidated reports presented to Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Quarter Two 2015/16 was presented to OSB on 8 December 2015. It is pleasing to note that there has been significant progress in developing the framework since Quarter One:

A new Strategic Risk Register for the Council has been developed, linked to the Strategic Plan and Outcome Delivery Plans approved by Council on 25 November 2015 and was appended to the OSB report outlined above. Progress against activity to reduce the risks identified in the register to targeted levels will be monitored as part of Balance Scorecard discussions from Quarter Three 2015/16.

Much work has also been undertaken to monitor projects within the Capital Programme. Monthly expenditure profiles for each budget allocation, and milestones for each project within the programme have been established.

An annual employee satisfaction survey has now been introduced and will report in Quarter Four 2015/16. Together with the above points, this means that all standard measures for Scorecards will be reportable from Quarter Four 2015/16.

Work in final months of 2015/16 will focus on finalising the Balanced Scorecard model for 2016/17, ensuring that the weighting and scoring model used in the framework, the measures used to populate it and the targets set for those measures, are fully reflective of the Council's priorities.

FINANCE

7. Comprehensive Spending Review

Details of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and Autumn Statement were provided by Central Government on the 25th November 2015. This set out the Governments financial plans over the next 4 years. Information is provided at an overall Whitehall departmental level only. No information is provided at an individual local authority level.

Set out in the CSR are the Government's intentions, by 2019/2020:-

- a) To reduce the Welfare budget by £12 billion,
- b) To reduce Whitehall budgets by £20 billion, and
- c) To produce a £10.1 billion annual surplus.

The level of reduction at each Departmental level varies. The Departments of “Business innovation and Skills”, “Transport”, and “Communities and Local Government” taking the biggest reductions. Included in the CSR is an intention to see support to Local Government reduce by a huge 56%.

This is to further the government’s intention to savagely cut funding further to local government, making councils reliant on council tax and other local forms of funding-as well as of course hitting public services. Unsurprisingly it will hit areas like Middlesbrough with far lower level of high banded properties and consequently lower levels received from council tax, far harder than the more affluent areas

Other key proposals include:-

- a) To allow Local authorities to levy an additional Council Tax precept of 2% for Adult Social Care expenditure,
 - b) An increase of £1.5 billion in the Better Care Fund by 2019/2020,
 - c) To pass on 100% of business rates to Councils by the end of the current parliament, and
 - d) to impose an apprentice levy equivalent to 0.5% of employees wage bill and
- The Local Government Finance settlement was to be provided to Local Authorities on the 17th December 2015. This outlines the impact on an individual Local authority basis. The Chief Finance Officer is analysing the real impact of this and will be reported separately to Council at a later time. At the time of writing this report this detail was not available

An update to the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) economic forecasts was provided. This reflected a reduction in the level of national debt as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product from 83.6% to 74.7% over the next 4 years. This is significantly higher than the position as at May 2010 which stood at 62.2%

In comparing the CSR with previous Government plans, the projections in respect of the level of national debt have been revised upwards and the point at which a potential annual budget deficit may be generated has been extended.

8. Members Small Capital Scheme

On the 8th December I chaired a briefing session for all Members setting out the process for bids for capital funding from the members small capital scheme pot. 12 Members attended the session.

The funding gives Council Members the opportunity to put forward scheme proposals for capital funding of between £5,000 and £15,000 for projects within their wards. £120,000 is available over the period 2015/2016 to 2016/2017.

At the session the application process was explained and it basically involves Members completing a simple application, which the appropriate officers will support them completing. The information required is; what is the project about; what outcomes will

the scheme achieve; how much it will cost and the timescales involved. All applications will then be scored on their merits and agreed by Property Sub-Committee.

On Friday 11th December, Martin Shepherd, Head of Asset Management, circulated to all Members applications forms, guidance and a copy of the presentation. Completed applications need to be returned to Martin by the 29th January 2016 and any queries Members have can be directed to him.

At my request the session also included a briefing on the Capital Programme. There were some queries from that that are in the process of being answered.

NICKY WALKER
EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE