

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2010**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **CABINET DECISION**

Corporate Management & Finance– Lead Cabinet Member – **Councillor Laing**

#### **Task & Finish EIT Review-Democratic Services**

1. Summary

The attached report outlines the findings of the Officer Task & Finish EIT Review of Democratic Services. Democratic Services was programmed to be reviewed in April 2011 as part of the Council's Efficiency Improvement and Transformation (EIT) programme. Because of increasing financial pressure and desire to effect the proposed changes before the 2011 Elections, it was agreed that this review would be brought forward. The review covers all areas within Democratic Services; realisation of benefits will be expedited with recommendations implemented in year.

The scrutiny of this review was undertaken by the Executive Scrutiny Committee. The conclusion of the review was presented to that Committee on 30 November 2010. The Committee endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet.

2. Recommendations

1. That the Area Based Allocation grants amounting to £15,393 be retained as part of the Council's overall required savings.
2. That subject to CMT and MAP approving the introduction of a summer recess period for Council/Committee meetings, the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to consider the introduction of a system of annualised hours for Democratic Services staff and realise any financial savings that accrue from this.
3. That, subject to consultation with Members, the Council's approach to the hosting of its AGM be revised, as outlined, with effect from 2011 and MAP be invited to consider options to be presented regarding the future role of ordinary Council meetings..
4. That subject to full consultation with elected Members:-
  - the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of ICT seek to introduce a standardised level of future IT support for Members;
  - following the successful rationalisation of our printer estate within the authority and the introduction of secure 'follow me' printing from multi-function devices, local printers in Members homes be no longer supported;

- in line with Workwise principles, the amount of office accommodation provided within the Council offices be rationalised to reduce the amount of office space required in favour of more shared “touchdown” facilities with concentrated workspace areas;
  - advancements in IT technology be reviewed in the near future to see whether devices such as I-Pads, tablets etc can be introduced by the Authority offering longer term efficiencies leading to a reduction in the Council’s Printing budget with less paper work sent to Members and the facility for Members to access all documents via a tablet, upon which notes can be made on the documents electronically.
5. That attendance at the list of approved conferences is reviewed by the Members Advisory Panel.
  6. That Democratic Services, in consultation with each elected Member, be authorised to identify ward surgery venues that can be provided at no cost to the Authority, utilising more widely library and school buildings where appropriate.
  7. That the business case for transferring servicing of LSP meetings to Democratic Services be explored by the Head of Democratic Services.
  8. That Democratic Services deliver the further service improvements identified through independent assessment and inspection at no extra cost to the Authority within existing budgets.
  9. That support arrangements for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee are reviewed (in discussion with other Tees Valley Authorities) with a view to removing the £5000 scrutiny support to Middlesbrough Council and providing scrutiny support on a rotational basis from within existing scrutiny budgets at Stockton.
  10. That the staffing arrangements at paragraph 207 are made permanent and any resulting savings are made permanent within the structure and budgets for Democratic Services.
  11. That future work is carried out to examine the civic function and how the current staffing arrangements and roles can become multi functional to increase efficiencies whilst maintaining and improving the current service.
  12. That a new lease car for the Mayor be procured at an annual saving of £2,200.
  13. That the Head of Democratic Services continue to work with procurement to maximise the opportunities for savings in respect of electoral printing.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

As part of the Council’s EIT Programme, and as part of the agreed Scrutiny Work Programme for 2010/11, this officer led review has been undertaken as a value for money exercise with a view to realising any financial savings that may contribute towards the Council’s overall financial objectives and service improvement programme.

#### 4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2010**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**CABINET DECISION**

**Task & Finish EIT Review-Democratic Services**

**SUMMARY**

The attached report outlines the findings of the Officer Task & Finish EIT Review of Democratic Services. Democratic Services was programmed to be reviewed in April 2011 as part of the Council's Efficiency Improvement and Transformation (EIT) programme. Because of increasing financial pressure and desire to effect the proposed changes before the 2011 Elections, it was agreed that this review would be brought forward. The review covers all areas within Democratic Services; realisation of benefits will be expedited with recommendations implemented in year.

The scrutiny of this review was undertaken by the Executive Scrutiny Committee. The conclusion of the review was presented to that Committee on 30 November 2010. The Committee endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Area Based Allocation grants amounting to £15,393 be retained as part of the Council's overall required savings.
2. That subject to CMT and MAP approving the introduction of a summer recess period for Council/Committee meetings, the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to consider the introduction of a system of annualised hours for Democratic Services staff and realise any financial savings that accrue from this.
3. That, subject to consultation with Members, the Council's approach to the hosting of its AGM be revised, as outlined, with effect from 2011 and MAP be invited to consider options to be presented regarding the future role of ordinary Council meetings..
4. That subject to full consultation with elected Members:-
  - the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of ICT seek to introduce a standardised level of future IT support for Members;
  - following the successful rationalisation of our printer estate within the authority and the introduction of secure 'follow me' printing from multi-function devices, local printers in Members homes be no longer supported;
  - in line with Workwise principles, the amount of office accommodation provided within the Council offices be rationalised to reduce the amount of office space required in favour of more shared "touchdown" facilities with concentrated workspace areas;

- advancements in IT technology be reviewed in the near future to see whether devices such as I-Pads, tablets etc can be introduced by the Authority offering longer term efficiencies leading to a reduction in the Council's Printing budget with less paper work sent to Members and the facility for Members to access all documents via a tablet, upon which notes can be made on the documents electronically.
5. That attendance at the list of approved conferences is reviewed by the Members Advisory Panel.
  6. That Democratic Services, in consultation with each elected Member, be authorised to identify ward surgery venues that can be provided at no cost to the Authority, utilising more widely library and school buildings where appropriate.
  7. That the business case for transferring servicing of LSP meetings to Democratic Services be explored by the Head of Democratic Services.
  8. That Democratic Services deliver the further service improvements identified through independent assessment and inspection at no extra cost to the Authority within existing budgets.
  9. That support arrangements for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee are reviewed (in discussion with other Tees Valley Authorities) with a view to removing the £5000 scrutiny support to Middlesbrough Council and providing scrutiny support on a rotational basis from within existing scrutiny budgets at Stockton.
  10. That the staffing arrangements at paragraph 207 are made permanent and any resulting savings are made permanent within the structure and budgets for Democratic Services.
  11. That future work is carried out to examine the civic function and how the current staffing arrangements and roles can become multi functional to increase efficiencies whilst maintaining and improving the current service.
  12. That a new lease car for the Mayor be procured at an annual saving of £2,200.
  13. That the Head of Democratic Services continue to work with procurement to maximise the opportunities for savings in respect of electoral printing.

## **DETAIL**

1. This review has followed the approach that Stockton Borough Council has adopted for undertaking EIT reviews which ensures that all reviews are conducted with equal rigour and as part of an overall corporate strategy. A review team was established at the outset to progress work and ensure the wider corporate policy implications and customer requirements were considered. The Director of Law & Democracy, the Corporate Management Team and the EIT Sub-Board have provided a Strategic overview and challenged the status quo. Elected Members have supported the review through their roles as customers, policy makers and community representatives.
2. A desk top exercise has been completed to draw together appropriate consultation, benchmarking / performance data, financial appraisals and feedback from staff which has been evaluated and is presented here for consideration and comment.

## **BASELINE**

3. The Democratic Services Division is made up of four service areas:

- Democratic and Members Services Team (9.5 FTE) (1 post on secondment)
  - Scrutiny Team (5 FTE including 1 vacant post )
  - Electoral, Civic and Community Engagement Team (7 FTE)
  - Efficiency Improvement Transformation (1 FTE)
4. There are 20.5 FTE equivalents across the Division which operates from the Municipal Buildings and utilises a core budget of £741,000 and Corporate Budgets totalling £1,955,000.

## **Democratic & Member Services**

### *Democratic & Member Services Overview*

5. The service is structured in accordance with the support requirements necessary for the Council's Executive arrangements, which were introduced in January 2001<sup>1</sup>\*. The Local Government Act 2000 required local authorities with a population of at least 85,000 to operate one of three models of executive arrangements. Since this date, the Council has operated with a Leader & Cabinet model.
6. The 2000 Act legislation introduced the Cabinet, Scrutiny and Committee structure that has since been amended to its present structure at **Appendix 1**.
7. Meetings of each of the above are arranged in accordance with the requirements of the Democracy Diary, with some meetings, such as Planning, Cabinet and Licensing Committees meeting on a fixed 3, 4 and 6 week schedule respectively; and others following either a fixed pattern, or arranged as required. Since 2007, a four year Democracy Diary has been introduced giving both Members and officers the opportunity to plan their work schedule ahead, whilst still allowing flexibility to introduce extra meetings as required.
8. Information that supports each of the above meetings is maintained on the Council's E-Genda system, and is made available in hard copy form to all Members of that particular Committee. The use of new technology, such as E-Genda which was introduced in 2006, and the Council's website containing democratic information, Cabinet Blog, Scrutiny Committee final reports etc. has played a key role in allowing officers to make more democratic information than ever before immediately available to both members of the Council, officers and the general public, thereby increasing accessibility and improving awareness. This innovation has meant that less resources, such as printing costs, paper, officer time, has been necessary due to the increased use of technology to communicate.
9. The Section also supports other officers of the Council, as well as elected Members, in the use of E-Genda and its various applications such as meeting support for officer & Member meetings (including most recently Stockton Renaissance and its Area Partnerships); officer delegated decision recording; Forward Plan preparation and, from December 2010, its E-Petition facility. Other functions undertaken by the Section include responsibility for managing:-
- officer interests and gifts & hospitality notifications;
  - the register of Member Declarations of Interest made at meetings;
  - the register of motions and public questions;
  - meeting support to the EIT Sub Board;
  - tender opening;
  - governance and appointment arrangements for members to outside body organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> These arrangements have been the subject of review in accordance with the provisions regarding new executive arrangements contained within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Council has agreed that a Council Leader and Cabinet new executive model be implemented.

10. Since 2007, the service has also utilised available technology in providing Member Learning & Development support. In addition to a comprehensive Induction Programme delivered post election, the Member Support service provides/facilitates:-
- annual mandatory training in planning and licensing procedures;
  - an annual opportunity for Members to identify their learning needs in a Personal Support Plan (PSP) (either in person with the Principal Member Development Officer (PMDO), or on line in their own time) based on their own various responsibilities as councillors;
  - the sourcing and offering of appropriate training and resource requirements based on each PSP utilising the available dedicated Members Learning budget;
  - a monthly Members Policy Update programme featuring the latest topical issues facing the Council;
  - a dedicated Members ICT Support Officer,
  - appropriate IT technology suitable to each individual members needs;
  - an office based and electronic members library facility;
  - office accommodation for group leaders, chairs of committees and group secretaries;
  - comprehensive Members Handbook containing summary information, signposting and useful links to key services;
  - assistance regarding the booking of appropriate venues for ward surgeries, and subsequent advertising, i.e. in Stockton News and on the Council's Website;
  - appropriate stationary and resources to allow councillors to perform their role;
  - the payment of claims in respect of member travel and subsistence;
  - opportunities to attend national conferences, and assistance with related travel to such events;
  - CRB records for each Councillor, reviewed every three years.
11. The above service has been developed and influenced jointly by officers and Members with appropriate matters considered and determined by the Members Advisory Panel. In 2007, Members and Democratic Services officers also had the opportunity via the DCLG's Commission on Local Councillors to put forward views on the incentives and barriers to people serving as councillors; the responses to which were used to focus on the type of service now required to be delivered. Some of the initiatives to come out of this exercise included:-
- the need for learning and development opportunities to be offered both during the day and on an early evening to address Members work/life balance;
  - opportunities to identify learning needs 24/7;
  - access to democratic information 24/7;
  - the delivery of a comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy advising members of the public of the importance of the role of councillor, and encouraging participation.

### *Consultation*

12. The Section provided an opportunity in both 2007 and 2008 for Members, officers and Parish/Town Councils to visit Democratic Services 'at home' and become more familiar with the service, with an opportunity given to provide comment and suggest service improvements. As a result of this, officers from the Section were able to develop appropriate guidance to assist officers in understanding the roles of the Council's various committees, providing reporting templates, clear deadlines and protocols for attendance at meetings; increase awareness corporately of the management of the Democracy Diary, introduce Outlook invitations for each meeting for elected members; and re-engage with stakeholders such as Parish/Town Councils, trade unions, teaching staff, market stall holders etc. by providing fresh opportunities for consultation via regular forum meetings.
13. Democratic Services have also sought to increase the opportunities for the public to comment on our service and have undertaken Viewpoint Residents surveys in 2008 and again in 2010 as a means of capturing the extent of public knowledge of the service provided. This was to

assess whether the Section's delivery of its Community Engagement Strategy was having a positive impact and was contributing to the Government's desire to have strong community involvement.

14. In 2008, 49% surveyed were aware of where to find their Ward Councillors contact details and ward surgery information; and by 2010, this had increased to 73%.
15. In 2008, only 50% surveyed were aware that the public could attend meetings of the full Council and its Committees; but by 2010, the number of people aware had increased to 59%.
16. In 2008, only 16% were aware that Council meeting agendas, reports and minutes were available in local libraries and on the Council's website. By 2010, this had increased to 20%.
17. Opportunities were also taken in the most recent Viewpoint survey to raise public awareness of new available technology such as Cabinet and Mayors Blog, Councillors Personal Web Pages and Council Forward Plan; as well as the introduction of new legislation regarding the Council having both a manual and electronic Petition scheme, opportunities to engage in democratic activity, e.g. as school governor, councillor, Education Admission/Exclusion Panel Member, and the availability of dedicated ward funding for environmental works. Information on each of the above features within the work undertaken by the Section's Community Engagement Officer and is also available from the Council's website, along with opportunities for customer comment/questions to Democratic Services staff directly, to submit questions to Council, comment on the Forward Plan and submit a ward surgery query on-line to a ward councillor.
18. Regarding specific consultation with elected Members, in addition to regular liaison with the Member Champion for Member Learning & Development, consultation on the following matters has taken place through the Members Advisory Panel:-
  - Member Learning & Development Strategy;
  - Councillors Commission-Role of an effective Councillor;
  - New Executive Arrangements;
  - Changes to Constitution;
  - Format and Venue of AGM;
  - Timing of Meetings;
  - Establishment of Commemoration Working Group.
19. In addition, the views of elected Members have also been invited in respect of specific external consultation on topics such as:-
  - Ethical Governance review
  - CPA
  - Members Charter
  - Customer First Stages 1&2, and Customer Service Excellence

### *Benchmarking*

20. Democratic Services share benchmarking with our cluster Authorities; other Authorities from the North East region & Cumbria; and often undertake informal ad hoc benchmarking with the other Tees Valley Authorities.
21. Recent examples of benchmarking obtained have included:-
  - Number of meetings held per year;
  - Number of staff and staffing costs;
  - Number of in-depth scrutiny reviews undertaken each year;



- Timing of meetings;
- Summer recess;
- Printing & postage costs;
- Servicing of LSP meetings;
- Education Admission/Exclusion Panel support;
- Thresholds required for Petition scheme;
- Extent of support for Civic Office;
- Members ICT and accommodation offered.

22. From the information obtained, the following conclusions can be reached:-

- the number of meetings held per year and average number of meetings per member of staff are in the top quartile (when compared both nationally and regionally);
- staffing numbers and costs are in the lower quartile (when compared both nationally and regionally);
- the number of in-depth scrutiny reviews undertaken are in the top quartile (when compared nationally);
- regionally 5 Authorities have/are considering an August recess and both regionally and nationally, a mix of daytime and evening meetings are preferred;
- nationally, a combination of hard copy and an increasing reliance on electronic information is used to supply members with meeting information, with Stockton's printing costs being on average and postage costs minimal;
- there is however a difference in approach regionally to the support of LSP meetings, with some Authorities providing meeting support by non-Democratic Services staff, and other Authorities providing support from within Democratic Services. Servicing of meetings of Stockton's Renaissance structure, with the exception of the Safer Stockton Partnership carried out by Democratic Services, is currently delivered by the Council's Performance & Partnerships section.
- most Democratic Services sections, regionally and nationally, provide Education Admissions/Exclusions appeal support;
- the range of civic support provided varies within the Tees Valley;
- ICT support for members is broadly similar in the Tees Valley, although most authorities are reviewing their provision in an effort to achieve efficiencies through standardised service, increased use of multi functional printer devices (at the expense of individual printers), and rationalised use of office accommodation.

23. The Member Support service was commended in 2007 by the Municipal Journal (MJ) for its development of easy to read role guides encompassing the many different roles and tasks undertaken by members, and the various different skills and competencies required by members. In 2008, APSE similarly recognised the service for its comprehensive role guides and in 2009, APSE awarded Stockton on Tees BC Member Services with the Best Member Development Initiative of the Year.

*What does inspection tell us about this service?*

24. The service had formerly been recognised as achieving the required standards to be awarded both Customer First Stage 1 and 2, and this year was recognised as achieving Customer Service Excellence, with the award stating that :-

"The service clearly meets the requirements of the Customer Excellence standard, and with a high level of compliance. Some areas of particular strength were identified are detailed as:-

- The overall motivation and enthusiasm of the staff team were clearly evident – all were keen to talk about what they do and all demonstrated a real sense of pride in the services delivered.

- The evidence presented at different times and in different formats showed a high degree of consistency, giving added confidence that processes are thoroughly embedded.
- The range of methods used to engage and consult with customers includes innovative and imaginative approaches, which further demonstrates the service's determination to get things right.
- Staff share a clear understanding of the importance of getting things right in the first instance and the potential additional work that is caused later if things aren't resolved quickly.
- There is clear evidence that the service fully embraces the corporate culture of customer service.

25. Areas for further development are detailed as:-

- The assessor had only limited access to customers. It is important that the customer viewpoint is assessed fully and this should be addressed at the surveillance visit in a year's time.
- Although some targets are set for customer satisfaction, these could be made clearer.
- Performance data, specifically for timeliness and quality of service, could be published more effectively.
- Although there is some benchmarking evidence covering timeliness and quality, this is currently limited and doesn't cover all service delivery areas. "

26. The service was inspected in 2007 by IDeA and NEREO to measure whether its Member Support service met the standards required to be awarded Charter Status following the refresh of its Member Learning & Development Strategy; and thankfully was awarded Charter Status with the judgment that:-

- There appears to be a wide range of learning and development activities including videos, open learning materials and courses which run at different times to encourage participation from people who work and have caring responsibilities
- Councillors are far more aware of what the Authority is trying to achieve and that Members were taking a far more active role with regard to their own development.
- Within the Executive role, Members have clear lines of accountability and are given full support to enable them to perform their role at the highest level.
- Members interviewed were able to give examples and evidence of how learning and development has improved individual's effectiveness within committees and, ultimately, improved services to the community.
- The induction process allows Members to be effective more quickly as it supplies them with background knowledge and information, as well as confidence to undertake the role.

Areas for Improvement:-

- although the induction process was extremely comprehensive, it tended to be centred on service areas and internal committees and would benefit from support around community leadership and dealing with issues within the ward. It was also too overpowering and held in too short a timescale, and should be delivered in shorter modules over a longer time scale to enable assimilation of the information and ability to connect the learning to real situations.

- Members should play a greater part in the induction process and in training in general, perhaps being trained as trainers in order to have greater influence on content, timing and facilitation.
- Evaluation should be more focussed and specific to allow the Panel to make more informed decisions regarding the next training cycle.
- Members should have more influence on the Member development budget.

27. The service is currently preparing to submit itself for evaluation against the criteria for achieving Charter Plus.
28. The service has been the subject of several recent internal audit inspections regarding the Members and Officers Travel and Subsistence scheme, tender opening, Officers and Members Interests, Gifts & Hospitality, Officer Delegated Decision recording and the E-Genda system. These audits have revealed that the Section has 'sound systems of internal controls'.
29. Democratic Services have received few complaints regarding the service over the last few years, with any received related to electoral registration, canvassers and the election process; however, these complaints have generally been due to complainants not understanding the statutory election deadlines that the service has to adhere to. There have also been a couple of complaints about the location of a couple of polling stations which is being reviewed in the current Polling Station Review, additional information requested to be contained in minutes, and a failure to keep the Town Hall Notice Board up to date.
30. The Section has received two commendations, receiving the Member Development Award from APSE and from another service area for excellent team work ethic and supportive/flexible attitude towards internal customers. A number of compliments have also been received which include the organisation of various mayoral/civic functions such as Armed Forces Day and Town Hall Visits. Other compliments have covered areas relating to community engagement events, E-Genda training, general helpfulness of staff, content of minutes, officer work on reports and praise of election staff.
31. The Section is also responsive to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and endeavours to provide the requested information in accordance with the legislation within 20 working days. In 2007/08 the number of FOI requests was 2. This increased sharply in 2009/10 to 17.

*Is there a statutory level of service/ could the service be provided in a different way?*

32. Under the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000, full Council must set the budgetary and policy framework of the authority within which the executive will operate.
33. The Local Government Act 2000 requires Local Authorities with a population of at least 85,000 to operate one of three models of executive arrangements. This Council has operated with a Leader and Cabinet model since 2001. These arrangements are currently the subject of review in accordance with the provisions regarding new executive arrangements contained within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Council has agreed that a Council Leader and Cabinet new executive model should be implemented after next May's local elections.
34. In accordance with the above legislation, the role of councillors not on the executive is to assist the executive in policy development, propose new policy to the executive or Council, represent their electorate and review and scrutinise policy and executive decisions. Legislation also requires Councils to have a scrutiny function but is not prescriptive about structures which are for each Council to determine. More recent legislation requires the designation of a Committee to scrutinise crime and disorder matters and identifies key partner agencies that have a duty to cooperate with the scrutiny process. Select Committees also have a role as appeals body in relation to the newly approved petitions scheme. Councils must also appoint a designated

scrutiny officer to support the work of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees which in Stockton's case is the Head of Democratic Services.

35. A Local Authority must also maintain a number of regulatory and other committees to deal with functions, such as the determination of applications for planning permission that cannot be dealt with by the executive, or matters to be determined by a Licensing Committee in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003; and the need currently for each Local Authority to have a Standards Committee with a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted members of the Authority and deal locally with complaints about Member conduct.
36. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced increased powers to the executive to make decisions more quickly than before and with increased delegation for officers to make their own decisions (often in consultation with executive members) provided that these decisions are in accordance with the agreed policy and budgetary framework. As a result, many of the decision making bodies required prior to this date were considered unnecessary and Committees such as those set up for Tenders, disposal of Land & Property, Housing Management etc. were dispensed with as those decisions could now be made more quickly by officers using their delegated powers in accordance with established policy guidelines.
37. Democratic and Member Services support has therefore been reviewed since this time to provide what is considered necessary in terms of both committee associated and Member support, with the existing staffing structure introduced in 2007.
38. The service includes both support for statutory committees, as well as supporting the Council's seven Select Committees and Executive Scrutiny Committee; and also offers committee support for a number of other Consultative fora, panels and partnerships.
39. The section is also proactive in its approach to identifying members own individual learning and support needs recognizing best practice from the Local Government Information Unit that every Councillor is an individual, and that political background, knowledge, experience and skills vary. The Councillor role itself can range from ward representative to executive Member, from community champion to scrutineer. Therefore, we consider the challenges faced by Councillors and their supporting officers when finding appropriate development solutions. Councillors need development solutions which help build both governance expertise and practical skills. We therefore provide or facilitate a mix of provision including both mandatory and discretionary training and bespoke support needs, each identified, recorded and evaluated via the Council's Member Support system.
40. Advice and information is also offered to officers, Members and the general public regards interpretation of the Council's Constitution and the promotion of democratic opportunity. Examples of this include advice to officers regarding delegated decision recording and appropriate reporting procedures to be used, promotion of the Councillors role via the Council's website, Councillors web pages and corporate Blogs, through arranged ward surgeries and as part of our Community Engagement initiatives with schools, community groups and the hard to reach. Attempts have been made to increase the availability of advice and support regarding each of the various democratic procedures so that officers, Members and the public have the majority of information they need readily available, with only exceptional need having to be addressed by contacting a member of Democratic Services staff in person.
41. The service has also been proactive in its attempts to introduce a standardised approach to meeting support throughout the Authority to establish a consistent quality of service and approach and achieve greater transparency and accessibility and has successfully introduced and trained other members of staff on use of the E-Genda system for both Officer Working Group and Renaissance and its Area/Thematic Partnerships. This has been extended to include advice given to Renaissance staff regarding Member conflicts of interest procedures and other support required by Members at meetings; and the need to co-ordinate meeting arrangements with reference to the Democracy Diary, prepared for a four year period.

Democratic Services have provided full meeting support to the Safer Stockton Partnership since its inception in 2000 at the request of the Head of Community Safety.

42. From analysis of the benchmarking information available regionally and nationally, it is apparent that all Authorities engage what they consider to be an appropriate number of Council staff to undertake the various Democratic and Member Support services. This may be partly due to the inherent differences for the service required by each Authority; with Authorities such as Hartlepool and Middlesbrough adopting a directly Elected Mayor model of executive, whilst other Unitary Authorities in the region, such as Stockton, have had a Cabinet and Leader model of executive. Whilst the Constitutions of many of these latter authorities may have many similarities, there is still variance amongst Authorities in terms of their executive composition (with Stockton being one of few authorities in the country having a power sharing/coalition arrangement); support for and number of scrutiny committees varying between authorities; the use of discretionary committees and area panels being different; and the actual number of Councillors on each Council varying.
43. As mentioned in our approach to Member Support, the development needs of each of our 56 Councillors are regarded as unique, with each having the opportunity to influence the extent of support that they receive via their PSP and through the dedicated officer support provided.
44. The Head of Democratic Services is also responsible for the Efficiency Improvement and Transformation functions of the Council, and to that aim, receives necessary support from both the Democratic and Scrutiny teams.
45. There is no commonality with regard to the use of electronic committee servicing systems within the region, and each Authority has determined its own thresholds with regard to the need for the Council to have its own Petition scheme in place, including the procurement of a suitable E-Petition scheme. There are variances in support for the civic function within the Tees Valley, but similarities in terms of ICT equipment offered to members, with the exception of dedicated officer provision offered.
46. Support for Education Admission/Exclusion Panel meetings is provided by the majority of Democratic Services Sections within the region. Within Stockton, this support has more recently extended beyond both the traditional work associated with the establishment of appropriate appeal panels, and correspondence and preparation of paperwork associated with the committee support, to also include advice on procedures for parents, FAQ's, the facilitation of training and support for Panel members, including member CRB compliance, and public promotion, as part of the Community Engagement Strategy, of the role of Education Admission/Exclusion Panel member, as well as assistance with recruitment.
47. There is however a difference in approach regionally to the support of LSP meetings, with some Authorities providing meeting support by non-Democratic Services staff, and other Authorities providing support from within Democratic Services. Support for meetings of Stockton's Renaissance structure, with the exception of the Safer Stockton Partnership carried out by Democratic Services, is currently delivered by the Council's Performance & Partnerships section.

*What would happen if the service was not provided?*

48. **Meetings** - statutory requirement to provide opportunity for Council, Executive, Regulatory and Housing and Community Safety Committee and Executive Scrutiny Committee to meet. Failure to continue to support these meetings alone would contravene the relevant legislation and leave the Authority open to legal challenge. It would also deny the opportunity for the Executive to make decisions in accordance with policy that would be of benefit to the public, leaving no mechanism available for any decision making other than decisions that can be taken by officers alone. It would also deny other elected Members the opportunity to amend, vote or introduce changes to the Council's main policy framework, or Medium Term Financial Plan, including

influence over the Council Tax levels for the Borough. The majority of matters determined by Regulatory Committees are concerned with applications received from members of the public, i.e. consent for planning applications, taxi vehicle/driver applications, licensed venue applications; and therefore failure to continue to provide such services would remove the opportunity for elected Members to be able to exercise their impartial and qualified judgement of such applications, which could in turn lead to delays in such applications being determined and likely public dissatisfaction.

49. If Democratic Services were no longer to continue to provide meeting support in respect of all the meeting forums listed at Appendix 1, there is a risk that the current culture within the authority of timely, ethical and transparent decision making may be at risk. There are both statutory and essential timescales to be adhered to facilitate effective decision making, as well as guidelines and rules of procedure contained within the Council's Constitution. Democratic Services existing knowledge in this regard is beneficial to other officers and elected members, including the offering of support to Chairmen/Vice Chairmen regarding the conduct of meetings. External inspections and members own comments have highlighted previously the importance of such support, and the difficulties that can arise through a difference in the support provided, highlighting the value of a standardised approach.
50. The Council has, like most other Local Authorities, invited civic guests to its Annual Meeting each year, at which the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected, the Leader, Cabinet and Committee Chair and Vice Chairs are appointed, along with the membership of each committee and the appointment of members to outside body organisations. Following the conduct of the business meeting, the incoming Mayor has hosted a civic function with a sit down meal for all invited guests, numbering in the region of 240, including Mayoral parties from each of the Tees Valley local authorities, the High Sheriff, Lord Lieutenant, Mayor's Chaplain etc. The average cost of the event in recent years has been in the region of £8,000.
51. From 2011 onwards, there are a number of changes likely to affect the annual appointment process outlined above with, as a result of the introduction of New Executive arrangements, the proposed appointment of a Leader for a four year term who will appoint his/her own Cabinet. Also, a recommendation coming forward for consideration as part of the recent Task and Finish review of elected Members roles on Outside Body organisations is for Council appointments to be made for a four year term to these organisations, allowing both the elected Member and the organisation itself the opportunity to work together throughout this term, each acquiring more knowledge and expertise of each other's role without any uncertainty as to whether membership would continue each year. By reverting to a four year appointment period, it is recognised that both officer and Member time can be reduced from the appointment process with annual appointments no longer made, and political groups no longer required to convene meetings to consider nominations to outside bodies each year. With such a shift to four year terms of office, it is appropriate at this time to also consider whether the appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs and the membership of Committees can also now be made for a four year term. If the Council were to move towards a four year tenure of office for its key appointments, this would drastically cut down the amount of business required to be considered at each Annual Meeting. Whilst the Council is required to have such a meeting by the Local Government Act 1972, the amount of business that would remain to be conducted could be restricted to the appointment of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, confirmation of the dates of Council meetings and other necessary Constitutional matters. Each of these factors therefore suggest the Council may wish to consider reviewing its AGM arrangements for 2011 and beyond and consider whether it wishes to adopt a two stage strategy to the hosting of such meetings, with the current policy of hosting the AGM continuing in 2011 subject to the proposed four year appointments described above. This would then give scope from 2012 to review the format of the AGM to focus on a smaller agenda and review the invitations and hospitality after the meeting. Reducing the number of invitees would also enable the meeting to be held in a smaller venue. With a reduction in both officer and member resources required each year to facilitate the event, a financial saving of approximately £6-8,000 per annum could be achieved from 2012/2014.

52. Failure to support **Education Admissions/Exclusions appeal procedure** would contravene the School Standards & Framework Act 1998 and again would deny the opportunity for parents to appeal to an independent body against a school's decision to refuse to admit, or exclude, a particular child. There were 134 admission appeals made in 2009/10 which would otherwise not be determined (although only a small percentage of original decisions to refuse to admit are overturned on appeal). Democratic Services receive an annual income from CESC in respect of the service provided in support of arrangements made by Democratic Services to consider Education Admission and Exclusion appeals from the parents of both primary and secondary school pupils. This support has more recently extended beyond both the traditional work associated with the establishment of appropriate appeal panels, and correspondence and preparation of paperwork associated with the hearings, to also include advice on procedures for parents, FAQ's, the facilitation of training and support for Panel members, including member CRB compliance, and public promotion, as part of the Community Engagement Strategy, of the role of Education Admission/Exclusion Panel member, as well as assistance with recruitment. As a result the recharge cost for such a service is likely to be in the region of £8,500 for 10/11.
53. **Members Support costs** -The Section currently has a Members Training budget of £19,112. Withdrawal of this budget or Member Support would have an effect on the members' ability to be able to develop the necessary skills required to be able to undertake the various roles of a councillor. This is particularly the case after local elections for any new Councillor. The competencies required for the various Councillor roles vary greatly, and use of the Members Training budget allows the opportunity to obtain external training or resources support that fill any gap that exists in a Member's capacity to perform that role. Without such support, the service that a Member is able to deliver either as a decision maker or community advocate may be diminished to the detriment of their electorate. The full budget allocation was utilised in 9/10, partly to build up our learning resource materials to meet members identified needs. With an expected influx of new members in 11/12, it is anticipated that demand for these resources and external training such as that previously provided by NEREO and independent Planning Associates regards planning training, may be high. In recent years, an average of £7,000 p.a. of this budget has been spent on external training provision. The potential exists therefore to reduce this budget and consider the use of internal resources only for any training to be provided; although this would be subject to and dependent upon such expertise being held in house. NB Reference is also made to the proposal made above in respect of this budget absorbing support for Education Admission/Exclusion Panel Members.
54. **Conferences** - Elected Member attendance is currently invited annually for a number of Conferences, the cost of which is met from the Council's corporate budget allocation. These include LGA Annual Conference, National Children & Adult Services Conference, Institute of Licensing, Planning Summer School and the Chartered Institute of Housing. Attendance is usually by the relevant Cabinet Member and Chair and Vice Chairman of the appropriate Select Committee, plus relevant officers, and this follows a review of member representation at conferences undertaken by Members Advisory Panel in 2007. The cost for attendance during 9/10 was in the region of £11,500. There is currently no formal exchange of information obtained by either Members or officers at these events to indicate whether attendance at these events continues to provide value, and therefore it is proposed that a review be undertaken of the merits of their continued attendance.
55. **Printing costs** - Democratic Services spent £59,077 in 09/10 in providing paper based agendas, reports and minutes associated with meetings. This is a slight increase on 2008/09 (£57,232). The increased use and availability of technology in recent years had seen an initial reduction in hard copy costs from £64,194 in 2007/08, however, large amounts of paper and printing are still generated for meetings of Council, Cabinet and the Safer Stockton Partnership in particular. This can include the extra cost of producing information in colour, and large documents such as Council Minute Books. The availability of electronic information does allow scope to consider further restricting the amount of both colour and black and white paper

produced; although this would require both members and officers to accept that their information needs could be met more through electronic information than at present.

56. **Ward surgery costs** - A total of £3,600 was spent on the hire of appropriate venues for ward surgeries for 09/10 on a mix of Youth & Community Centres, private buildings (Village Halls etc), Churches, Libraries and School buildings. Only libraries and school buildings are within the ownership of the Council, and do not charge for their hire, however, only 6 libraries and 5 schools are currently used within the whole Borough. There is therefore some potential to be explored in the Members Support Officer, in consultation with each elected member, seeking to identify ward surgery venues at no cost to the Authority.
57. **Outside Body Support** - Subject of current scrutiny Task and Finish Group to identify improvements to governance arrangements. Indications from this review so far are that both elected Members and officers see the value in continuing with the appointment of members to such bodies, but that there should be more officer support provided for the exchange of information regarding these bodies and more annual evaluation. Such support would need to be provided within Democratic Services.

*What contracts or other arrangements are in place?*

58. A five year contract is in place with Associated Knowledge Systems (AKS) for the provision of E-Genda from August 2010 (with option to withdraw after three years) at a total cost of £34,600. This new contract has been negotiated with our existing supplier and represents a saving of approximately £10,000 when compared to the previous five year contract. In addition, a one off procurement and development cost for an E-Petition scheme has been negotiated with AKS, saving £1,750 due to our own involvement with development of the product.

*Technology – now and future provision and support*

59. The Section has embraced available technology in order to be able to allow Members to communicate by either PC, laptop, blackberry, or telephone, has supplemented this provision with individual printers at home, and has made available a range of office accommodation for members within Municipal Buildings, complete with IT equipment. The current average set up cost for each member with appropriate IT equipment is £1,400 (total amount for members set up costs, excluding annual rental-£60,729.72).
60. All SBC Members are offered a printer, with different types of printer having been supplied based on ad hoc procurement. These printers rely on a range of cartridges to print with, in 2009/10 cartridge cost the authority £3,000 p.a. Printing locally is recognised as being hugely costly to the Authority and as such an Authority wide project is currently under way to consolidate all printing. SBC will purchase a number of multi function devices that will be placed throughout council offices. Remote printing away from Council offices will also be reviewed as part of this project to ensure accessibility and value for money are both achieved.
61. Mention has previously been made to the extent of electronic information currently available for both Members and officers, as has the opportunity to make more of this availability at the expense of continuing to duplicate all/some information in paper form. Advancements in technology will be reviewed in the near future to see whether devices such as I-Pads, tablets etc can offer longer term efficiencies whilst maintaining the quality of the information provided. Having discussed Members support with other Authorities it is clear that most Authorities are assessing it. One case in point being Sunderland. They have reviewed their ICT Members' budget and invested heavily into it. They have done this by reducing their spend on print to almost zero and reinvesting this spend into Tablet PC's. Council Members use these PCs for all business. They dial in to the network through them (hard wire or wireless [see later note on wireless]) use them to take notes on, store documents through them (to publish on the web and to hold on the network) and e mail using them. No paper work is sent to Members at all now. One copy of papers that relate to Cabinet or Committee are issued as a hard copy for the



Members library and no more. Access to all documents is done via the tablet. Notes can be made on the documents electronically. Through their electronic Committee system, Councillors can manage their own web pages and non political Blogs. Whilst this all encompassing solution is now in place in Sunderland it has taken a huge cultural shift to get there. Whilst this is undoubtedly the way to go Stockton Borough Council would need to embark on this road with caution and plan carefully.

62. Stockton Borough Council is also to trial a secure Wifi solution that is compliant with the Government Connect Code of Conduct. The compliance of the solution to the code of connection is critical as the authority is audited against it. This will enable a review of the kit that Members have and may allow for the trial of tablets in the future.

## **Scrutiny**

### *Scrutiny Overview*

63. Scrutiny was introduced under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000. The Act requires Councils operating Executive arrangements to have a scrutiny function but was not prescriptive as to structures; these were left to individual Councils to determine. The main legislative provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 in relation to scrutiny enable Committees and their Members to:

-Review and/or scrutinise

- Decisions made by Cabinet and Council Officers in relation to key Decisions;
- Actions carried out within the remit of the Council;
- The performance of the Council in relation to targets and policy Objectives; and
- Have the right to call in and examine (in accordance with the agreed timescale), decisions made by Cabinet, before the decision is implemented

64. In addition, Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000, Councils are given the power to do “anything they consider likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of the area”.

65. Local Authorities also have the power to scrutinise health issues and services, as introduced in the Health & Social Care Act 2011. The Health Select Committee may review any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services. In relation to major health service re-design, the Health OSC must be consulted on proposals and have the right to refer a proposal to the Secretary of State/ Monitor.

66. More recent legislation requires the designation of a Committee to scrutinise crime and disorder matters and identifies key partner agencies that have a duty to cooperate with the scrutiny process. Select Committees also have a role as appeals bodies in relation to the newly approved petitions scheme. Councils must also appoint a designated scrutiny officer to support the work of the Council’s overview and scrutiny committees which in Stockton’s case is the Head of Democratic Services.

67. A number of external and internal drivers have influenced the development of the function. External drivers include legislation and increasing pressure on public services to be open and transparent. The function is also shaped by internal factors including organisational culture and political proportionality.

68. The function has been heavily shaped by legislation which has in recent years sought to strengthen the scrutiny function in respect of the scrutiny of key partners and organisations

outside of the Council. Scrutiny has also been given a role in adjudicating on Councillor Calls for Action.

69. In December 2005, Council approved new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements which sought to strengthen coordination of the scrutiny work programme and place greater emphasis on policy review and development work. Key features of the new arrangements which are still in place today include:

- Establishment of the Executive Scrutiny Committee to coordinate the work programme
- Establishment of a Scrutiny Liaison Forum to facilitate dialogue between scrutiny and Cabinet Members as well as regular “tri partite” discussions
- Identification of “link officers” for review from within the service or organisation under scrutiny

70. In addition to the Executive Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Liaison Forum, the Council currently has seven select committees (**See Appendix 1**) which undertake scrutiny within their themed areas.

*Consultation*

71. Following the introduction of the Council’s new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements, a review was carried out in 2006 using the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s Self Evaluation Framework. Members and officers were asked a number of questions based around the four principles of good scrutiny. The survey results were used to develop a Scrutiny Improvement Plan which was refreshed in 2008 following a repeat of the survey and discussions at a scrutiny away day. The improvement plan had focused around recurring themes including raising the profile of scrutiny, strengthening links with key partners, engaging with the wider Select Committee membership. As a result of Member feedback, a number of constitutional changes have also been made including relaxation of Select Committee remits to enable scrutiny reviews to be prioritised on a Council wide basis. The survey has been repeated again this year and results are to be reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee.

72. Earlier in the year, several questions were included on a Viewpoint Survey to gauge awareness of scrutiny by the public. The questions were the same as those asked in 2007 except that there was an additional question this year relating to scrutiny of other public service providers. The results showed a slight improvement on the previous survey.

<b>Question</b>	<b>2007 Survey Respondents answering “yes”</b>	<b>2010 Survey Respondents answering “yes”</b>
Before reading this survey, were you aware of the Scrutiny Process at Stockton Borough Council?	24%	25.7%
Do you understand the Scrutiny Process?	52%	56%
Did you know you can contribute to the Scrutiny Process at Stockton Borough Council?	10%	12.4%
Did you know that Stockton Borough Council can examine the work of other public service providers (e.g. health services, Police etc)?	(Not asked)	18.4%

## *Benchmarking*

73. Stockton Borough Council is in line with the majority of unitary local authorities operating the specialist model for scrutiny whereby scrutiny has dedicated officer resources who only work to the overview and scrutiny function. The national average size of unitary authority scrutiny team is 3.6 FTE and Stockton are in line with this level of support with currently 4 FTEs. Democratic Services is also the most popular location for scrutiny support within Councils. The average size of scrutiny teams has increased nationally which may be as a result of new responsibilities for Crime and Disorder scrutiny, dealing with Councillor Call for Action and partnership scrutiny.
74. The CfPS annual survey shows that although Members are increasingly engaging in more challenging and expansive scrutiny they are unlikely to engage in conducting research outside of meetings and writing reports which provides a clear distinction between officer and Member roles as the scrutiny function matures.
75. Stockton Council's Scrutiny Team provides support to an above average number of full-scale reviews per year (the average number of scrutiny reviews undertaken, across all Authorities, is 5 per annum). At Stockton the average number of in depth Select Committee led reviews over a four year period has been 9 per annum. This confirms the benchmarking data set out earlier in the report showing that Stockton is in the upper quartile for scrutiny reviews conducted compared nationally. However, in addition to the in depth reviews, Select Committee have also had extensive involvement with officer-led EIT reviews and have undertaken Member task and finish reviews. Select Committees also undertake a range of other activity including consideration of significant and other health consultations, "quality accounts", monitoring of previous reviews, overview meetings, the annual meeting to consider crime and disorder issues and challenge performance and financial information on a regular basis.
76. Attendance at regular North East Scrutiny Network meetings enables the sharing of best practice and comparison with other Council approaches. Attendance at network meetings has revealed that although there is involvement of Members in efficiency work in other Councils, Stockton is unique in the level of this involvement with all scrutiny Members fully supporting the programme of EIT reviews through the scrutiny work programme.

## *What does external inspection tell us about the service?*

77. The Council's scrutiny function has received positive feedback from external inspection. The last corporate assessment in 2008 stated that Scrutiny provided rigorous policy review and had made a significant contribution to service improvement. It concluded that the scrutiny process was robust and resulted in improved outcomes but it would benefit from additional opportunities for challenge.
78. The function has also been praised in more recent inspections. In 2010, the Care Quality Commission Inspection stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committees are effective with Members giving detailed attention to key policy issues through the EIT process. The safeguarding inspection by OFSTED stated that good scrutiny arrangements are in place with good examples of the engagement of children and young people in reviewing processes leading to change and that scrutiny arrangements have had an impact on developing services and achieving cost effectiveness. The recent Audit Commission Value for Money inspection stated that Executive Scrutiny Committee was challenging and effective. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has also featured several of the Council's scrutiny reviews in their publications (e.g. Review of Older People's Strategy and Choice Based Lettings Review) and shown recent interest in the level of involvement of scrutiny in the EIT programme.

## *Is there a statutory level of service/ could the service be provided in a different way?*

79. As explained earlier in the report, Councils operating executive arrangements are required to have a scrutiny function. Legislative provisions are not prescriptive as to structures; these are

left to individual Councils to determine. Scrutiny structures and processes at Stockton have evolved to suit local requirements. Notwithstanding the degree of local determination, Councils are required to have at least one scrutiny committee, the designation of a crime and disorder scrutiny committee and the appointment of a designated scrutiny officer. Scrutiny also needs to exercise certain statutory roles in relation to Call In, Councillor Calls for Action and the petitions scheme.

80. At Stockton the function is supported by an officer team of four dedicated scrutiny officers. Although there is no requirement for Councils to have dedicated scrutiny support, national research has shown that Councils with dedicated support are more likely to have an effective scrutiny function. As highlighted in the earlier section on benchmarking, Stockton's scrutiny team is in line with the national average for a Unitary Council and in the top quartile for the number of in depth reviews conducted each year. Because of the nature of the work, local differences and the sensitive political dimension, scrutiny does not lend itself to anything other than in house delivery.
81. The team is currently carrying a vacant trainee scrutiny officer post. To support the work of the team a member of the democratic services team has been seconded to the role of Scrutiny Support Officer. The arrangement has worked extremely well with the post providing a flexible resource to the team across all reviews but with particular responsibility for monitoring the implementation of previous scrutiny reviews and assisting with consultations.

*What would happen if the service was not provided?*

82. The Council has to meet its statutory obligations in relation to the scrutiny function. If the level of service was reduced, the Council would have to reduce the amount of scrutiny undertaken. Scrutiny has played a key role in underpinning the Council's drive for improvement and structures are in place to ensure that the scrutiny work programme complements the Council's priorities. Scrutiny also provides a platform for the concerns of the public to feed in, engages non executive Councillors in reviewing Council policy and services, and provides accountability through critical friend challenge of the Executive.
83. The Council's scrutiny function has proved itself to be flexible and add value to the work of the Council which has been confirmed by external inspection of the service. The function is currently playing a key role in the Council's EIT programme enabling non executive Council to challenge services and have meaningful input into reviews.

*What contracts or other arrangements are in place?*

84. The Council has an arrangement with Middlesbrough Council in respect of administrative and scrutiny support for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Together with the other Tees Valley Authorities, a sum of £5,000 per annum is paid to Middlesbrough Council. This sum covers Middlesbrough's costs in servicing the Committee and provides a contribution to the salary of a scrutiny officer. Other North East Councils are reviewing this funding arrangement.

## **Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT)**

### *EIT Overview*

85. Following the departure of the previous Assistant Chief Executive, responsibility for co-ordination of the EIT function transferred to the Head of Democratic Services on a temporary basis. At this time, a simplified framework approach was established including consideration of how best Member support could be achieved. Scrutiny involvement was embedded in all EIT reviews. A three year programme was introduced with reviews falling into one of three categories:

- Select Committee led reviews
  - Gateway reviews – officer led reviews with challenge by Select Committees at baseline and options appraisal stage
  - “Reporting in” reviews to Executive Scrutiny Committee – officer led reviews with challenge by Executive Scrutiny Committee at baseline and options appraisal stage
86. More recently officer task and finish EIT reviews have commenced to expedite review work scheduled for later in the programme. Member involvement is still maintained through challenge at key stages in a similar way to gateway and “reporting in” reviews.
87. The overarching aim of these reviews is to establish efficiencies of the service area that they review. Reviews are undertaken by lead officers who, in collaboration with the relevant select committee make various recommendations in order for these efficiencies to be realised. As well as identifying efficiency, reviews have been able to identify improvement areas and opportunities for business transformation.
88. A framework for EIT reviews was developed which outlined the stages of the review, baseline questions and tools to help with options appraisal. In addition to the lead officer, a finance lead and independent officer were assigned to each review to ensure strengthened challenge. HR and other specialist advisory support was allocated as appropriate. Select Committee led reviews also benefited from the support and challenge of a designated scrutiny officer.
89. Following feedback from lead officers after Year 1 of the programme and recognising the valuable support from the scrutiny team to the year 1 Select Committee led reviews, a new fixed term scrutiny officer (located within the scrutiny team) was appointed to provide similar support to the officer led reviews for Years 2 and 3 and co-ordinate reporting to the EIT Sub Board (senior officer co-ordinating body for EIT programme), thereby ensuring that all reviews received the support needed to identify savings critical to the Council’s financial management.
90. Over £2 million potential savings were identified through the Year 1 reviews. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has shown recent interest in the level of scrutiny support to the EIT process as the extent of scrutiny involvement with the EIT programme at Stockton is unusual and is leading the way for other Councils.

### *Communications*

91. Value for money and the EIT review process is communicated widely to employees through a range of communications channels. A communications plan for the overall VfM programme and for each review is developed and regular items feature in KYIT. Communication with residents has taken place through Stockton News and the Stockton webpage will soon have a VfM section. Regular communications have continued with trades unions throughout the process.

## **Electoral, Civic and Community Engagement**

### *Elections - Legal framework*

92. The structure of electoral services is to a large extent dictated by legislation. The legislation that underpins the local government election process is listed below.
- Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)
  - Local Government Act 2000
  - Electoral Administration Act 2006
  - Representation of the People Act 1983
  - Representation of the People Act 1985
  - Representation of the People Act 2000
  - Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended) 2001 Regulations

- Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended by the Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 and 2006, and the Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2006)
- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- Local Government Elections (Changes to the Franchise and Qualification of Representatives) Regulations 1995
- Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000
- European Parliamentary Elections (Franchise of Relevant Citizens of the Union) Regulations 2001
- European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002

### *Elections overview*

93. Running an election is a complex logistical operation with statutory obligations, involving considerable financial and physical resources and delivered against tight and inflexible timescales. It is therefore essential that formal, written plans are in place with clearly defined objectives and success measures to allow progress to be monitored and which identify risks and corresponding mitigating actions.

94. Electoral Services undertake all elections in Stockton on Tees;

**UK Parliamentary Elections** - There is a maximum period of five years between UK Parliamentary Elections, with no minimum period. Currently the timing of a General Election is an issue of royal prerogative. Formally the Queen is responsible for dissolving Parliament by Royal Proclamation. However, in practice the Prime Minister may ask for a general election before the end of the five year term and will ask the Queen to grant dissolution.

**Referendum** – The last referendum to take place in the north east was November 2004. The government has announced a referendum is to take place on 5 May 2011, the same day as local and parish elections. In order to allow administrators adequate time to prepare for that poll the Bill needs to achieve Royal Assent by January.

**Local Government Elections** - Local Government Elections in Stockton take place every four years and are held on the first Thursday in May. Stockton has 56 Borough Councillors representing 26 wards. There are 145 parish councillors representing 16 parishes. The last Local Election took place on 3rd May 2007. The next Local District and Parish Elections are due to take place on 5th May 2011.

**European Parliamentary Elections** - European Parliamentary Elections take place every five years. Stockton is in the North East Region which returns 3 Members of the European Parliament. The last European Election took place on 4th June 2009.

**By-Elections** - A by-election can occur due to the resignation or death of a Councillor or Member of Parliament. Currently there are 3 vacancies in the wards of Billingham East, Ingleby Barwick East and Mandale and Victoria.

**Mayoral referendum** - A Mayoral referendum has not been held in Stockton. A referendum can be requested to be held anytime upon receipt of a valid petition signed by 5% of the electorate. However, we undertook a consultation with all registered electors in July 2010 and the results showed a preference to adopt the Council Leader and Cabinet option and these results are available for interested parties.

## *Electoral registration overview*

95. Electoral Registration Officers have several statutory functions. - In order to be able to vote in elections in Great Britain, a person's name must be included in the register of electors.

**Register of electors** - The Electoral Registration Officer has a duty to maintain a register of Parliamentary electors and a register of local government electors as well as a register of those citizens of European Union member states who are entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections and those peers living outside the UK who have made a declaration to vote at European Parliamentary elections. These registers contain the details of all those who are registered to vote

The Electoral Registration Officer must also produce an edited version of the register. The edited register contains only the names of those on the full register who have not taken the decision to opt out of their details appearing on the edited register. The edited version of the register is produced whenever the full register is revised. While the edited register is available for general sale, the full register is only available for public inspection under supervision and its supply and sale is limited to certain persons and organisations.

**Annual canvass** - For the purposes of maintaining the electoral register, the Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty to conduct an annual canvass.

**Rolling Registration** - to maintain the register throughout the year the Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty to by way of the rolling registration process

## *Elections*

96. Following the Parliamentary General Election and Local Government Elections held in 2005, a review was undertaken at Stockton which resulted in some twenty four recommendations for improvement across all areas of election management and administration.

97. Following on from the 2005 general and local elections an extensive improvement plan was incorporated in to our service and business improvement plans. Further improvements have been identified at each election review since then leading to continuous improvements. The main improvements that lead to the greatest efficiencies are shown on the list below:

- Working with ICT to increase efficiency
- Introduction of a telephone hunt group to facilitate customer access
- Development of a recruitment and training strategy to develop a cohort of staff to draw on
- Procurement - NEPO contract for external printing suppliers for elections and electoral registration maximising purchase power
- Introduction of procedural documentation of the election process using lean principles
- Standardisation of elections fees across the Tees Valley
- Introduction of 'grass skirts' for 2007 combined elections count to speed up and make the count process more transparent
- Election payments generated by payroll
- Introduction of accounting system compatible with SBC accounts
- Working directly with partners and suppliers to achieve fit for purpose and right first time goods and services

98. Following the 2010 General Election Internal Audit undertook an audit of electoral services. They carried out an audit on the categories listed below and we gained Full Assurance in all areas.

- Financial Management
- Electoral Register

- Polling Facilities
- Security of Votes
- Count Supervision
- Performance Management
- Service Improvement
- Monitoring and Review

99. Internal audit also undertook an audit of the Express software used for elections and electoral registration. They carried out an audit on the categories listed below and we gained Full Assurance in all areas.

- A sound system of control is being applied consistently
- Access Controls
- Audit Trail Facilities
- Data Protection Controls
- Change Control

### *Electoral Registration*

100. **Annual canvass** - In the last 5 years improvements have been made to the way we conduct the annual canvass. In December 2005 the annual canvass achieved a 71% return and 136,994 electors were registered to vote. In December 2006, these figures increased substantially to a 90% return and 139,970 electors registered to vote. Registration has continued to increase and in 2009 had increased to a 95% return and 141,514 electors.

101. The canvass project is reviewed every year and various methods have been introduced year on year to increase the % return and also to achieve this in a more efficient way. Some of the methods employed are:

- Ensuring the register property base complies with BS7666 national data standards to ensure every known property is added to the database and is therefore canvassed
- The hand delivery of canvass forms by canvassers is beneficial not only in savings in postage costs but enables the canvasser to become familiar with their area at an early stage
- Commencing the canvass a month earlier to allow time to target non respondents
- The introduction of the choice for residents to use the internet or text to respond gives additional choice to our customers and is also a more economical method of processing information
- Raising awareness of the requirement to register every year
- Eliminating the reminder round as our cost analysis research showed it was of little value
- Amending the canvass form to maximise the efficient use of electronic returns as this is a more economical method of processing information

102. This year arrangements for the conduct of the canvass have been revised again in order to deliver the most effective and efficient result. A performance based payment structure has been implemented to encourage a higher return by canvassers and the electoral registration canvass form has been amended to minimise the number of electors requesting a postal vote application that is not returned. Electors may download an application form to vote by post or contact us via email or telephone to request a form be sent out. Previously there was a box to tick if the elector wanted a form to be sent out and historically we send out 10,000 forms each year and only 1,000 are returned. The benefits of this change in procedure are that savings will be made whilst increasing the speed the elector will receive the form and hopefully ensure its return.

103. **Postal votes** – The increase in the number of electors registered to vote by post has increased from 21,330 in 2005 to 32,000. This 50% rise indicates a rise in accessibility to the



electorate and that our customers are aware of the different methods of casting their vote. This rise has a large impact on the service at election time and the collection postal vote identifiers.

### *Community Engagement*

104. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 placed a specific duty upon the ERO to increase registration and participation. A community engagement strategy was developed and implemented to identify the audiences we needed to engage in order to meet this duty and various methods and techniques were introduced to achieve this.
105. The community engagement strategy is complimented by the mayoral strategy and supporting activities to ensure active citizenship, engagement and participation are promoted throughout the Borough. The audiences we target include hard to reach groups and individuals including BME, young people, elderly and the vulnerable.
106. Through our community engagement work we have developed a growing Information Distribution database. This has enabled us to identify partner organisations to help us promote active citizenship, which means that we can reach more people than we could on our own and with fewer resources. It has also increased our ability to target the distribution of democratic information to specific audiences.
107. We have been able to increase awareness of the:
  - importance of voter registration and voting,
  - opportunity to become a councillor;
  - opportunity to attend council meetings and ask questions;
  - opportunity to invite the Mayor to events to raise the profile of the Borough and Council initiatives
  - opportunity to visit the Town Hall to promote democratic engagement and participation;
  - the support offered to schools to promote democracy through assemblies, school visits, citizenship and democracy workshops, school council elections;
108. We have developed a number of engagement tools and resources for various age groups and sections of the community (children, young people, older people, BME community, people with physical and or learning disabilities). Some have been used by our local councillors as well as other organisations. We have even had interest in using these resources to create a resources toolkit for community workers and other public sector workers across the country to promote active citizenship.
109. We have built strong relationships with other Council departments, public bodies, external organisations, schools, community and voluntary groups from all sections of the community. This has led to a number of positive outcomes including a greater awareness of the work of Democratic Services, joint working with internal and external partners, sharing resources, referrals to new partners, repeat requests to deliver activities, a growing reputation for delivering quality activities and enhancing the image of the Council. The work of the last few years has created a solid foundation that we will continue to build on in the future.
110. We offer schools with regard to teaching pupils about citizenship and democracy. Information packs and hands on support are provided throughout the year with school council elections, assemblies, school visits and Town Hall Tours.
111. Local Democracy Week is a national campaign to raise awareness amongst local people about what their local council does and how to get involved with the decisions it makes. Traditionally, it is aimed at young people. However, we have expanded the focus of its activities and events to include all hard to reach groups and people in the community.

112. The 'Be a Councillor' campaign launched in democracy week last year is continuing until the 2011 local elections. Publicity materials have been distributed to main libraries and community centres. 'Do you want to make a difference?' pull up banners have been produced and are rotated between public buildings every two weeks. The campaign will continue leading up to the 2011 Local Elections to encourage more people to consider standing as candidates and to increase awareness of the role of a local councillor.
113. As well as the need to raise people's awareness and understanding about how to get involved in decision making, there is a need to increase people's confidence to get involved. This is achieved by bringing the Civic and the Community Engagement team together to make the most of the unique opportunities to reach into the community through Mayoral Engagements.
114. By working together, they have enhanced the quality and effectiveness of Town Hall Tours and visits to create a much greater awareness of:
- the role of the Mayor and local councillors;
  - the opportunity to invite the Mayor to events as the first Citizen of the Borough;
  - becoming a local councillor;
  - the past history and current use of the Town Hall;
  - services delivered by the Council;
  - how to pursue complaints and make suggestions for improvement to services;
115. This work is reinforced out in the community through fun and attention grabbing activities at public events, school assemblies, school council elections, citizenship and democracy workshops, presentations, information displays, promotional materials and use of the democratic pages of the Council website.
116. An improved communication network was developed and used to publicise the canvass and 'Be a Councillor' campaign. Electronic versions of information and publicity materials are distributed through it. This list was effectively used to distribute information about the general election and was also provided to the ONS to be used as a method of promoting the Census.
117. The national public awareness campaign for the recent General Election aimed to encourage all eligible people to register and included advertising on TV, radio, press and on line. The central theme of the campaign was 'Make sure nothing stops you voting'. The campaign was complemented by our ongoing democratic engagement campaign. In conjunction with the communications team, press releases were produced on behalf of all of the Tees Valley Councils. One Stockton resident, aged 102, agreed to promote the importance of voting as she had voted in every election since 1929. This passion for exercising her right to vote resulted in her story appearing in the local newspapers, on the radio and on BBC Look North the week of the election. The impact of our engagement work can be illustrated by an increase in registration; for example, in the weeks leading up to the election an additional 506 people registered to vote and 165 people registered to vote by post.

### *Civic Services*

118. In 2007 we undertook an extensive review of civic services to deliver the pace of improvement associated with that of an excellent Authority.
119. We reviewed how the mayor, as first citizen, in this distinctive and important role could foster civil renewal through community engagement. How the Mayor can communicate with all types of people, recognise achievement of those who contribute and, acting as a figurehead, enthuse and motivate people. The emphasis we placed on the Mayoral role

needed to shift more towards the proactive rather than the reactive and how the Mayor and Civic Service can contribute to the overall Council aims needed to be explored.

120. As a result of the review we:

- Developed an annual Mayor's Strategy clearly stating the goals and impact to be achieved that year linking / aligning where appropriate to the Council's Objectives.
- Provided support in advance of the Mayoral year to enable the incoming Mayor to plan themes priorities and targets.
- Developed the Mayors role guide and associated protocols.
- Provide a tailored programme of support to each Mayor assessed during a personal support planning session.
- Proactively seek and promote attendance at events that contribute to achieving the Mayors strategy and support the Council's corporate objectives and work with the council to identify opportunities for the Mayor to support the Councils Corporate objectives.
- Link with the community engagement strategy to ensure compliance with the specific duty to promote registration and participation throughout the Borough as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.
- Provide written protocols for itemised events.
- Updated the civic event pro forma to be more effective.
- Explored and enhanced where appropriate the use of technology to support the role and work of the Mayor.
- Developed a press and PR strategy for the Mayor in liaison with the Press office.
- Examined current Procedures etc to ensure they are fit for purpose in delivering service.

121. In 2006 the Mayoral Blog was introduced, an online diary packed full of the Mayor's day to day activities and thoughts as a Mayor with photographs and links to relevant sites. As well as residents of the Borough who had been part of events and wanted to see what had been said about them, the Blog has been read by ex-citizens in Australia, North America and other far-flung destinations. In March 2007 "Better Connected" (a snap shot of Local Authority websites) was published and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was one of only three Authorities to be praised nationally for their work on the Mayor's Blog.

122. Prior to 2007, Civic services were located in a small room along the corridor from electoral services. In 2007 the Civic Services Officer and the Mayors attendant moved into the same office. This change provided cover and greater flexibility for civic services. Future work is needed to examine this function and how the roles can become multi functional as opposed to exclusive to increase efficiencies whilst maintaining and improving the current service within existing budgets.

123. In 2008 SBC were awarded runner up in the Civic office of the year, an external accreditation awarded by the National Association of Civic Officers. The award related to 2006/2007 civic year and recognised the achievements of the Mayor and the support of civic services in areas such as introduction of the Blog, promotion of Fair Trade, fundraising for local charities, Promoting the Council and the Towns local history and the works undertaken with other Faiths, residents from ethnic backgrounds and the voluntary sector.

124. In September 2008 we improved arrangements for relief driver with the aim to increase efficiencies reduce costs and improve communication. We moved from using an external agency supplier for casual drivers and employed SBC casual drivers. This change led to an annual saving of £1,300.

125. We continually strive to make the most efficient procurement choices across all service areas. Examples this year include the lease of the civic car. The main aim, having concluded that a vehicle was still necessary, was to secure a vehicle which is not only fit for purpose but also has reduced CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and lower leasing costs. Consultation was undertaken with procurement, fleet management, present Mayor and past Mayors. This exercise secured a saving of £2,200 per annum which equates to a total of £8,800 over the 4 year contract.
126. **A Town Hall Display Strategy** was introduced. The Mayors reception room in the Town House was refurbished and the bar moved downstairs to better enable better access to visitors and allow them to be received into a comfortable environment whilst maximising meeting space. The archive service was utilised to provide displays in all of the rooms and corridors to make the Town Hall a more interesting place to visit and to demonstrate the heritage of Stockton on Tees to visitors. Town Hall Tours were updated to include information regarding the new displays and exhibits.
127. The history of the Town Hall and its current use is brought to life through a fun and humorous presentation relevant to the particular audience. Visitors are made aware of the opportunity to attend Council meetings, ask questions, become a Councillor and even be a future Mayor.
128. Many groups visit the Town Hall each year including children from primary and secondary schools, beavers, scouts, brownies, guides, boys' brigade, various adult interest groups, community and voluntary groups, students, business people and foreign visitors. In 2009/10 the Mayor hosted 22 tours of the Town Hall engaging approximately 365 visitors. All visitors treated as important guests, making them feel special and valued as citizens of the Borough. The whole experience of meeting the Mayor and visiting the Town Hall is made a unique and 'out of the ordinary' occasion that they will talk about and remember for a long time.
129. The feedback we receive shows that visitors take great pleasure from meeting the Mayor and being able to ask the Mayor questions about anything. This often leads to the most amusing moments of the visit. They are fascinated by the Mayor's robes and chains, and especially enjoy being able to closely examine the chains and other regalia. They are amazed at how much the chains weigh and their value.
130. Over the past few years people from Japan, China, Brazil, Costa Rica, Poland, Finland, Germany, Spain, France, Los Angeles, and New Zealand have visited the Town Hall hearing about the Borough's rich and proud heritage. In 2009/10 the mayor welcomed approximately 86 visitors from other countries. These occasions are also networking events where we learn about their cultures and democratic practises.
131. **Citizenship Ceremonies** are hosted at The Town Hall, providing the perfect setting to welcome new citizens as members of the United Kingdom. This number of applications has increased significantly over the last 5 years, including the number of guests attending to the witness the special occasion. In 2009/10 there were 255 new citizens welcomed and most were accompanied by friends, family and supporters. The community engagement message of participation and the importance of registering to vote are included in the presentation and registration forms and information about the different ways they can vote is made available.
132. **The Mayor's Annual Charity dinner** is self sufficient and raises around £6,000 every year for the Mayor's chosen charities and generates very positive feedback from those who attended. The dinner is attended by representatives from NHS, Durham University, Housing associations, members and officers of the council and local businesses providing an opportunity for introductions and corporate networking.

133. **The Yorkshire Regiment** and **The Rifles** paraded through the Town Centre before receiving the Freedom of the Borough from Stockton Council this year. The project planning paid dividends and the parades were extremely well received by the troops and the public who came out to show their support. The spectators cheered and waved flags as the soldiers marched to loud cheering and clapping. Schoolchildren attended the parade many of whom had made banners of support. The response was extremely enthusiastic when the Mayor asked for 3 cheers in support of the regiment. Feedback from the public is that they appreciated the opportunity to express their support and gratitude in a practical way. The Regiments' Commanding Officers sent a letter of thanks to the Mayor saying how the level of public support demonstrated at the event was nothing short of spectacular. Although not quantified, these events given the numbers attending have made a positive economic contribution to the Town Centre.

#### *Introduction of new legislation*

134. There have been extensive changes to legislation in recent years that has had a large impact on the service and the service has had to keep adapting and evolving in order to cope with the increased statutory duties and demands made by the introduction of new legislation.
135. **The Electoral Administration Act 2006** introduced changes and statutory deadlines that had a huge impact on our working practices. New processes and procedures had to be developed to ensure all statutory requirements were met.
136. The regulations all came into effect on 1 January 2007 and applied to all elections on 3 May 2007. These changes included, amongst other things:
- All postal voters and postal proxies have to provide personal identifiers
  - Verification of personal identifiers on postal voting statements at opening sessions
  - Creation of a marked postal voters list
  - Polling hours lengthened to 7am to 10pm
  - Applications to register to vote for the election can be made up to 11 days before the poll
  - Requests for a new postal vote can be made up to 11 days before the poll
  - Requests for a new proxy vote can be made up to 6 days before the poll
  - The end date/ time for replacements for lost or spoilt postal ballots is now 5pm on polling day
137. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty for all **Polling District Places and Stations** to be reviewed by the end of 2007. A full review of polling stations was held by December 2007 and, although the next review is not required until December 2011, we are currently conducting it to ensure polling stations to be used in the May 2011 elections are fit for purpose.

#### *Consultation*

##### *Viewpoint Elections*

138. In August 2007, following the Local and Parish Elections, we asked the viewpoint panel members questions about their experiences following the May 2007 elections. The key findings were as follows:
- Only three respondents were not registered on the Electoral Register.
  - 85% of respondents did vote in the recent Local and Parish Elections. The main reasons given for not voting were holidays, forgetfulness and illness.

- 56% of respondents voted at a Polling Station. 44% used their Postal Vote.
- 87% of respondents were aware that deadlines were in place to apply for a Postal Vote. Leaflets in the door and advertising on the TV and Radio were the top two suggestions to make people aware of the deadlines to apply for a postal vote.
- There was a 93% net agreement that Polling Station staff were friendly and helpful in the recent elections. There was 89% net agreement that staff were well informed and organised.
- When respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the location of the Polling Station there was a net satisfaction rate of 83% and when asked about access to the Polling station there was a net satisfaction rate of 82%. Dissatisfaction with the polling station was regarding parking and facilities for the disabled.
- 84% of respondents found out that elections were about to take place through a Poll Card delivered to their homes. This was followed by party leaflets delivered to their homes (45%).

#### *Viewpoint Review of polling Districts, Places and stations*

139. The results of the elections 2007 consultation were included in the 2007 Review of polling Districts, Places and stations. In addition, a focus group of viewpoint members were invited to further discuss issues around the location and access of polling stations.
140. This consultation indicated that:
- there were strong views that schools should be used as polling stations
  - all agreed that mobile polling stations were not a good idea
  - that public houses should be considered as a location for a polling station, as long as you did not have to go through the bar to vote.
  - Local authority buildings were also suggested as they are central to the community

#### *Viewpoint Annual Canvass*

141. A bi-annual survey is undertaken with members of the Viewpoint panel regarding the annual canvass to ascertain the level of customer satisfaction with the service.
142. In 2008 we asked questions regarding receipt, understanding and return of the 2007 canvass form. In 2007 the initial form was delivered via Royal Mail during the last week of August and reminders were sent a month later to all households who had not responded. Households that had not returned their forms by the by the middle of October were visited by canvassers. The top line results of the survey showed that there were high levels of customer satisfaction in both areas but only 96% of the respondents had received the initial form. Comments were also that areas of the form were difficult to understand.
143. As a result of this consultation in 2008 we changed to hand delivery of the initial form which ensured every household received it. In 2009, as the information on the form is statutory and we are unable to simplify it further we included an additional 'Quick guide to registration' explanatory instructions. The number of electronic registrations increased from 15,782 to 19,758. A decrease in the number of forms being returned to us reduces the manual handling and processing and storage of forms and therefore reduces the costs of administering the annual canvass.
144. In 2010 we asked questions regarding awareness about the necessity to respond to the canvass even if household details had not changed. We usually achieve a 56% return from the initial delivery form and chasing up further returns is expensive therefore we invited views as to how we could increase the initial percentage return rate of the form. The results, based on the 2009 canvass showed that 87% were aware of the need to register every year and only 61% were aware of rolling registration.

145. As a result of the responses we promoted this message through the community engagement strategy and mayoral strategy. The message was delivered at Town Hall visits, public events, presentations and workshops. The website was updated to reflect this message.

#### *Review of Parliamentary General Election Consultation*

146. Following the Parliamentary General Election questionnaires were sent to all Stockton North and Stockton South candidates and agents asking for comments. They were asked if they received a satisfactory response from the elections office, for comments on the information given to them, the location of polling stations and the count. Overall there was a very positive response and many commendations were received. Negative comments were to do with the cramped conditions in the mobile polling stations and the area designated for adjudication of the ballot papers at the Count being too cramped.

147. Questionnaires were sent to all staff who took part in the election asking for feedback in respect of the categories in which they were involved. The categories were training, collection of polling screens, the final presiding officer briefing and collection of ballot boxes and the count process. Respondents were asked to complete the form by grading their answers on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very good and 1 being very poor.

148. Training achieved 85% response rate of grades 4 and 5 and none at grade 1. Arrangements for the collection of polling screens achieved a 70% rate of grades 4 and 5 and none at grade 1. Final presiding officer briefing and collection of ballot boxes achieved 84% rate of grades 4 and 5 and 1 feedback sheet completed grade 1. The count process achieved 88% rate of grades 4 and 5 and 1 feedback sheet completed grade 1. One negative comment related to the location of the Pavilion being a less than adequate venue for the final Presiding Officer briefing due to the long walk to the car park with the ballot boxes and equipment. The second related to the large polling station sign falling down outside due to the rain.

149. The feedback illustrates what went well and identifies areas for improvement for the future elections. Many additional comments and suggestions were also put forward and these will be considered in the future.

150. **The new executive arrangements** consultation with all registered electors ended on 29 July. In total, 26,069 consultation slips were returned, representing 18.47% of the Borough's electorate (141,164). The results were as follows: - Council Leader and Cabinet - 13,445, Directly Elected Mayor and Cabinet - 12,513, Void (showing no preference or choosing both options) 111. These details formed part of a report to cabinet on 2nd September, with a decision being made by full Council on 8th September to adopt the Council Leader and Cabinet option.

#### **Polling District Places and Stations 2010**

151. Consultation required as part of the Polling District Places and Stations review 2010 was undertaken from 25 October until 15 November 2010 during which time we sought representations from the Returning Officer, all Members, Parish Clerks, Disability access groups and BME representatives. The Director of Law and Democracy will use his delegated powers to take decisions on polling districts, places and stations to be used in the future.

#### *Benchmarking*

152. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and has since established itself as a professional body to represent the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has 1648 members, the majority of whom are employed by Local Authorities to provide electoral registration and election services. SBC officers are members of the North east Region of the

AEA and Stockton attend regional and national meetings and have the opportunity to contribute to discussions and consultations both regionally and nationally.

153. The Electoral Commission is responsible for guidance, performance monitoring and review and provides advice and assistance on electoral matters to all those involved in elections. The EC also set and monitor performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain. These standards set out what needs to be achieved in order to support a well-run election. They cover planning and organising for an election, the integrity of the election locally, and participation in the election through public awareness, the accessibility of information for electors, and support to candidates and agents. The national results of the performance standards are available on the EC website which has the facility to compare the results of other councils.

### *Elections*

154. The Electoral Commission first published performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain in March 2009, and Returning Officers were required to report on their performance against these standards at the 2007 local government elections. The EC publish details of each Returning Officer's assessment of their performance against the standards on the Commission's website

Elections and referenda performance standards:

Performance standard 1 – skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer

Performance standard 2 – planning processes in place for an election

Performance standard 3 – training

Performance standard 4 – maintaining the integrity of an election

Performance standard 5 – planning and delivering public awareness activity

Performance standard 6 – accessibility of information to electors

Performance standard 7 – communication of information to candidates and agents

155. A self assessment return has been completed after every election since the 2007 local government elections and we have made incremental improvements on the baseline by identifying improvements and incorporating them into our Service plans. Significant improvements of performance were achieved at the general election and we have now attained the standard for 2 performance indicators and attained above standard for 5.

### *Electoral Registration*

156. The Electoral Commission first published performance standards for Electoral Registration in Great Britain in 2008

157. Electoral Registration performance standards:

Performance Standard 1 - Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors.

Performance standard 2: Maintaining the property database

Performance standard 3: House-to-house enquiries

Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications

Performance standard 5: Supply and security of the register and absent voter lists

Performance standard 6: Public awareness strategy

Performance standard 7: Working with partners

Performance standard 8: Accessibility and communication of information

Performance standard 9: Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass

Performance standard 10: Training



158. A self assessment return has been completed after every canvass and we have made incremental improvements on the baseline by identifying improvements and incorporating them into our Service plans. In 2008 we did not meet the standard for 2 areas, attained the standard for 5 and attained above standard for 3. Significant improvements of performance were achieved in 2009 and we have now attained the standard for 4 performance indicators and attained above standard for 6.
159. The North East Purchasing Organisation administers the elections and electoral registration printing contracts for four Tyne and Wear Authorities – South Tyneside, Gateshead, Newcastle and North Tyneside and two Tees Valley Authorities – Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland. Currently the election contract is held by Adare and the electoral registration printing contract is held by CFH. The printing contract for electoral services is a specialist critical contract and there are risks if we do not receive the correct service in a timely manner. SBC are currently leading a category data study on advertising and print spend which may have an impact on the future spend on this contract and possibilities such as printing in house and/or between authorities are being explored. Another option may be to combine both printing contracts to one supplier to maximise potential savings. This study is still in the first phase.
160. Tees Valley Authorities have quarterly and ad hoc meetings to benchmark and discuss electoral matters. In 2006 a report was taken to the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Meeting in 2006 regarding a consistent standard approach to election fees across the 5 Tees Valley authorities. A table of fees was introduced updates are reviewed and agreed through Tees Valley Lawyers meetings. The main advantage to standardising fees is that staff tend to work on elections for their own Authority area.

### **Impact on demand for service in the future across all Services areas**

#### *Democratic Services*

161. There are currently 3 councillor vacancies on the Council. Other new councillors may arrive as a result of the next elections, including new Parish/Town councillors.
162. Plans are now in place to review the Council's Member Learning & Development Strategy in readiness for this, utilising all available best practice and support. As part of this, a Members Induction Programme will be delivered post elections, to which all Parish/Town councillors will be invited to attend, introducing the main elements of the Council's service delivery and how, as members, they will be provided with support. This will reflect the feedback from previous reviews of what was provided and the Inspection/Accreditation outcomes.

#### *Scrutiny*

163. A clear vision for scrutiny in the next five years is yet to crystallise. Whilst it is understood that the Decentralism and Localism Bill will give Councils the option to return to traditional committee structures, scrutiny continues to feature in emerging Government consultations. Even where Councils return to traditional structures, there is, arguably, still an important place for scrutiny (or accountability) within structures.
164. It is likely that there will be a decrease in formal powers and prescription for how scrutiny operates but, with the abolition of inspection regimes, an increasingly important role for scrutiny to play in self regulation. Perhaps, more importantly at Stockton, scrutiny is playing a central role in the Value for Money strategy and this role will continue to be important for the foreseeable future. Following the initial three year EIT programme, it will be important for the Council to continually review how it provides services and demonstrate that it is delivering value for money and is working to eliminate waste and improve the delivery of services to the public through continuous improvement.

## *EIT*

165. The only formal measure for value for money is through performance indicator 179. It is however, imperative that a value for money culture runs through the core of the organisation. This is especially important in the light of the present economic climate and following the comprehensive spending review.
166. A number of Councils have established Transformation Teams to support value for money work. These include Darlington, Gateshead and Newcastle and this is mirrored across the country.
167. All Councils engage Members with the process. The level of Member involvement with the EIT programme at Stockton is, however, unusual in that the Scrutiny work programme has been devoted to supporting the EIT process which ensures that Members are involved with all reviews taking place. Close involvement of scrutiny with the EIT process, helps the process to remain transparent, accountable and open to Stockton residents and enables Councillors to have a meaningful input into decisions on future spending priorities. Because of this close link with scrutiny, it has made sense for coordination of EIT work to sit within the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services.
168. The three year EIT programme is due to come to an end in 2011, and it has become more important than ever, given the current financial pressures, that we find further efficiencies within the Council. Whilst the current EIT reviews are an effective tool to establish efficiencies within service areas, it is clear that more could potentially be done to look in more detail how a service operates. One example of this is to use Lean principles in order to identify wasteful processes. Other Councils around the country have adopted this approach which has been immensely successful in delivering efficiency savings. This additional tool could be used to assist the reviews either in their commencement or within their implementation after recommendations in order to streamline processes, identify necessary improvements or gaps in technology.
169. It is imperative that service areas operate a value for money culture throughout their structure in order to ensure that efficiencies are sustainable, therefore reducing the need for reviews to be revisited or constantly monitored. There is also a danger that once a review has been completed, complacency sets in and the monitoring process is ineffective.
170. Member involvement is key in the EIT process, and it is therefore appropriate that the EIT programme remains within Democratic Services closely aligned with the scrutiny function in order for the process to remain transparent. Work on the VfM programme will continue for the foreseeable future.

## *Electoral services*

171. There are currently 3 casual vacancies in the office of Borough Councillor for the wards of Mandale and Victoria, Billingham East and Ingleby Berwick East. An election to fill the vacancy will be held if two local government electors for the Borough, by notice in writing, request that the procedure to hold an election to fill the vacancy be commenced.
172. The decision to hold a national referendum on using the alternative vote system at the same time as local and parish elections and potentially a Mayoral election/referendum at the same time, raises significant logistical problems in particular the resources needed at the polling station and the complexity of the procedures for postal votes opening and the count.

173. The coalition government's constitutional reform programme has an extensive impact upon electoral services. There will be a need to analyse and assess the impact of all legislation changes introduced by the new government as it emerges.
174. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill provides for a referendum on 5 May 2011 on whether to adopt the "alternative vote" system instead of the current "first past the post" system for Westminster parliamentary elections. The Bill also provides for a review of the current constituency boundaries to equalise the size of constituencies and reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600.
175. The boundary review is to be completed by October 2013 in time to make changes for the 2015 general election. If a simple majority of voters in the referendum vote to change to the "alternative vote" system, the provisions to effect this change will be brought into force on the same day as the boundary changes to constituencies.
176. The Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill is before Parliament to fix parliamentary terms. This means that general elections are to occur every five years on the first Thursday in May with the next election occurring on 7th May 2015. General elections are only to be held earlier than this if either two-thirds of all MPs vote in favour of dissolution or there has been a vote of no confidence in the Government and an alternative Government has failed to gain the confidence of the House of Commons within 14 days.
177. The Coalition Agreement published in May 2010 committed to speeding up the implementation of individual electoral registration the Government plan to bring individual registration into force in 2014. This will mean that during the 2014 annual canvass all existing registered electors and others who may be eligible to vote, will be invited to register individually and provide personal identifiers (signature, date of birth and National Insurance number) that will be used to authenticate their identity before they are added to the register. The Government also intends to take the opportunity of introducing individual registration to tackle problems of under-registration. The government will be trialling data matching – allowing electoral registers to be compared to other public databases to identify people missing from the register – over the course of 2011. Further primary legislation will be needed to replace the current provisions in the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 and the government intend to publish a draft Bill next year before legislation is introduced into Parliament.

## **REVIEW FINDINGS AND EVALUATION**

### **Democratic and Members Services**

#### **Area Based Grant**

178. The Local Government Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 introduced a duty on principal local councils to respond to both electronic and hard copy petitions received from the public; and to therefore have an appropriate petition scheme in place. This necessitates the provision of an electronic petition facility (E-Petition system). To this aim, Democratic Services negotiated with AKS its current Committee System provider (E-Genda) to develop with them an appropriate E-Petition system using Democratic Services officers input into the key elements required of the system. This has resulted in the procurement of an appropriate system from them at a reduced one off cost of £2,250 for implementation from December 2010.
179. The Council has received as part of its Area Based Grant allocation from the Government for 2010/11, the sum of £13,500 towards the cost of implementing an E-Petition system. The above costs have been absorbed by Democratic Services during 2010/11 for the development and procurement of an E-Petition system.

180. In addition, the Council has received £1,845 for the development and delivery of the Councillor Call for Action.

181. Work in both of these areas has been absorbed within existing resource allocation.

**Recommended that the Area Based Allocation grants amounting to £15,393 be retained as part of the Council's overall required savings.**

### **August Recess**

182. It is practice for a four year Democracy Diary to be set after each new Council is elected in order to give elected Members clarity as to the dates/times meetings that Council and Committees are to be held in order to be able to plan their work/Council/home life commitments. Due to Member requests, it has been the norm to avoid having meetings of full Council during the traditional Summer school holiday period to allow Members the opportunity to take their own holidays during this time. The availability of Members, and officers to be able to attend meetings during this time has been brought into question even more of late with a number of Committee meetings cancelled during this period due to concerns that insufficient members were available to attend.

183. As a result, CMT, and thereafter the Members Advisory Panel, are due shortly to consider the proposed four year Democracy Diary for 2011/2015 and as part of this, will be invited to consider the introduction of a recess period during late July/August whereby only essential Committee meetings are held. In addition to freeing capacity for both elected Members and officers to take annual leave within this period without affecting scheduled meetings, the introduction of such a recess period would allow Democratic Services to review its own workforce requirements during this period with a view to introducing a system of annualised hours. For example, following interest expressed by part time staff within the Section to not work during the traditional six week school Summer holiday period, but retaining a required level of service within the Section, an estimated annual saving of £5,000 could be achieved.

**Recommended that subject to CMT and MAP approving the introduction of a Summer recess period for Council/Committee meetings, the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to consider the introduction of a system of annualised hours for Democratic Services staff and realise any financial savings that accrue from this.**

### **Annual Meeting/Council Meetings**

184. The Council has, like most other Local Authorities, invited civic guests to its Annual Meeting each year, at which the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected, the Leader, Cabinet and Committee Chair and Vice Chairs are appointed, along with the membership of each committee and the appointment of members to outside body organisations. Following the conduct of the business meeting, the incoming Mayor has hosted a civic function with a sit down meal for all invited guests, numbering in the region of 240, including Mayoral parties from each of the Tees Valley local authorities, the High Sheriff, Lord Lieutenant, Mayor's Chaplain etc. Wherever possible, the Council has used its own premises (Billingham Forum) for the event and used internal caterers however, this year, due to the redevelopment of the Forum, an external venue was used with again SBC caterers brought in. It is likely that for 2011 again an appropriate external venue will be required as works to the Forum may not be complete by the date of the AGM in May 2011. The cost of the event in respect of venue hire and refreshments in recent years has been:-

-7/8	£6,152 (B Forum)
-8/9	£6,622 (B Forum)
-9/10	£6,169 (B Forum)
-10/11	£8,150 (M&M Bldg)

-11/12 ext        £8,150 (external venue likely to be required)

From 2011 onwards, there are a number of changes likely to affect the annual appointment process outlined above with, as a result of the introduction of New Executive arrangements, the proposed appointment of a Leader for a four year term who will appoint his/her own Cabinet. Also, a recommendation coming forward for consideration as part of the recent Task and Finish review of elected members roles on Outside Body organisations is for Council appointments to be made for a four year term to these organisations, allowing both the elected Member and the organisation itself the opportunity to work together throughout this term, each acquiring more knowledge and expertise of each other's role without any uncertainty as to whether membership would continue each year. By reverting to a four year appointment period, it is recognised that both officer and member time can be reduced from the appointment process with annual appointments no longer made, and political groups no longer required to convene meetings to consider nominations to outside bodies each year.

185. With such a shift to four year terms of office, it is appropriate at this time to also consider whether the appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs and the membership of Committees can also now be made for a four year term, providing certainty for elected Members as to their role on the Council for the duration of their term of office. Such a proposal would obviously be subject to the condition that any member could request at any time that Council consider a proposed amendment to any appointment previously made.
186. If the Council were to move towards a four year tenure of office for its key appointments, this would drastically cut down the amount of business required to be considered at each Annual Meeting. Whilst the Council is required to have such a meeting by the Local Government Act 1972, the amount of business that would remain to be conducted could be restricted to the appointment of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, confirmation of the dates of Council meetings and other necessary Constitutional matters. The procedure for the appointment of the Mayor has previously been established by Council and is laid down within the Constitution, thereby removing previous uncertainty regarding the appointment.
187. This would then give scope from 2012 to review the format of the AGM to focus on a smaller agenda and review the invitations and hospitality after the meeting. Reducing the number of invitees would also enable the meeting to be held on a smaller venue. The reduction in both officer and member resources required each year to facilitate the event, a financial saving of approximately £6-8,000 per annum could be achieved from 2012/2014 if the Council were to host the event in its own venue, i.e. the Town Hall, review the number of invitations issued, and no longer provide a sit down meal following the business meeting.
188. It may also be appropriate at this stage to consider the future role of ordinary Council meetings and the extent of the information presented to them. In addition to standing items such as the facility for both members and the public to ask questions of Cabinet members and Chairmen of Committees, and consider any member motions submitted, this Council has historically considered the minutes of all meetings contained in Appendix 1 at full Council and has reproduced these minutes in hard copy form, as well as making them available electronically via E-Genda. The hard copy printing costs for Council agendas in 9/10 was £9k from the Council's corporate Member Support budget, with each Council agenda typically costing more than £1k to produce in hard copy format. The majority of these minutes are in the main presented for information being either a record of decisions already taken by Cabinet under Executive arrangements; by Planning and Licensing Committee under delegated authority, be an interim progress of reviews being undertaken by Select Committees, or be information regarding the various Consultative forums and meetings of the Police and Fire Authorities.
189. This practice is believed to be unique within this region as most authorities, since the introduction of New Executive Arrangements, have adopted a practice of inviting Council to consider and debate decisions that they alone are authorised to make, such as proposals

regarding the Council's key policy areas, and matters affecting the Council's Medium Term Financial Position. These issues are currently presented within the minutes of Cabinet meetings, alongside decisions determined by the Executive.

190. The facility to allow questions at Council, and the availability of all Council and Committee minutes on the Internet and Intranet, means that members and the public still have the facility to be kept informed regarding the business of each of these forums without the information necessarily being presented to Council in their current form.

191. Two options would appear to present themselves in this regard:-

- i) To no longer present the minutes of all Cabinet, Scrutiny, Regulatory and Consultative/Informative forums; and instead allow Council to consider matters requiring a Council decision, as well as standing items such as member and public questions, motions, petitions and Leaders Forward Plan;
- ii) To include the minutes of the various meetings on the agenda before Council but refer Members attention to the information available via E-Genda, and no longer reproduce the information in hard copy format.

192. Each of the above options allows the potential to reduce printing costs for Council agendas by £8,000 p.a. if adopted.

**Recommended that, subject to consultation with Members, the Council's approach to the hosting of its AGM be revised as outlined with effect from 2011 and MAP be invited to consider options to be presented regarding the future role of ordinary Council meetings.**

#### **Members IT**

193. The Section has embraced available technology in order to be able to allow Members to communicate by either PC, laptop, blackberry, or telephone, has supplemented this provision with individual printers at home, and has made available a range of office accommodation for Members within Municipal Buildings, complete with IT equipment. The current average set up cost for each Member at home with appropriate IT equipment is £1,400 (total amount for members set up costs, excluding annual rental - £60,729.72) and includes a variety of different solutions, i.e. PC, laptop, blackberry etc. Through an appropriate procurement strategy to standardise the future level of IT support provided for all Members, it is suggested that a saving of approximately £2,000 may be realised by rationalising the equipment provided into one best solution.

194. All Members are currently offered a printer to allow localised printing, with different types of printer having been supplied based on ad hoc procurement. These printers rely on a range of cartridges to print with; in 2009/10 cartridge costs to the Authority was £3,000. Printing locally is recognised as being hugely costly to the Authority and as such an Authority wide project is currently under way to consolidate all printing. All local printers from within Council offices will soon be removed and no officer will be able to purchase a local printer. SBC will purchase a number of multi functional devices that will be placed throughout council offices via 'follow-me' printing which will mean an officer/Member can print documents to a print queue and collect them from any machine on the network. Documents will not be printed by the device until the person enters a unique reference number (PIN) into the device. If we are set to rationalise our printer estate within the Authority it is proposed that we thereafter seek to not replace local printers for Members once the Printer Consolidation project is complete and we are live with 'follow-me' printing. The average cost of a printer is £160 and therefore significant savings could be achieved.

195. Benchmarking with other Authorities has also identified a move by some Authorities to seek to reduce the amount of separate office accommodation provided for members within Council offices in favour of more shared 'touchdown' facilities with concentrated workspace areas,

and less individual office space provided. This would therefore reduce the amount of office space required corporately by Members and reduce the amount of office equipment, PC's and overhead costs associated with the cost of providing the existing amount of office space.

196. The extent of electronic information currently available for both Members and officers increases the opportunity to make more of this availability at the expense of continuing to duplicate all/some information in paper form. It is proposed that advancements in IT technology be reviewed in the near future to see whether devices such as I-Pads, tablets etc can offer longer term efficiencies whilst maintaining the quality of the information provided. Potential benefits of this would be a reduction in the Council's Printing budget with less paper work sent to Members and the facility for Members to access all documents via a tablet, upon which notes can be made on the documents electronically.

**Recommended that subject to full consultation with elected Members:-**

- **the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of ICT seek to introduce a standardised level of future IT support for Members;**
- **following the successful rationalisation of our printer estate within the authority and the introduction of secure 'follow me' printing from multi-function devices, local printers in Members homes be no longer supported;**
- **in line with Workwise principles, the amount of office accommodation provided within the Council offices be rationalised to reduce the amount of office space required in favour of more shared 'touchdown' facilities with concentrated workspace areas;**
- **advancements in IT technology be reviewed in the near future to see whether devices such as I-Pads, tablets etc can be introduced by the Authority offering longer term efficiencies leading to a reduction in the Council's Printing budget with less paper work sent to Members and the facility for Members to access all documents via a tablet, upon which notes can be made on the documents electronically.**

**Attendance at Conferences**

197. Elected Member attendance is currently invited annually for a number of Conferences, the cost of which are met from the Council's corporate budget allocation. These include LGA Annual Conference, National Children & Adult Services Conference, Institute of Licensing, Planning Summer School and the Chartered Institute of Housing. Attendance is usually by the relevant Cabinet Member and Chair & Vice Chairman of the appropriate Select Committee, plus relevant officers, and this follows a review of Member representation at conferences undertaken by MAP in 2007. The cost for attendance during 9/10 was in the region of £11,500. There is currently no formal exchange of information obtained by either members or officers at these events to indicate whether attendance at these events continues to provide value, and therefore it is proposed that a review be undertaken of the merits of their continued attendance.

**Recommended that attendance at the list of approved conferences is reviewed by the Members Advisory Panel.**

**Venues for Ward Surgeries**

198. A total of £3,600 was spent in 2009/10 on the hire of appropriate venues for elected Members to host ward surgeries with a mix of Youth and Community Centres, private buildings (Village Halls etc), Churches, Libraries and School buildings being used. Only libraries, school buildings and a limited number of community centres are within the ownership of the Council, and currently only libraries and school buildings do not charge for their hire. At present however, only 6 libraries and 5 schools are currently used within the whole Borough. There is therefore some potential to be explored in the Democratic Services,

in consultation with each elected Member, seeking to identify ward surgery venues that can be provided at no cost to the authority, utilising more widely library and school buildings where appropriate. Use of these venues would contribute to both the extended schools initiative, and would seek to place members in the environment of a school or library which are likely to be already well used by people and therefore raise the profile of the ward surgery to a larger passing audience.

**Recommended that Democratic Services, in consultation with each elected Member, be authorised to identify ward surgery venues that can be provided at no cost to the Authority, utilising more widely library and school buildings where appropriate.**

### **Support for LSP**

199. Recognising the procedural support and advice given by Democratic Services and the need to co-ordinate meeting arrangements with the democracy diary staff as well as the difference in approach regionally to the support of LSP meetings, it is suggested that the Head of Democratic Services investigate any potential savings arising from the standardisation of LSP meeting support from within Democratic Services.

**Recommended that the business case for transferring servicing of LSP meetings to Democratic Services be explored by the Head of Democratic Services.**

### **External Inspection**

200. Evidence obtained from independent assessment of the service through Customer Service Excellence and the Members Charter, along with the information obtained via benchmarking illustrating both the extent and cost of the service in comparison with other authorities, demonstrates that Democratic Service have strived to deliver and continuously improve its service for the benefit of elected Members and the general public. Evidence of this can also be seen from the feedback obtained from Customer Comments, Complaints and Commendations and from the increased public awareness of the service demonstrated by recent Viewpoint surveys.

201. The service is committed to securing further service improvement identified through each of these assessments and inspections and aims to deliver them at no extra cost to the Authority.

**Recommended that Democratic Services deliver the further service improvements identified through independent assessment and inspection at no extra cost to the Authority within existing budgets.**

### **Support for Tees Valley Health Joint Scrutiny Committee**

202. The Council has an arrangement with Middlesbrough Council in respect of administrative and scrutiny support for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Together with the other Tees Valley Authorities, a sum of £5,000 per annum is paid to Middlesbrough Council. This sum covers Middlesbrough's costs in servicing the Committee and provides a contribution to the salary of a scrutiny officer. Other North East Councils are reviewing their arrangements and contribution to this work.

203. It is proposed that support arrangements for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee are reviewed (in discussion with other Tees Valley Authorities) with a view to removing this contribution and providing support to the Joint Committee within existing Council scrutiny resources. For example, servicing of the Joint Committee could be rotated among the participating Councils in a similar way to the newly established North East Joint Health Scrutiny Committee which Stockton currently supports.



**Recommended that the support arrangements for the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee are reviewed (in discussion with other Tees Valley Authorities) with a view to removing the £5000 scrutiny support to Middlesbrough Council and providing scrutiny support on a rotational basis from within existing scrutiny budgets at Stockton.**

#### **Vacant Posts**

204. There are currently two vacant posts within the service. The Scrutiny Trainee and has been vacant for some time and a trainee DSO has been seconded from Democratic Services in a Scrutiny Support Officer role. In addition, a modern apprentice position is also currently vacant and it is proposed that this position is deleted. Savings from vacancies and secondments have already been earmarked to meet medium term financial pressures. In addition this will achieve a saving of £4,200.

**Recommended that the above arrangements are made permanent and any resulting savings are made permanent within the structure and budgets for Democratic Services.**

#### **Civic**

205. In 2007 the Civic Services Officer and the Mayors attendant moved into the same office. This change provided cover and greater flexibility for civic services. Future work is needed to examine this function and the scope for roles to become multi functional to increase efficiencies whilst maintaining and improving the current service.

**Recommended that future work is carried out to examine the civic function and how the current staffing arrangements and roles can become multi functional to increase efficiencies whilst maintaining and improving the current service.**

#### **Mayoral Car**

206. The service has continually striven to make the most efficient procurement choices across all service areas. Examples this year include the lease of the civic car. The main aim, having concluded that a vehicle was still necessary, was to secure a vehicle which was not only fit for purpose but also reduced CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and lower leasing costs. Following consultation with procurement, fleet management, the present Mayor and past Mayors, a new vehicle has been procured which achieves all these aims at an annual saving of £2,200 per annum which equates to a total of £8,800 over the 4 year contract.

**Recommended that a new lease car for the Mayor be procured at an annual saving of £2,200**

#### **Electoral Printing**

207. The North East Purchasing Organisation administers the elections and electoral registration printing contracts for four Tyne and Wear Authorities – South Tyneside, Gateshead, Newcastle and North Tyneside and two Tees Valley Authorities – Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland. SBC procurement are currently leading a category data study on advertising and print spend which may have an impact on the future spend on this contract and possibilities such as printing in house and/or between Authorities are being explored. Another option may be to combine both printing contracts to one supplier to maximise potential savings. This study is still in the first phase.

**Recommended that the Head of Democratic Services continue to work with procurement to maximise the opportunities for savings.**

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

208. It should be noted that several of the proposed recommendations are subject to further consultation with elected members. The projected saving that could be achieved should

each of the above recommendations be implemented would be approximately £60k, including the passporting of Area Grant Based Allocation of £15,393 continuation of which into future years is subject to confirmation.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

209. The statutory obligations required to be met by the Section are set out in paragraphs 32-36; 63-68; and 92 of the report.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

210. This report on EIT Review of Democratic Services is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

211. The issues covered by the review have an impact on the Stronger Communities element of the Community Strategy.
212. There are no specific community safety implications.

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

213. This report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and has been judged to have a positive impact. An action plan for further improvements has been developed / no remedial actions are required.

## **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

214. Reference is made within the report to the results of benchmarking exercises carried out with other local authorities; specific external assessments and public consultation carried out via Viewpoint. Consultation has been carried out with the Leader, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen regards proposals to introduce an August Recess; and, if approved, further consultation will be carried out with all members regarding proposals contained that have a direct impact on them.

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Education related? No

Background Papers  
N/A

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors  
N/A

Property

The report suggests a review be undertaken of the amount of office accommodation provided within the Council offices and this will be undertaken in consultation with elected members and in accordance with the Council's Asset Management Plan.