

Democratic Services – Overview Report - November 2015

Electoral

1. **May 2015 Elections** – Painstaking planning and preparations for the May 2015 elections paid dividends in the successful delivery of these combined elections.
2. We knew that the combined nature of the election programme in 2015 would create inevitable pressures within key areas of the project. This was the first time since 1979 that the Parliamentary, Borough and Parish Elections had taken place at the same time resulting in 33 separate polls to administer; this was also the first time that an election was being delivered under the new Individual Electoral Registration (IER) regime. As a result the workload for the elections increased significantly. By way of illustrating the scale of the task:
 - 339 nomination papers were checked (most of which required further follow up and multiple checks)
 - 2,254 assenter details had to be checked against the electoral register
 - 196 agents were appointed
 - 100 polling stations were booked
 - 505 staff were appointed to 1,372 jobs
 - 70,002 postal ballot packs were issued and 64,162 were receipted and opened representing an unprecedented 87% turnout of postal voters
 - A staggering 2,592 postal votes were returned on polling day which all had to be opened and processed for verification as soon as possible after 10pm
3. The interest in the election also resulted in a surge of registration and postal vote applications which put additional pressures on the Electoral Team working to new IER processes and at a time when work on administering the elections was gathering pace. During the statutory elections period:
 - 16,127 applications were received
 - 2,140 postal vote applications were received
4. There was also considerable media interest in the Stockton South election which meant that there were full film crews from BBC, ITV/ Tyne Tees, Sky news and local radio present. The project team and colleagues from IT and Communications met with media representations at several site meetings and these meetings proved to be useful in clarifying and planning for media requirements well ahead of the count.
5. The only substantive complaints from voters received were in relation to the use of mobile polling stations. During the May 2015 elections, the combined poll, high turnout and limited space in the mobile stations led to queues forming. It is proposed that a mini polling station review is carried out focusing on the districts where mobile stations are used to seek to identify any alternative arrangements. In four of these districts there are schools which could be used if the schools were willing and fresh approaches will be made.
6. Democratic Services worked in partnership with the Communications Team to develop and deliver a Communications Plan to promote awareness about, and participation in the May

Parliamentary and Local Elections. This combined and complemented the IER Strategy and Delivery Plan.

7. A range of public awareness activities were organised to link in with the Electoral Commission's national publicity campaign including posters, leaflets, press releases; articles in Stockton News and KYIT; library book receipts; information added to SBC website; targeted messages distributed through social media and Democratic Services' network of contacts; the SBC car park tickets; footnote on all Democratic Services' staff e-mails.

2015 Elections	Turnout in May 2015
<i>Parliamentary Election for Stockton North</i>	39,783 (60.12%)
<i>Parliamentary Election for Stockton South</i>	51,944 (69.16%)
<i>Local District Elections for Wards</i>	64.13% Overall Turnout

8. Accounts for the May Elections were submitted following the elections, well ahead of the deadline and we have received sign-off from the Elections Claims Unit. The use of an independent book keeper from the accountancy team has assisted with the speedy completion and sign-off of the accounts.
9. **Individual Electoral Registration (IER)** 2014/15 has seen the continuation of work to support transition to IER. In June 2014, the biggest change to electoral registration in over 100 years was introduced. The increase in workload generated by the additional business processes required under the new system has been significant and ongoing registration activity has been delivered against the pressure of other projects such as the household notification write out, the MYP elections, annual postal vote refresh and May 2015 elections.
10. The appointment of an apprentice in Electoral Services has been essential in assisting with the additional enquiries, mailings and processing registration involved with the transition.
11. Following an initial confirmation exercise resulting in a high proportion of electors being transferred to the new IER register, work has focused on those electors who have not registered individually through mailings and house to house enquires and requirement to register notices.
12. Democratic Engagement Activity to support the transition to IER has included:
- On-going work identifying and developing new internal and external partners to help maximise voter registration by targeting specific groups of people that are statistically the least likely to register or vote (e.g. young people, students, BME, social housing tenants).
 - Delivery of various activities / publicity / and distribution of information to raise awareness about the changes to voter registration and promote registration using the SBC website and social media; press releases including one referring to the 'Gogglebox' TV advert; articles in KYIT and Stockton News regarding registration and postal/proxy application deadlines; e-mail distribution lists; posters and leaflets in libraries, contact centres and other community buildings.
 - An eye-catching market stall to promote voter registration and voting was positioned in Stockton on two market days during April. Thousands of people saw the key message 'Your vote matters. Make sure you're in,' the online registration website (www.gov.uk/register tovot e) and the local helpline phone number. Well over a hundred

people made enquiries at the stall and led to several voter registrations and postal vote applications. The banners used for the stall were specifically designed so that they could be used through the year in a number of campaigns and events.

- Democratic Services worked in partnership with the Economic Growth and Development Services Division to promote voter registration through the issue of SBC car park tickets with the national IER branding, key message, online registration website and local helpline.
 - Following the initial issue of 150,000 car park tickets across the borough, the arrangement was renewed for another batch for the first quarter leading up to the voter registration deadline and beyond the elections. This has proved to be a very cost-effective and efficient way to take the IER message to a large number of people who may be unregistered. We intend to make this a long-term arrangement.
13. Alongside the continuation of work to support transition to IER, in July 2015 the first full **household canvass** since the introduction of IER commenced in July 2015 with efforts being focused in particular on those electors who have not yet registered individually as they will be removed from the elector register on 1 December 2015 if they have not completed a successful registration under IER by that date. Initial household enquiry forms were mailed out to all properties on 5 August 2015 and house to house enquires for non-responding properties commenced on 7 September 2015. The response to this first canvass has been encouraging and far exceeds the response rate of other Councils in the North East and the national picture. Approximately half of our responses have been via digital means and we have seen a significant increase in the number of attainers. Final reminders to non-responding properties will be posted out on 27 October 2015.
 14. Democratic Engagement Activity to support the transition to IER and 2015 canvass has included on-going work identifying and developing new internal and external partners to help maximise voter registration by targeting specific groups of people that are statistically the least likely to register or vote (e.g. young people, students, BME, social housing tenants). This was co-ordinated to complement and support the delivery of the 2015 Annual Canvass.
 15. Various activities / publicity / distribution of information to raise awareness about IER, the Annual canvass and promote voter registration took place both online and using paper forms. This was done using the SBC website and social media; press releases; articles in KYIT and Stockton News; e-mail distribution lists; posters and leaflets in libraries, contact centres and other community buildings; at the monthly citizenship ceremonies; on 180,000 SBC car park tickets with the national IER branding, key message, online registration website and local helpline; specific messages regarding voter registration on every issue library borrowing receipt during the canvass period; and encouraging over 1,200 primary pupils to take the voter registration message home through school council assemblies and town hall tours.
 16. To ensure that we stayed up to date with latest news, advice, information, guidance and resources related to IER, we monitored emails/ e-bulletins/ websites of Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission and utilised the information to produce publicity / awareness materials – articles, banners, posters, leaflets, press releases, social media etc.
 17. At the end of stage one of canvass activity, we achieved a 52% response, and this has now increased to 86%. The canvassing door to door has now been completed and the final stage of the canvass has commenced with final reminders hitting the mats from the 27 October.

18. In terms of our work to encourage registration levels are currently as follows

Electoral Registration:

1.12.14	138,132 electors
1.9.15	142,199 electors
23.10.15	139,628 electors
Unconfirmed Electors	1436 likely to be deleted on 1 December 2015.
Pending electors	6500 electors who are currently in the process of individually registering. Canvass commences 6 November 2015

If all pending electors successfully complete their registration this would bring the Stockton Electoral register to 144,880

The number of attainers (16 / 17 year olds):

1.12.14	1262
1.9.15	1470
23.10.15	2140

19. UK Youth Parliament Election February 2015 - Working in partnership with local secondary schools, sixth forms and Stockton Riverside College, Democratic Services planned co-ordinated and delivered a successful election for Borough's new representative in the UK Youth Parliament. There were six candidates for the role. The response to the ballot was fantastic with over 6,000 young people exercising their vote (a 70% turnout) from nine secondary schools, two sixth forms and a further education college. The newly elected MYP is Jess Hugill from Conyers School, and her Deputy is Kushan Bhardwaj from St. Patrick's Catholic College.

20. Household Notification Letter – As a result of the transitional canvass in 2014, a full canvass of all properties in the Borough did not take place. In order to ensure that our Register was as complete and accurate as possible for the May 2015 Elections, a Household Notification Letter was sent to every property setting out who is registered to vote and inviting changes in order to ensure that the register is as complete and accurate as possible ahead of the May elections. Delivery of the letters was timed to coincide with National Voter Registration Day on 5 February 2015. The response to the Household Notification Letter has been very positive and the inclusion of postal vote application forms with the letter has also led to over 2000 new postal vote applications being received.

21. Elections and Electoral Registration – Audit – In September 2015, Elections and Electoral Registration were audited by internal audit. The service received full assurance with no recommendations.

22. Community Governance Review – Following receipt of a petition calling for the abolition of Billingham Town Council, a community governance review commenced to review the future

of the Town Council. In addition, the opportunity has been taken to conduct a community governance review with respect to the future operation of Elton Parish Council which had not operated since December 2008 when all Councillors resigned.

23. Consultation letters have been sent to all local government electors as part of the first stage of the review process asking them indicate whether or not they support and abolition of these parish councils. The consultation ends on 31 October 2015.
24. **Police and Crime Commissioner Elections** – Initial planning work has now commenced for the elections next May. Stockton will again be the Police Area Returning Officer for the Cleveland Force Area and planning meeting has commenced with the Local Returning Officers and Elections Teams in the Force area.

Scrutiny

25. **Scrutiny Work Programme** – Select Committees completed a busy and challenging work programme for 2014/15. In total, thirteen in-depth reviews were completed during the year covering a diverse range of topics as follows:
 - The Effects of Arts and Culture on Wellbeing
 - Neighbourhood Policing
 - Transition from Primary to Secondary
 - Durham Tees Valley Airport
 - Licensing and Public Health
 - Home Care
 - Countryside Sites
 - Road and Footpath Investment
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
 - School Admissions Arrangements – Phase 1
 - Safer Place for Children
 - Street Cafe Furniture and A-Boards
 - Tree Preservation Orders
26. This was alongside ongoing monitoring of completed reviews and corporate performance across key areas including children, health, and adult services, and engaging with emerging NHS issues. The high profile Task and Finish Review of Child Sexual Exploitation was completed within three months taking evidence from a wide range of partner agencies and services over seven meetings.
27. A significant number for topic suggestions were submitted for review in 2015/16. Executive Scrutiny Committee confirmed the work programme for 2015/16 which was agreed in principle before the elections and Select Committees have commenced work under the revised Select Committee Structures.
28. Evidence gathering is well underway as part of the Select Committees in depth review programme. In September, the People Committee completed its review of Choice Based Lettings and this was reported to Cabinet on 8 October 2015.
29. The annual round of overview meetings covering each committee's thematic remit began in September and this year has seen a revised reporting framework to match the new committee structure, and enhanced information provided to committees. This has ensured that Committees have a range of information to consider in advance of the meeting.

30. Following the Future of Scrutiny Report in 2014, the **new Committee structure** has been embedded. This streamlined approach retains dedicated Committees for Adult and Health, and Children and Young People issues, and adds the Crime and Disorder Committee to undertake the statutory Crime and Disorder scrutiny function. In addition there are People and Place Select Committees covering the remainder of Council service provision.
31. Following the election **Questioning and Challenge Training** for each Committee was delivered as part of the Member induction process and to prepare the new Committee structure for their role.
32. The Scrutiny Toolkit was refreshed and provided to all Members following the election.
33. **Quality Monitoring Framework for Adults and Children's Services** – Work continued on improving the work of the ASH and CYP Committees regarding monitoring of the performance and the quality and safety of these important and high profile services, including those provided to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.
34. As part of the Questioning and Challenge Training noted above, tailored training was provided to CYP and ASH Committees.
35. In consultation with CESC, it has been agreed by both Committees to increase further the number of site visits relating to both children and young people, and adult services, and introduce a schedule of visits, on a thematic basis to assist Members in assuring themselves about the quality of services and increase their knowledge base.
36. To further strengthen the Committees' role, updates on negative Ofsted/CQC inspection reports will be reported to the next available CYP/ASH Committee following publication.
37. Healthwatch has reported its Annual Report to ASH Committee, at the same time as presenting its first Enter and View Report (relating to the quality of activities for residents in a care home). Member also considered Stockton's Local Account for Adult Services.
38. **Health Scrutiny** – In March 2015, ASH Committee were updated on the key performance of North Tees NHS Trust as contained in its Quality Account. Following this, the ASH Committee's statement was included in the published version of North Tees Trust's Quality Account. This reflected Committee discussions in relation to mortality rates, staff satisfaction, and cancer referral to treatment times, as well as highlighting good practice.
39. ASH Committee continues to be supported to respond to proposed service changes.
40. The CCG is proposing changes to the local model for Urgent Care; this would see an urgent care centre adjoining A and E at North Tees site, bringing together GP-led walk in and out of hours GP care on one site. An update was considered in June 2015; key issues to monitor include the future of the registered GP Practice at the same location as the current Walk-In Centre (Tithebarn). Following the meeting, the procurement was 'paused' in line with a wider NHS England national review of projects, and further updates will be considered when available.
41. Members supported proposals to merge Tennant Street and A + B Medical Practices, whilst agreeing to monitor further the issue of GP patient registration in the Borough. After

considering the latest progress update on the previous review of access to GP/urgent/emergency care, the Committee is engaging with NHS England and CCG to highlight its continuing concerns about GP registration and 'closed' lists.

42. Stockton has had active representation on the joint health scrutiny committees. Hartlepool BC is chairing the NE Regional Committee during 2015, and Redcar and Cleveland is chairing the Tees Valley Sub-regional Committee in 2015-16, following on from Hartlepool in 2014-15.
43. Key issues for regional work have been:
 - ongoing monitoring of the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS)
 - engagement with the Northern Clinical Senate and NHS England on their work and overall vision and drivers for acute/community care across the region
 - Quality Accounts for NEAS and the Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust
44. In future work, the Tees Valley Committee has agreed to review the issue of CAMHS, following the suggestion by Stockton, and the Regional Committee added review of 'use of pharmacy for minor ailments' for 2015-16. The Regional Committees have a role in considering proposals for service changes. For example, in 2015-16 the Regional Committee has been considering the initial information on neonatal care in the region.
45. **Police and Crime Panel** – In order for more in-depth scrutiny to take place task and finish groups made up of one Member from each local authority plus an Independent Member scrutinise specific topics of interest. They report their findings to the full Police and Crime Panel which include recommendations for the Police and Crime Commissioner and his office. Stockton Council's Scrutiny Team provides officer support for the reviews along with assistance from our Governance Officers.
46. The Task and Finish Reviews of the Overall Budget Strategy, and Commissioner Priorities were completed and reported to the meeting of the full Panel on 3 February 2015.
47. The Budget Strategy Group found that:
 - The PCC savings plans for 2014-16 are well advanced and are set to be achieved overall which should ensure a balanced budget for that period.
 - The PCC propose a 1.99% precept rise to partly address the budget gap for 2015-16;
 - The Police Office and PCSO staff numbers have stabilised ahead of schedule, but to avoid further reductions in frontline capacity, future savings will increasingly need to come through collaboration, and better ways of working including estates and technology.
 - The process for allocating community safety funding/ PCC Initiatives has further developed, and there is scope for partners including Community Safety Partnerships to develop programmes on a multi-year basis, subject to the submission of a business case.
48. The Commissioner Priorities Group found that:
 - Interchangeable terminology created confusion with residents who were not aware that the PCCs objectives were the same as their concerns and priorities until he gave a complicated subset of information so recommended that standard and consistent terminology be adopted.

- Communication with agencies can still be improved and recommended the PCC objective be reviewed to ensure this is addressed.
 - The PCC's objective regards improved communication between agencies without mention of the general public and recommended the PCC's objective be explicit about communication with the public as well.
 - Anti-Social Behaviour was one of the main reasons for the review so it was recommended that the PCC and the Police and Crime Plan 2015-18 makes clear his commitments and objectives to residents who see this as a priority.
 - ASB linked directly to the objective of retaining and developing Neighbourhood Policing. The T&F Group recommended a clear definition of neighbourhood policing feature in the updated Police and Crime Plan and other relevant documentation to provide clarity for residents and all other interested bodies.
49. A new panel membership was formed following Council elections in May. The first meeting of the new panel took place on 30 July 2015 and identified/discussed possible scrutiny topics and gave consideration for undertaking the review topics of Victims' Services and Shared Services which were previously agreed but not completed in 2014/15. The panel agreed to complete the 2014/15 topics and set the 2015/16 scrutiny work programme at its meeting on 21 September 2015 which also includes scrutinising the budget strategy on an annual basis.
50. Both the Victims' Services and Budget Strategy reviews will be completed for the February 2016 PCP meeting to inform the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Panel of the required Police precept. The Shared Services review will report to the June 2016 meeting.
51. **North East Regional Member/ Officer Scrutiny Network** – In October, Graham Birtle from Stockton's Scrutiny Team took over the Officer Chair of the North East Scrutiny Network for a two year term of office. Councillor Brown continues to Chair the Member Network meetings until July 2016.
52. The Network provides a forum for Members and officers in the North East within the scrutiny function to meet and share ideas on improving scrutiny processes and enhancing effectiveness whilst also providing a link with the Centre for Public Scrutiny. It meets regularly holding region-wide discussions on key issues and learning opportunities and recently looked at Effective Scrutiny of Health and Social Care, and the Transfer of 0-5 Children's Public Health Commissioning.

Emerging Issues

53. The Scrutiny Work Programme is set on an annual basis using an established procedure. All Members, Committees and services are consulted on suggested topics. Any suggestions from the public and partners are also considered. These are then considered at Scrutiny Liaison Forum (made up of Scrutiny Chairs, Cabinet Members and CMT) to prioritise the suggested topics, and these are then considered by Executive Scrutiny Committee which sets the final Programme.
54. This year, SLF has been called for 22 February, and Executive Scrutiny will consider the draft programme on 8 March.

Democratic Services & Member Development

55. The May 2015 local elections saw **17 new Councillors** elected to the Council; meaning nearly a third of the Council is made up of newly elected members. It is noticeable also from those newly elected that over half of the new members are under 50 years of age, with 3 or 4 in their 20's/early 30's and 1 member being only 19 years of age! This trend towards a younger age profile for elected members is testament to the success of our Community Engagement Strategy and in particular our Be a Councillor campaign which sought to raise awareness of the opportunities for everyone to consider becoming involved in local democracy by standing for office as a local councillor. This awareness raising included 2 sessions, held on Saturday mornings, and specifically targeted towards explaining the role of a Councillor to people that were interested in standing for election. Over 50 people attended the 2 sessions and of these, 7 went on to be elected to serve as a Borough Councillor and it is believed that some may also have been successful in being elected to serve as a Parish/Town Councillor.
56. Preparations for the new Municipal Year thereafter become the forefront of our activity in the first quarter with new political groups formed, new members aligned to existing groups, Chair/Vice Chair and Cabinet positions being confirmed. Each group are advised independently by officers from Democratic Services regarding the new **Political Composition of the Council**, their resulting entitlement to seats on committees, and the appointment process that would take place at Annual Council and Cabinet. This includes seeking nominations and making subsequent appointments to over 40 outside or joint body organisations.
57. The **Annual Council Meeting** hosted at Billingham Forum marks the official start of the Municipal Year with in the region of 200 guests in attendance, including elected members, civics and VIP's from within the region, Mayor's charities and Civic Award winners and nominees. This year, for the first time as part of the Council's initiative for transparency and encouraging public engagement, the meeting proceedings were filmed and later posted on the Council's website for the public to view. Along with all full Council meetings, meetings of Cabinet and Planning Committee are also filmed initially utilising the services of an external media services company, who in turn will seek to pass on their filming and editing skills to media students from Stockton Riverside College to assist their studies during the 15/16 academic year. To date, on average, each of the meetings have been viewed as follows:-
- Council – 71 views per meeting;
 - Cabinet – 116 views per meeting;
 - Planning – 803 views per meeting.
58. The above complements the public's existing rights to attend any public meeting. Meetings of Planning Committee and Cabinet are typically the most regularly attended by members of the public; although of late full Council has attracted a lot of public interest with regards to the Council's SPARK of Genius programme both with the number of people attending and the number of public questions posed. This new facility of recording the proceedings of meetings does however provide an alternative means for the public to keep abreast of proceedings if they are unable to attend the meeting in person.

59. In order to assist all members, including those newly elected, the Council has an agreed Member Learning & Development Strategy in place which provides for how elected members will be supported in their role. As part of this, Democratic Services provide and facilitate an extensive **Member Induction Programme** to which newly elected Parish & Town Councillors are also invited to attend, along with the Council's Independent Persons and Parent Governor representatives. The programme starts with a Democratic Services at Home Day for all Councillors on the Monday following their election. The purpose of this event is to familiarise new Councillors with members of the team, explain the services and support members receive from the Section, and prepare and equip new members with the essential information and resources they need in their first few weeks in office. All members are invited to discuss their ICT support needs and those that are unfamiliar with the use of such equipment are offered the opportunity of training regarding use of the equipment and software with representatives from Stockton Council Learning and Skills. The advancements and affordability of available technology continues to increase so that now, more than ever, the Council is able to offer elected members with a wide range of ICT devices that can assist them to fulfil their Councillor role in a more efficient and effective way.
60. Reflecting on previous member feedback, the Induction Programme this year was programmed to take place over the initial 3 months of the new Council, thereby phasing the learning and knowledge in 'bite size' chunks, rather than over one short condensed period. Member feedback on each of the sessions has been extremely positive with the majority recommending the sessions as being positive, informative and likely to be of benefit to any member with a similar need. This programme included various corporate and service related presentations designed to familiarise new members with the work of the Council, and also included a 'Market Place' event showcasing each service area and partners such as Tees Active, Tees Achieve and Thirteen Group.
61. Highlighting the increasing importance of elected member responsibility in these areas, new **Mandatory training** was introduced within the Induction Programme regarding both Adults and Childrens Safeguarding. All members of the Council are now required to attend an induction on each subject, thereby increasing knowledge throughout the Authority and equipping members with essential awareness skills that they can utilise, if required, in any situation when interacting with their constituents. Similarly, new mandatory training has been introduced, again for all members, on the subject of Local Government Finance and Strategic Planning given the significance of both issues within the current constrained economic climate for local government. Other mandatory training is provided in respect of procedures/policies relating to Employee Appeals, Licensing and Planning Committee. Each of these sessions were well attended this year by members over and above those that were appointed to these Committees. Therefore, in the event of any member being unable to attend these important meetings, they are in a position to appoint a substitute to attend in their place; consequently improving the overall decision making process by having more 'eligible' members available to call upon.
62. New also within the Induction Programme for this year was the inclusion of opportunities for any elected member to be supported by an experienced member mentor and its known that a number of the newly elected members have taken this opportunity up, using the **Member mentor scheme** set up by Democratic Services with help from the Local Government Association. With such a large number of new and inexperienced members elected to the Authority, member mentoring provides a vital source of support for these members by utilising the experience gained by their peers. An external facilitator was also used to provide members with knowledge of the protocols and etiquette in the Recorded

Environment; eg advice to assist members should they be attending a meeting that was filmed; or required to be interviewed by the media. With the public now having the right to film/record proceedings conducted at public meetings; and the Council now recording key meetings for the benefit of the public, together with a 24/7 available media outlet with the impact of the internet and introduction of social media, these skills for councillors have never been more in demand than at present.

63. Members are also supported in their **representational community role** which to date has included a Health & Wellbeing Community Leadership programme in 2014 enhancing members understanding of health improvements and community wellbeing and how their constituents/communities could benefit. This has been supplemented by two Mental Health First Aid sessions with the aim of equipping members with the skills necessary for them to recognise the symptoms of mental health problems and provide early assistance and advice that would help an individual to seek appropriate professional help. Community engagement support has also included development around the use of social media as a means of engaging with residents, particularly those residents that don't engage through the more traditional routes, so that they can be informed of what is happening in their locality. After an initial introduction for members on the use of social media in 2013, all members have now been offered support from the Members ICT Officer in social media accounts, and as a result there are now 6 ward Facebook and 6 ward Twitter accounts in existence and 30 Members have personal Facebook accounts, with 15 Members having personal Twitter accounts. This demonstrates that members understand the power and reach of social media as a tool to engage residents in their community.
64. As part of the Learning & Development Strategy, each Borough Council member is also given the opportunity to discuss their own **Personal Support Plan (PSP)** with a Member Support Officer. A record of this session and any learning and development needs identified is recorded confidentially on the Members PSP Database until the need is met and if the need is common to a number of Councillors, it forms part of the next phase of the Member Learning & Development programme. The PSP session includes consideration of the different roles of elected members; eg as a Councillor; as a member of Planning or Licensing; a Scrutiny or Cabinet member; or a member of the Health & Wellbeing Board or Police & Crime Panel.
65. The Council's approach to Member Development has been assessed as meeting the highest criteria of best practice as set out within the **Charter Plus accreditation** by NEREO. The Council are currently one of only two authorities in the North East to have been awarded Charter Plus status. A reassessment of our commitment and support will take place in the New Year that will hopefully provide further external validation that the service continues to provide members with the necessary support for them to effectively carry out their member roles.
66. Following prior agreement of the 4 year diary of **scheduled meetings of the Council** and its Committees, Democratic Services staff support the various public and informal meetings held within the Council's decision making structure. These include special/ad hoc meetings added to the diary as required. The support provided includes arranging appropriate venues for the meetings; dairying meetings for relevant attendees; preparing reports and agendas and making them available as required, attending the meetings and assisting the Chair in ensuring that they are conducted in accordance with the Council's Constitution; compiling notes during the meetings of the salient points and decisions; and afterwards preparing a summary of the meeting by way of a legal record in the form of minutes.

67. In the past 3 years, Democratic Services have assumed governance responsibility for the Health & Wellbeing Board structure; the Police & Crime Panel; Stockton Youth Assembly; and more recently the Stockton Local Children's Safeguarding Board (SLSCB) and its Performance Sub Groups. A copy of the decision making structure for the majority, but not all, of the meetings supported by Democratic Services is attached at **Appendix 1**. Obviously this has added to the workload of the Section at a time when efficiency savings and austerity have required a reduction in the number of staff employed. To illustrate the impact that this has had on the service, analysis shows that in 2009/10 when the Governance Section of Democratic Services had 7.5 FTE, the Section supported 254 meetings, as well as carrying out other essential work associated with governance procedures. In comparison in 2014/15, having assumed the new responsibilities identified above, and with 6.5FTE, the Section supported a total of 437 meetings.
68. Both an initial Induction followed by development sessions have been held for members of the Health & Wellbeing Board
69. In the last year, the workload of the **Health and Wellbeing Board** has included:-
- performance against the Better Care Fund plans;
 - set up of a Task and Finish Group to help develop an Integrated Mental Health Implementation Plan;
 - consideration of the implications of, and approach to the NHS Five Year Forward View;
 - consideration of the Director of Public Health's Annual Report;
 - updates from the Clinical Commissioning Group on Community based urgent care and its plans relating to co-commissioning;
 - fulfilment of one of its statutory duties in approving a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment for the Borough;
 - a self-assessment session facilitated by the Local Government Association to ensure that the Board is being as effective as it should be in terms of its impact in improving the health & wellbeing of the Borough;
 - agreed a Children and Young People's Plan.
70. Meetings of the Adult Health and Wellbeing Partnership have given consideration to:-
- the development of a Sport and Active Leisure Strategy for the Borough;
 - an update on sex workers in Stockton and the multi-agency;
 - opportunity for Partners to describe how they contribute to achieving the priorities of the Partnership;
71. The main items of consideration at the Children and Young People's Partnership have related to:-
- the transfer of commissioning responsibilities of 0 – 5 Health Child Programme from NHS England to the Council, including the Health Visiting services and the Family Nurse Partnership;
 - update on the implementation of SEN;
 - update from Catalyst on the Fairer Start Project and the Big Life Families had been support for the Champion Programme seeking to improve the lives of pregnant mothers and 0-3 year olds living in Stockton Town Centre;

- the results of a skills audit of Early Years staff operating in the Town Centre from which a Fairer Start Competency Framework has been produced to offer a career pathway and give value to those involved.
 - issues relating to VEMT and CSE;
 - the new School Nursing Service with integrated Family Weight Management Service;
 - a 'fresh' look at innovative approaches to tackling substance misuse amongst adults.
72. Both the Adults and Children's Commissioning Groups have continued looking at Commissioning intentions to identify synergies and opportunities for joint commissioning as well as whether to continue the funding of some projects/initiatives being provided by the third sector
73. All members of the **Police and Crime Panel** have had a training induction event, organised by Democratic Services, which included presentations from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable, and the Commissioner's Finance Officer. There was also discussions on the role of the Panel, scrutiny of the Commissioner's decision and the handling complaints about the Commissioner. In depth scrutiny work is undertaken by Task and Finish Groups.
74. The Panel itself also has responsibility for agreeing the Police Commissioner's Precept; providing comments on the proposed Police and Crime Plan 2015/18
75. This past year has also marked the conclusion of the first two year term of office of the inaugural **Stockton Youth Assembly (SYA)** which for the first time saw the democratic election of a Youth MP and Deputy Youth MP to represent the needs of the young people of the Borough. In addition to the YMP & Deputy, the SYA invites representation from each Secondary School/Academy; Youth Clubs from the major townships; and special interest groups. The nomination and election process introduces the young people for the first time to how democracy works and gives each an insight into the various services the Council is responsible for, and importantly seeks their views on how they would wish services to be shaped in the future. It also gives the young people the opportunity to 'rub shoulders' with Councillors and officers responsible for making important decisions on Council services by attending events such as the first Borough-wide Debate, and helps inform young people regarding their own future career path, or opportunities to stand as an elected representative for the Borough in the future.
76. The SYA has made a positive contribution to the following key policy areas that most affected young people:
- Health & Wellbeing
 - Getting Ready for Work
 - Arts and Leisure
 - Police & Crime
 - Communities & Environment.
77. Vital life skills were also acquired along the way as the young people gained confidence of conducting themselves during meetings and developed their communication and presentation skills. Many of the members of the SYA have used these skills when attending both regional and national British Youth Council events, including championing

and canvassing support for their own priorities through the Make Your Mark campaign which culminated in young people from across the country debating their top priorities from within the heart of democracy itself, the House of Commons.

78. The most recent elections of the MYP & Deputy MYP took place in February this year with School Councils putting forward 6 candidates. Over 6292 votes were cast and counted in the presence of the Mayor; which represented a 70% turnout. A real example of democracy at work and a voter turnout that most elections would be proud of! The Count confirmed the election of Jess Hugill as MYP and Kushan Bhardwaj as Deputy MYP for the next two years. Following the election of the new YMP & Deputy, officers have assisted in inducting each to the role of the Council and preparing them for their role on the SYA. The second ever Annual Debate was also held in September this year when the new SYA representatives were given the opportunity to discuss with Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Corporate Directors key policy areas that most affect young people. The areas that young people said they most wanted to talk about more in the next year were as follows and would become part of the Youth Assembly's work programme for the next two years:-
- Emotional Health & Wellbeing
 - Early Help Services
 - Young Person Manifesto
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
79. The SYA have since had the opportunity to determine the values most important to them for meetings of the SYA and how they would like their meetings to be conducted. They have also discussed how schools and young people can support the BYC Make Your Mark campaign which encourages young people to identify their top priorities that can subsequently be debated at a national level. Officers continue to seek to engage those schools not currently represented on the SYA as well as promoting to all schools, including primary, the benefits of establishing a School Council so that their voice is heard at a local level. As a result of a previous pilot programme (#Sam campaign) seeking to identify the most appropriate means of consultation with young people, the Council intends to further its programme of consultation with young people via Twitter and has identified dedicated resources within CESC to continue this campaign.
80. As referred above, Democratic Services now have responsibility for assisting the SLSCB Business Support Manager to support the governance structure that supports the **SLSCB**. In addition, the Section is also responsible for the promotion and registration of Children's Safeguarding E-learning training amongst multi-agency partners. The importance of both staff and members being aware of their responsibilities with regard to Children's Safeguarding has recently been highlighted by Council with the training in regard to both adults and children safeguarding now mandatory for elected members, and all staff are encouraged to have at least a basic awareness of essential signs to look out for.
81. The software used for recording the Council's decision making (**E-Genda**) has also been reviewed recently with a new upgrade to the system negotiated which will introduce improvements to enhance the appearance of the existing system and offer an improved google search facility to help retrieve required information. The upgrade extends the amount of democratic information hosted by the system and makes the information more easily viewed on any mobile, tablet or other IT device. This contract had been negotiated at a reduction of almost 20% on the previous contract price. The public can now also easily

identify their own ward councillor through improvements introduced via the Council's new Customer Portal simply by entering their own address.

82. Future **ICT requirements** for both Democratic Services staff and elected members are kept under review as more and more IT hardware becomes available to support each. This has led to Governance Officers piloting the use of specific hardware designed to record the audio of meetings and transpose the audio to text, which ultimately could be used to assist to improve capacity through the process of producing minutes of the meeting and provide an archive of debate should it be required as evidence; e.g. as part of a scrutiny review. Elected members are also offered a wider range of IT appliances to assist them in their role and in addition to PC's, laptops or blackberry devices, have been offered as part of an invest to save opportunity, the use of tablets upon which it will be possible for them to access their Council agenda papers. This again offers the potential to improve the support offered to elected members by giving them 24/7 access to required information, and at the same time provide the information in a more economical manner and reduce hard copy printing costs.
83. The Section also provides administrative support for hearings convened to hear Education Admission appeals with in the region of 130 appeals heard each year. This has entailed a lot of support offered by the Governance Team to parents during what is for them a particularly worrying time.

Civic & Community Engagement

84. During every civic year, the Mayor of the Borough is invited to attend numerous events and meet with people from many organisations, charities, schools, colleges and businesses. Democratic Services support the Mayor in attending over 300 events each year at events such as these, as well as presiding at Citizenship Ceremonies, Staff Long Service Awards, and playing host to visits from members of the Government and Royal Family, and Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs.
85. In addition, the Mayor hosts a number of large civic events as follows which requires planning and preparation by staff within the Civic Team, assisted where required by the Council's Events Team:-
- **Mayor's Ball** attracting hundreds of people from local businesses, charities and community groups who together help to raise a vast amount of money in aid of the Mayor's charities;
 - **Mayor's Sunday** when the Mayor joins forces with Stockton Churches to host an 'open air' Mayor's Sunday service within the Parish Gardens;
 - Annual **Town & Gown luncheon**, celebrating the strong links between the local authority and Durham University, which was this year hosted by the Council at Preston Hall.
 - Participation in the national celebration of the **Commonwealth with a flag raising ceremony**;
 - **Armed Forces Week** activities in support of our Armed Forces Covenant, which this year included coupled a Freedom Parade in honour of One Close Support Battalion REME who were granted Freedom of the Borough in 2011;
 - **Remembrance Parade and Services** paying respects to our Armed Forces;
 - **Mayor's Christmas Carol Service** attended by local school children, civic guests, local choir and groups, as well as many of the elderly from nearby Care Homes.

86. In addition to the above events, the Civic Office constantly look to refresh the civic programme and host new events that will raise vital funds for the Mayor's charities and in recent years Grosvenor Casino have kindly hosted an annual fund raising event at their Casino. Other businesses have supported the Mayor's charities by hosting Curry Nights whilst the Council's Preston Hall Museum has also played host to both an Afternoon Tea and a Murder Mystery Night and Billingham Forum have hosted a 60's Night for Civic Guests.
87. The impact of our Community Engagement Strategy can be seen in the growing attendances each year at these events as more and more people have become aware of the events and their purpose and have attended in increasing numbers. Monies raised for the Mayor's Charities each year have also exceeded £20k every year thanks to the support of the public, elected members, local businesses and staff. Members of the public can keep up to date with the activities of the Mayor by following their blog; reading about their aims, objectives and chosen charities in their Mayoral Charter; and reviewing the Mayor's Annual Report at the end of their Mayoral Year.
88. For the past 5 years, the Civic Office has also promoted a **Mayor's Civic Awards scheme** to recognise the achievements of individual residents, groups, organisations or businesses within the Borough that have:-
- achieved something particularly noteworthy within the Borough; or
 - enhanced the reputation of the Borough at a national level stage; or
 - made a significant contribution to the conservation and protection of the natural environment of the Borough.
 - recognise the extraordinary dedication of an individual or couple, who have provided a loving and supportive family life to a child, or sibling group who do not live with their birth family.
 - created a substantial number of new jobs; or
 - nurtured and promoted the skills of local residents; or
 - significantly invested in making the borough a great place to live, work and conduct business.
89. There are now 7 categories of award within the scheme as follows:-
- Young Person Award (aged up to 18 years old)
 - Service to Community Award – Individuals
 - Service to Community Award – Groups & Organisations
 - Service to Community Award – Businesses
 - Health and Wellbeing Award
 - Green Award
 - Carer/Foster Carer Award
90. The winners of the awards each year are chosen by an independent Panel chaired by the Mayor and are invited to receive their awards at the Annual Council Meeting each year to receive the award in front of civic and invited guests. All other nominees commended by

the Panel are recognised at an event held in the Town Hall each year where they receive 'Good Citizens' certificates and a small civic token to recognise their achievement.

91. The work of the Section in promoting democracy and encouraging democratic engagement has been recognised for the past 4 years by the Council of Europe who have awarded Stockton '12 Star City' status for promoting local democracy. Stockton is the only UK local authority to have achieved this recognition.