

# People Select Committee Overview Meeting 2016

7 November 2016

## Report from Assistant Director Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

### Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

#### Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £52 million over the last five years and that we are still confronted with having to find further savings. In relation to Democratic Services this has meant delivering efficiencies and savings within the following areas:

- Rationalisation of Member ICT support
- Civic and Member Services amalgamation
- Staffing reductions
- August recess
- Attendance at conferences
- Reduction in the number of select committees

Whilst we acknowledge that we have a strong track record of sound financial management and we have been dealing with these problems successfully for many years, it will not be easy to address the additional loss of government funding of over £20 million by 2019/20. Moving forward, expectations will need to be realistic as many more difficult decisions will need to be made.

It is both acknowledged and accepted that we can't continue to do all the things we currently do and that we won't be able to work in the same way. For Democratic Services this may mean for example implementing the next phase of the Modernising Electoral Registration Programme (MERP) which will mean delivering differently to drive out cost whilst increasing user satisfaction and accuracy and completeness of the Register.

The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as reduced budget allocation, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention**, particularly those people in our communities who are subject to, or at risk of harm, people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and those who are financially excluded or whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- **Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention**, specifically in relation to tackling health inequalities, meeting the skills gap and improving access to job opportunities, tackling fuel poverty, improving education and training opportunities, access to affordable housing and financial and digital inclusion.
- **Developing strong and healthy communities** through the provision of mainstream and preventive services that are available to all those who choose to access them.
- **Creating economic prosperity** across the Borough

It is within this context that the select committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

## 1. What has been achieved in Electoral Services?

- 1.1 Individual Electoral Registration** - 2015 saw the final transitional canvass and efforts were focused on ensuring that any electors who had not successfully been transferred to the IER electoral register did so before the legislation required their deletion in December 2015. Proactive data mining, house to house enquiries, requirements to register and a comprehensive programme of democratic engagement and awareness raising to target under-represented groups paid dividends.
- 1.2 On publication of the revised register on 1 December 2015 (following transition to IER) there were 138,811 electors which represented 92% of the adult population and maintained the percentage of the adult population registered to vote pre IER despite the many challenges of transition and bucked regional and national trends.
- 1.3 Attainer registration on publication of the Revised Register was, however, disappointing with only 19% of attainers registered to vote. As a result there has been focused engagement work to increase registration of this group who are under registered nationally. The table below sets out registration levels since publication of the revised register on 1 December 2015.

Register Month 2016	Dates of 1st input and deadline	Register Published	Electorate	Pending Electors	Attainers	Postals	Overseas	Service
January	21/11/2015-11/12/2016	04/01/2016	138,894	8,794	921	32,226	191	100
August	10/06/2016-08/07/2016	01/08/2016	143,120	7,320	1,919	33,443	556	109

- 1.4 The EU Referendum also had a positive impact on registration levels and the percentage of the adult population registered peaked on 1 July at 94.69% and is currently 94.37%. The percentage of attainers registered has significantly increased January and August and is currently at 41%.
- 1.5 The last year has seen a particularly gruelling programme of **electoral events** and by-elections. In May 2015, the team delivered the Parliamentary, Borough and Parish elections which was the first time that there had been this combination of polls since 1976. The polls were delivered successfully with no significant issues despite many problems being experienced elsewhere in the region. Stockton were the lead again for the Cleveland Police Force Area in the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections in May 2016 followed by the EU Referendum in June 2016, delivered successfully with a short lead in, a massive surge in registration applications (10,125 registration applications between 15 May and 9 June) and unprecedented turnout of 71%.
- 1.6 Other work has included:
- Community Governance Review – Billingham Town Council and Elton Parish Council
  - Mini polling station review
  - Signature Refresh
  - Household Notification Letters – February 2015
  - 2016 canvass - now underway with a 60% response at Stage 1 and a marked increase in preference for on line and automated responses from the public

## **Challenges in Electoral Services**

- 1.7 Transition to Individual Electoral Registration continues to present challenges. Despite channel shift, the function has experienced a significant increase in printing and postage volumes and we are continually trying to find new ways of working within the legislative constraints to reduce printing and postage costs. The additional stages in the registration process under IER, the individual nature of registration and other aspects of IER such as the exceptions process and the high number of online duplicate applications are also proving to be resource intensive. Staffing capacity is an issue and IER is also continuing to evolve under the Modern Electoral Reform Programme which will examine all of the above issues.

## **Emerging issues for Electoral Services**

- 1.8. - Delivery of the Tees Valley Mayoral Elections in May 2017  
- Parliamentary Boundary Review  
- Changes to registration under the MERP  
- MYP Elections February 2017  
- Preparation for 2019 and 2020 polls

## **2. What has been achieved in Democratic & Member Services?**

- 2.1 The start of the 2015/16 Municipal Year saw a significant intake of newly elected Councillors to the Authority with 17 new members elected. A comprehensive Member Induction Programme was therefore delivered as a vital component of the overall Member Learning & Development Strategy agreed by members themselves.

- 2.2 The Member Learning & Development Programme covers:-

- An Introduction to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council from both a National /Regional Context
- Service Area Roles & Responsibilities
- Mandatory training for Planning, Licensing & Employee Appeals
- Health & Safety training for members
- Introduction to Scrutiny/Ingredients of a Good Scrutiny Review
- ICT Training
- Health & Wellbeing Community Development Programme
- Mental Health First Aid
- Charing/Challenging Meetings
- Social Media Training
- Protocols and Etiquette in the Recorded Environment
- Mandatory Corporate Parenting/Children's & Adults Safeguarding
- Tour of the Borough
- Market Place Event showcasing all services activities

- 2.3 The above was supplemented by the opportunity for all members to have their own Personal Support Plan to discuss their own specific learning needs based on their roles and responsibilities.

- 2.4 A further two new members have since been elected at by-elections meaning that almost a third of the Council are in their first term of office. Member feedback on the support provided has been positive and this was confirmed during interview with representatives and peers from NEREO & the LGA who confirmed that 'the current level of support provided to members was excellent' and they were therefore delighted to be able to reaffirm that we had once again met the criteria of excellence required to achieve the North East Charter Plus for Member Development.

- 2.5 The Democratic Structure for which Governance Officers provide support continues to evolve with both a Domestic Violence Steering Group and a Tees Valley HWB Chairs Network now supported within the last year, along with another body within the SSLCB

governance structure (Jt Hartlepool & Stockton Safeguarding Training Group). There has also been an additional workload associated with complaints made to the Police & Crime Panel (PCP), along with an extensive process for the appointment of independent members to the Panel.

2.6 The HWB Board also invited the LGA to undertake a Peer Review of its performance in January this year which confirmed that there was good partnership arrangements in place and that the Board was ambitious in its approach to tackling health inequalities. The importance of the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent have been reflected of late in both the introduction by Democratic Services of mandatory training for members as part of their Learning & Development Programme and an increase (50%) in the take up of E-learning safeguarding training by staff, partners and stakeholders facilitated by Democratic Services.

2.7 For a fixed one period from the start of the 2016/17 Municipal Year, and with little lead in time, the Section were also tasked with the responsibility for providing governance advice and support in respect of the new Tees Valley Combined Authority. This has entailed new joint working with colleagues from across the Tees Valley and officers within the new TVCA to appoint members to and support the work of:-

- TVCA Board
- Audit & Governance Committee
- Transport Committee
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

2.8 During this period, junior members of staff have temporarily stepped up to provide support to Council, Cabinet & SMT whilst other staff were seconded to provide support to the TVCA, thus broadening their experience and assisting their development.

2.9 Opportunities to engage younger people within the democratic structure were once again offered with the Section supporting the second Annual Debate inviting young people to discuss their views and priorities for the Council with Cabinet Members, Chairs of Scrutiny and officers from the Senior Management Team. This led to shared priorities for young people being identified with the Borough's first Young People's Manifesto 2015-17 being produced, for which officers, members and partners would be accountable to deliver. The Section will monitor progress against the Manifesto through their support of meetings of the Stockton Youth Assembly, whilst also offering young people other opportunities to make their views heard including via social media, Annual Conversation with Young People and engagement work carried out with schools and colleges.

## **Civic**

2.10 The Section continues to support the Mayor's role in promoting the Borough and each year discusses the Mayoral aims to produce an overall Mayoral Strategy for the year. During the last Mayoral Years this has seen a focus on health, young people and business with the Mayor promoting and supporting each and raising thousands of pounds for registered charities.

2.11 The Mayor's annual civic calendar includes the following civic events organised by the Section which are increasingly well attended by members of the public, our Armed Forces colleagues, businesses and young people:-

- Annual Council Meeting
- Mayor's Sunday
- Armed Forces Week
- Remembrance Parade
- Mayor's Carol Service
- Mayor's Charity Ball

- 2.12 Within the last 18 months, civic recognition has been bestowed on a number of former serving Councillors awarded Alderman status, as well as the Freedom of the Borough granted to REME One Close Support Battalion and former Councillor Robert Gibson. Our support for our Armed Forces reflects the Covenant in place in respect of the support the Council seeks to provide our past and present Armed Forces personnel with the Mayor annually hosting events in support of fund raising for our 3 Armed Forces Freedom Regiments. Numbers attending both our Armed Forces Week activities and Remembrance events have illustrated an upsurge in public support and feedback obtained regarding attendance surveys all Council events held in the Borough has indicated a growing recognition of these events by members of the public. In addition, the number of young people and guests attending the Mayor's Carol Service in the last 5 years has consistently reached 500, the capacity for the venue, with 13 schools having attended last year's event.
- 2.13 Promotion of the above events are part of the Section's wider Community Engagement Strategy, which has seen the Authority exceed both regional and national trends regarding IER; the strong emergence of the young people's voice within the Borough, civic recognition paid to individuals, organisations and businesses within the Borough as part of the Mayor's Civic Awards; and a rise in the number of prospective candidates for Council and MYP elections. Recent elections to the Borough Council have seen an increase in the number of female councillors (11 of the last 19 members elected female and 24 of the 56 members of the Council being female-43% compared to the national average of 30% ) and the average age of those elected significantly below the national average of 59 years with at least 2 members only in their early 20's.

### **Challenges in Democratic & Member Services**

- 2.14 There is currently a scarcity of resource to oversee the administration of Education Admission appeals. The workload for this process is extensive throughout March-July (main round) with a flow of in year transfers considered usually monthly. Democratic Services currently arrange the hearing dates and identify Panel members for each hearing, notify parents/schools of the hearing dates, and co-ordinate the preparation and distribution of the papers. Legal Services currently attend and Clerk the meetings and prepare decision letters confirming the outcome. A review is currently underway regarding responsibility for these arrangements in the future.
- 2.15 Further demands upon the Democratic structure would inevitably represent a challenge to the capacity of the Section. Within the last year new forums within Health & Wellbeing and the SSLCB have been taken on board; as well as temporary responsibilities in respect of the TVCA. A review of the current processes for the administration of both member and officer interests and gifts and hospitality is currently underway with a view to identifying future efficiencies within the process utilising the Council's E-Genda system. This will also consider whether the process for recording and publishing Officer Delegated Decisions can also be improved upon. Democratic Services, as gatekeepers of the E-Genda system, will be heavily involved within these reviews.
- 2.16 The third term of the Stockton Youth Assembly is due to end February 2017 and Democratic Services will be responsible for the election of the new YMP and Deputy, as well as appointment of a new SYA membership. New ways of engaging with young people to sustain their interest and participation will be necessary with a view to hosting the third Annual Debate in the Summer of 2017 to focus on the priorities of young people within the Borough.

### **Civic**

- 2.17 The outcome of the recent Civic Review has resulted in restructuring of the Section with the effect that the full time Mayor's Attendant post will be deleted with effect from 17<sup>th</sup>

October. In future, attendant duties for the Mayor will be based around an average 18 hours per week fluctuating as demand dictates and will require careful planning to ensure that the quality of service is maintained despite the reduced capacity.

## **Emerging Issues for Democratic & Member Services and Civic**

2.18 Freedom Parade Yorkshire Regiment-June 2017

### **3. What has been achieved in Scrutiny?**

- 3.1 During 2015/16 the Team was shortlisted for the national Governance and Scrutiny Award at the Municipal Journal Awards. This was for the work of the Children and Young People Committee and its review of Transition from Primary to Secondary which focussed on how to maintain attainment during this crucial period in a child's education.
- 3.2 Following the local elections, all new Select Committee members were introduced to their role as part of a comprehensive induction process. This included each Committee receiving tailored Challenge and Questioning training.
- 3.3 The Council's Select Committees undertook a comprehensive work programme including eight in-depth reviews. The quality and performance monitoring for child and adult services was improved further by introducing a schedule of frontline visits.
- 3.4 The recent Ofsted inspection recognised that the Children and Young People Select Committee undertook extensive work to scrutinise frontline practice and specifically referred to the meeting the Committee held with managers of children's homes, their formal meetings with looked after children and their review of Child Sexual Exploitation.
- 3.5 Executive Scrutiny Committee held a successful development session which enabled it to reflect on its role.
- 3.6 Health scrutiny work has focussed on service developments including licensed fertility care, urgent care, and GP mergers. The last year has seen publication of North Tees Trust's CQC inspection report and improvements will continue to be monitored.
- 3.7 The NE Joint Member/Officer Network was chaired and supported by Stockton.

### **Challenges for Scrutiny**

- 3.8 Select Committees have continued to need to be focussed on issues which will deliver value for money, and produce recommendations that are deliverable within the overall resources available.
- 3.9 The NHS continues to put forward service change proposals which often need to be considered on an ad hoc basis.

### **Emerging Issues for Scrutiny**

- 3.10 The Better Health project is a major NHS transformation programme covering the Durham, Tees Valley and North Yorkshire areas. Stockton will continue to contribute to the Joint Committee established to review the proposals, and prepare a formal response during the public consultation period
- 3.11 Development of the scrutiny programme for 2017/18 in line with the Council's policy priorities

### **4. Administration Services**

- 4.1 The Corporate Administration Service plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing stable and reliable processes to our organisation, enabling services to focus on their core frontline goals. The service manages and supports all services across the Council, including some bespoke services for example in the Business Centre, and Social

Services. The focus is on creating cost effective first class service delivery mechanisms by working with services, developing clear service delivery processes in line with the customer's requirements and enabling innovation and digitisation of business processes where possible.

- 4.2 Over the last six months the service has delivered a significant restructure to reposition it within the new management structure for the Authority. During this time the service has continued to deliver successfully against all core objectives. The service will work collaboratively with services as they undertake their service reviews with a view to enable a forward thinking administration service that best serves the needs of the organisation.