

Statement by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Support Services & Economic Development

10 December 2013

ICT Services

ICT Services have now separated from RDC. We have our own network, hardware, systems and disaster recovery that will provide a much faster and resilient platform to accommodate HDC's ICT system requirements into the future.

Following on from the initial successful trial of iPads with Cabinet and the Senior Management team, a wider roll out has been arranged to incorporate members of the ICT Member Working Group and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees. This second phase will include the new Committee Admin System which will allow Members to manage their Council papers using the iPad.

Revenues & Benefits

Revenues and Benefits have now been successfully fully separated from RDC. This is the last service to have operated as a Shared Service.

Corporate Finance

We are pleased to be able to announce that this Council has in place a robust ten year financial strategy and a balanced budget for 2014/15.

A Business Rate pool has been negotiated across North Yorkshire, with the exception of Harrogate Borough Council and Selby District Council. Once ratified by Central Government this will have the potential to generate an additional estimated £120,000 per year in additional retained business rates.

The Council has made headway in improving terms and conditions for all staff, awarding a 2% increase in salaries in 2013/14, 1% above the national pay award. We have reinstated the corporate training programme to ensure that our staff have the right professional skills to enable them to work effectively and serve our community.

We are introducing a lease car scheme for staff that will be launched in the New Year.

Central Northallerton Masterplan

GVA were to commissioned to undertake a Masterplan of the Central Northallerton sites that have come available due to the recently announced closures of the prison and Rural Payments Agency. This would have run in tandem with the work on the main study.

Subsequently it emerged that the Ministry of Justice have asked GVA to handle the Northallerton Prison disposal. We decided that it was too great a risk to have GVA undertaking both elements of work. Irrespective of any assurances of the conflicts of interest being managed by established processes within GVA community confidence in the Masterplan, the wider study and the Council in general may be questioned due to the perceived conflict.

We are now part way through procuring the Masterplanning work separately. A report was submitted to Cabinet in December. The intention is to have the new team on board overlapping the Economic Study work so that the consultant teams can liaise and ensure the Masterplan benefits fully from the study work. The project commencement date is 11th December and is to be concluded by mid April 2014.

Economic Study

In September we commissioned consultants GVA to undertake a fresh study of the local economy - driven by a fresh political focus on the economy and business growth as well as the recognition that existing studies were dated and did not reflect the change in economic circumstances since 2005.

Work is progressing well. Surveys and workshops to inform the Retail Study and Employment Land Review have been undertaken alongside economic analysis, commercial market analysis, investment mapping and infrastructure audit. As an integral part of this we have held some very useful business meetings, in groups and on a one to one basis, to listen to views about the challenges they face and the prospects for growth.

The findings have been submitted to us in a draft Baseline report which will be subject to alteration throughout the study period to reflect any new and emerging data. These findings were discussed with Cabinet, in a Member workshop on 12th November and with businesses and wider stakeholders on 13th November. There was a repeat workshop for Members on the 25th November.

The headline findings will inform the main study report whilst the technical reports for the Retail Study and Employment Land Review will inform the partial review of the LDF.

Consultation with Members on the final report and recommendations will take place on 12th January 2014 with the aim of drawing all of the input into an Economic Strategy for the District for submission to Cabinet in April 2014.

Working with the Local Enterprise Partnership

The Local Enterprise Partnership is a key organisation for us to collaborate with to maximise business growth and the economic prosperity of our District. We have been working closely with them to shape their Strategy, their priorities for delivery and investment plans – these include key investment plans in our District for Bedale Gateway Car Park, Dalton Industrial Estate and North Northallerton.

We have also been working as part of a LEP Task Force in response to the closure of the Prison and RPA to support local employees in gaining positive outcomes and working with businesses to minimise the impact of the closures.

Working with Hambleton Business

In addition to the items above, we have also been involved in a range of interventions to support business growth and economic prosperity. The list below gives an indication of some of the key activities being undertaken:

- Installation of Wi-Fi in the High Streets of Northallerton, Stokesley, Easingwold and Thirsk (Bedale already in place)
- Apprenticeship scheme

- Business engagement strategy and links with key businesses and schools across the district
- Lunch and Learn - skill development and business networking
- Workshops in collaboration with the Federation of Small Business and experts on retail window dressing

Councillor Peter R Wilkinson

Deputy Leader

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Support Services & Economic Development