

## **Statement by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Finance**

**16 December 2014**

### **Financial Position**

The Council has a long history of excellent financial management and stewardship which has allowed us to enhance services through a period of unprecedented austerity, whilst most other councils are making cuts.

As we approach finalising the 2015/16 revenue budget we cannot afford to be complacent, recent announcements in the press suggest that Local Government over the next 4 years will be subject to a further reduction in central government grant funding of 37%. This coupled with a national salary settlement for staff of 2.2% in 2015/16, a significant reduction in Council Tax administration grant; our continued commitment to freeze Council Tax as well as fees and charges poses some real challenges for the medium to long term financial strategy of the Council.

In addition to these operational challenges we are committed to a £5m Economic Development Strategy and a significant Capital programme, both of which will reduce the Council's overall reserve levels.

It is for these reasons that the council must maintain its robust financial management and continue to keep strong control over its budgets.

### **Economic Development**

- Following a long planning process the new Economic Development Strategy has met with public, business and Council approval, to be adopted for the next 10 years; this is resourced by £5million which has been saved from management efficiencies across the Council.
- The Council's support to the Wensleydale Railway for its Northallerton extension has been recognised by the media. The project was completed on budget and on time in November.
- Financially the Economic Development budget is on target at the end of Q2.
- Lettings in workspaces are generally very good and Evolution has seen two additional lettings since the Council's investment in the new car park. The number of events being held there is also on the increase.
- Dalton Bridge is a project in which the Council is supporting businesses on the Dalton Industrial Estate to improve access, particularly during flooding. The project is going well and feasibility/design works are expected to be complete in the New Year.
- Relationships with businesses are improving having held the first key account lunch with major businesses in Hambleton. This was followed up with a similar event for smaller businesses. Both received positive feedback.
- It is my intention to organise a "brain storming" meeting with Members to discuss our strategy in respect of Vibrant Market Towns in January 2015.

**Councillor Peter R Wilkinson**

**Deputy Leader**

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Finance