

TO:	TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
FROM:	CLLR. GARETH SNELL, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, POLICY AND PARTERSHIPS
RE:	PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

My portfolio covers the areas listed below and within this report, I have included all the significant developments and decisions which have taken place as well as enumerating the activities that should be taking place over the next few months.

1. Communications

Between now and the end of the financial year Communications will be concentrating on completing the agreed number of questionnaire returns for Service Level Agreements they have in place with Streetscene, Recycling and Waste and Customer Services.

The annual assessment of all public sector websites in the country ended in November and Newcastle under Lyme will now have to wait until the early part of 2014 to see if we have retained our spot as the best public sector website in Staffordshire and one of the best in the country. Newcastle under Lyme is currently classed as "Four star mobile enabled" – the highest possible – in the ratings carried out each year by SOCITM.

Early in the New Year Cabinet will be asked to consider establishing a Wholly Owned Company for communications. The aim is to have in place a Service Level Agreement with the council for core communications activities and then to consider how to sell specialist skills to the market to generate money for the council's company. Staff will continue to be employed by the council so there are no TUPE issues. We will simply charge out their services to private business, the public sector or third sector, and the income generated will go to the council company.

'The Reporter' remains the most significant publication through which the Borough Council communicates with its residents, but the Communications Team are looking at online presence though the Website, Social Media and who our marketing tools can be maximised for the purposes of income generation.

2. Business Improvement

The work of the Business Improvement Team are, within my portfolio, responsible for production of the Quarterly Performance monitoring reports which have been streamlined in order to provide a greater level of meaningful qualitative information as well as the quantitative data members have requested.

The Business Improvement Team also produce the Annual Report and were instrumental in assisting in turning the political priorities of the new administration into quantifiable and measurable objectives within the new Council Plan – ongoing work to review, collate and support in the publication of the Council Plan.

In line with the Council's commitment to become a Cooperative Council, the Business Improvement team are conducting a Procurement Strategy review in order to ensure that the Council is maximising opportunity for small and medium sized companies in the local area to tender for Council contracts, thus helping support the local economy.

Working with various departments, the Business Improvement team have introduced protocols and procedures to allow the Council to be compliant with 'Community Right to Challenge' and the 'Community Right to Bid' parts of the Government's localism agenda.

A Social Value toolkit has been produced for members of the Newcastle Partnership to ensure that all public sector organisations are working together to deliver social value and Newcastle Borough Council is already using the Social Value Act to ensure that any commissioned services provide Social as well as financial value.

Business Improvement officers have assisted with identifying procurement savings within the budget setting proves and have supported the successful delivery of those savings, for example stationery; Cash Collection; Mail; ICT Hardware; Telecoms; Cleaning Materials; Fuel.

3. Partnerships (some cross over with Safer Communities and Healthier and Active Neighbourhoods)

In the last six months, the Partnerships Team has delivered a range of measures to address, deter and prevent anti social behaviour through the Community Safety team. These have included diversionary activities such as graffiti projects and enforcement activities such as restorative justice. Newcastle is now the only district in Staffordshire to see a fall in ASB during 2013/14 so far.

The Partnerships team, too, co-ordinate a range of activity to support victims of domestic violence and anti social behaviour such as raising awareness of domestic violence and other community safety related issues as well as helping a range of families and family members through our work and work of partners e.g. through the IDVA (which we part fund)

This Council has taken a lead on organised a series of events - welfare reform and public health - designed to bring partners together and focus on future areas of work needed in Newcastle and co-create local solutions which provide real dividends to local communities.

The Borough Council has, too, rolled out a "Let's Work Together" programme for partners across the Borough - series of training sessions established on key areas such as Safeguarding

The priorities for this area of my portfolio going forward are working closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to maximise future funding opportunities and the development of services for the Borough and ^{progress} and improve the opportunities with co-location of services.

The Partnership team, along with the portfolio holders will be working with the Public Health team to co-ordinate a gap analysis of Health and Wellbeing services/activities available in the Borough with a view to providing a service for identified need.

In conjunction with Councillor Williams, I will be working with officers on streamlining and strengthening the Locality Action Partnerships and providing additional support in order to allow them to govern their own work programmes and commission work effectively.

4. ICT

Each year ICT is required to comply with the Government's Code of Connection in order to access the secure Government network. Compliance enables major services of the Council (such as Revenues & Benefits) to exchange statutory & sensitive information with Central Government departments such as the DWP and other civil service organisations. Up until 2012, this compliance has been for government sites only. From 2013, the ultimate aim is to have a set of shareable, interoperable services that run over PSN, reducing duplication and waste across the whole of the public sector (incl. Police, NHS etc.). This year, the controls put in place were greater in number, much more stringent and included a zero tolerance policy for connection compliance.

In November 2013, the Council's accreditation with PSN was confirmed; which is a significant achievement with less than ¼ of those who need to register having successfully done so.

ICT has overseen the integration of a number of pieces of new software and information systems to replace outdated ones. Migration from the Council's legacy Customer Relationship Management to the new, Staffordshire wide CRM was completed by the end of October 2013. The Cloud based CRM system offers many improvements in usability, options for expansion and integration and facilities for customer self-service and mobile based apps.

A review of the Council's corporate financial system resulted in procuring a replacement system that will meet the needs of the Authority for the foreseeable future and secure a cost saving above the original system.

Upgrade to the Council's Modern.Gov system to offer residents, Members and staff, the opportunity to link to the Council's public website using the Modern.Gov app via their smartphone or tablet device.

This free app for Apple and Android based devices facilitates Council documents being pushed to subscribers when they become available. Users can annotate and quickly navigate documents using the intuitive and simple, touch based interface. This upgrade was secured at no-additional cost; is already being used by Cabinet Members and is the basis of ICT's forthcoming Digital Member Services offering.

In spring 2013, ICT decommissioned the Council's legacy remote access solution, Netilla, and replaced it with a mainstream system provided by network specialists, Cisco.

ICT have consolidated 8 existing telecoms contracts into a single common agreement. This has secured significant cost savings from BT, facilitated a refresh of the Council's Wide Area Network technology and with it the introduction of new, cutting edge telephony technology called SIP (session initiated protocol), to the Council's voice infrastructure. SIP technology is due to be implemented by April 2014.

ICT are migrating all Council users (including Members) to Windows 7 and Office 2010; which will be completed by April 2014. This is a huge undertaking involving testing of all Council applications to ensure compatibility, whilst introducing new technology such as Roaming Profiles.

All Councillors have now been registered as Data Controllers with the Information Commissioners Office. Replacement of the Content Management system used to upload information to the Council's website. The replacement is an Open-Source solution (Drupal) which may also be cloud based for improved business continuity/disaster recovery resilience, whilst offering improved performance for the Council.