

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 March 2014



Council Plan 2014-2017 - Refresh of the Work Programme for the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide members with information contained within the Council Plan 2014 -2017, relevant to the work of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This allows the opportunity for members to refresh the Committee Work Programme to reflect the 4 objectives and subsequent actions identified within the Council Plan for the Council's Altogether Better Council priority theme.

Background

2. The current Overview and Scrutiny Committees Work Programmes for 2013 -2015 focus on the priority areas identified within the context of the Council Plan, Cabinet's Notice of Key Decisions, Sustainable Community Strategy, Partnership plans and strategies, performance and budgetary control data and changes in Government legislation.
3. In relation to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee, Members will recall that the Work Programme for 2013-15 agreed to focus on the Medium Term Financial Plan. Further areas of focus for the Committee were added to reflect changing Government policy and at the request of Members related to performance concerns.

Council Plan 2014- 2017

4. The Council Plan is the overarching high level plan for the County Council, which covers a four year period and is updated on an annual basis. The plan sets out the corporate priorities for improvement and the key actions the Authority will take in delivering the long term goals in the Sustainable Community Strategy (2014-2030). Attached at Appendix 2 is the Altogether Better Council section of the Council Plan for members' consideration.
5. The Council's Altogether Better Council priority theme links to the work of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee containing the enablers that allow the council to effectively manage change and deliver improvement across the other themes within the Council Plan. It is imperative that delivery is made against these objectives which are increasingly important in times of significant change.

6. To help improve the performance of the Council, there are 4 objectives for an Altogether Better Council, underpinned by 11 outcomes:
- Putting the customer first:
 - A range of access routes to services
 - Responsive and customer focused services
 - People are treated fairly and differences respected.
 - Working with our communities:
 - Communities and stakeholders are engaged and communicated with
 - Effective partnership working
 - The effects of the welfare reform agenda are managed.
 - Effective use of resources
 - A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities
 - Council assets are optimised and information managed
 - Efficient and effective services.
 - Support our people through change:
 - Employee and member well-being
 - A strategic approach to organisational development.
7. The Council Plan also identifies a series of high level action plans detailing the work which needs to be undertaken by the Authority in order to deliver the outcomes identified above (see Appendix 2 attached).

Current Work Programme

8. During 2013, Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee has undertaken budgetary and performance monitoring, in-depth and light touch Scrutiny Reviews, systematic 6 monthly reviews of progress against recommendations and overview presentations in relation to the following areas:

In depth Scrutiny Reviews

- Budget and MTFP process
(Objective: Effective use of resources: A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities ABC 7)

Systematic reviews of progress against recommendations

- Postal Services within Durham County Council
(Objective: Effective use of resources - Efficient and effective services ABC 9)
- Telephones
(Objective: Putting the Customer First - A range of access routes to services ABC 1; Responsive and customer focused services ABC 2; People are treated fairly and differences respected ABC 3)
- Fit for Purpose, Fit for the Future (O/S Review of AAPs) – final sign off of recommendations
(Objective: Working with our communities – Communities and Stakeholders are engaged and communicated with ABC 4)

Areas of Overview Activity

- ICT Strategy Update
(Objective: *Effective use of resources – Efficient and effective services ABC 9*)
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
(Objective – *Effective use of resources*)
- Welfare Reform Updates
(Objective: *Working with our communities - The effects of the welfare reform agenda are managed ABC 6*)
- Customer First Strategy (refresh)
(Objective: *Putting the Customer First – A range of access routes to services ABC 1; Responsive and customer focused services ABC 2; People are treated fairly and differences respect ABC 3*)
- Asset Management Strategy (including Accommodation Strategy)
(Objective: *Effective use of resources – Council assets are optimised and information managed ABC 8*)
- Direct Services
(Objective: *Effective use of resources – Council assets are optimised and information managed ABC 8*)
- Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Reports
(Objective: *Putting the Customer First – People are treated fairly and differences respected ABC 2*)

Budgetary and performance monitoring

- Quarterly budgetary and performance monitoring for ACE and Resources.
(Objective: *Effective use of resources - A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities ABC 7*)

Areas for consideration in the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

9. Having considered the Altogether Better Council section of the Council Plan for 2014 - 2017 it is suggested that the following action areas could be considered in the update of the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee work programme (where they already link to the current work programme this is highlighted):

Putting the customer first – the high level action plan includes:

- Adoption of the new Customer First Strategy (on the CIOSC work programme) – a Task and Finish Group of CIOSC Members was set up in January 2014 to look at this, working with officers from Neighbourhood Services.
- Improved customer access to online services – this will be considered by the Task and Finish Group details above, and also as part of quarterly performance monitoring.

- Improve Complaints reporting and monitoring – CIOSC receive quarterly Customer Feedback reports, and the annual CAS Representations report.
- Strengthen integration of equality and diversity requirements to support effective decision making – CIOSC has input into the MTFP and savings planning process.
- **Working with our communities** - the high level action plan includes:
 - Support better use of community buildings and the wider asset transfer approach – Corporate Asset Management Plan and Property Strategy and also the Community Buildings Strategy is on the CIOSC work programme.
 - Improve partnership working with the VCS and Town and Parish Councils – this is on the CIOSC work programme for an update to a future meeting.
 - Increase the level of external funding attracted – regular updates on the Area Action partnerships will be presented to CIOSC, and remains an ongoing item on the work programme.
- **Effective use of resources.** The council continues to meet the challenges of achieving substantial savings. Extensive public consultation exercises have been carried out to take into account the requirements of the residents of County Durham. It is not likely there will be any let-up in funding reductions for the foreseeable future, the council will therefore continue to plan for and manage any further changes as required.
- Quarterly corporate performance reports are presented to CIOSC, and this is a rolling item on the CIOSC work programme.

The high level action plan includes:

- Develop the 2015-2016 – 2017/18 Medium Term Financial Plan – this is on the CIOSC work programme.
- Deliver and complete the current accommodation programme for council buildings – this is considered by CIOSC as part of the Corporate Asset Management Plan and Property Strategy, and is ongoing on the work programme.
- **Support our people through organisational change** – the high level action plan states:
 - Workforce Development Planning: Develop a strategic approach towards workforce development planning that ensures adequate support for managers in relation to progressing planned MTFP savings and meeting future business needs – CIOSC receive regular updates on the MTFP, but may wish to consider the wider action in relation to their work programme.

Next Steps

11. The current Committee work programme was devised for a two year period, 2013 - 2015 and therefore this provides the ideal opportunity for the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee to consider refreshing its work programme for 2014-2016 within the context of the Council Plan.
12. The Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the appropriate section from the Council Plan, Appendix 2 (copy attached) to inform the Committee work programme for 2014-2016, reflecting on the current work programme detailed in paragraphs 8 and 9 above.
13. Members will receive a further report at the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 7 July 2014 confirming/agreeing the Committee's work programme for 2014-2016 based on today's discussion and agreement.

Recommendations

14. That the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee notes the information contained in the Council Plan 2014-2017, Altogether Better Council theme (copy attached at Appendix 2).
15. That the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee refreshes the work programme for 2013 - 2015 by discussing and considering those actions identified under the Altogether Better Council priority theme of the Council Plan 2014 - 2015, as in paragraph 9.
16. That the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 July 2014 receives a further report detailing the Committee's work programme for 2014 - 2016.

Contact: Jenny Haworth Tel: 03000 268071

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The Council Plan sets out the corporate priorities of the Council for the next 3 years. The Medium Term Financial Plan aligns revenue and capital investment to priorities within the Council Plan.

Staffing

The Council's strategies are being aligned to achievement of the corporate priorities contained within the Council Plan.

Risk

Consideration of risk is a key element in the corporate and service planning framework with both the Council Plan and Service Plans containing sections on risk management.

Equality and diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty

Individual equality impact assessments have been prepared for each savings proposal within the Medium-Term Financial Plan which also underpins the Council Plan. In addition a full impact assessment has previously been undertaken for the Council Plan. The actions in the Council Plan include specific issues relating to equality and aim to improve the equality of life for those with protected characteristics.

Accommodation

The Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan is aligned to the corporate priorities contained within the Council Plan.

Crime and disorder

The Altogether Safer section of the Council Plan sets out the Council's contributions to tackling crime and disorder.

Human rights

The priorities and actions in the Council Plan are in line with relevant articles of the Human Rights Act, for example, many of the actions support the right to family life.

Consultation

Council and partnership priorities have been developed following an analysis of available consultation data including consultation carried out as part of the development of the interim Sustainable Community Strategy and this has been reaffirmed by subsequent consultation on the budget. Results have been taken into account in developing our resourcing decisions.

Procurement

None.

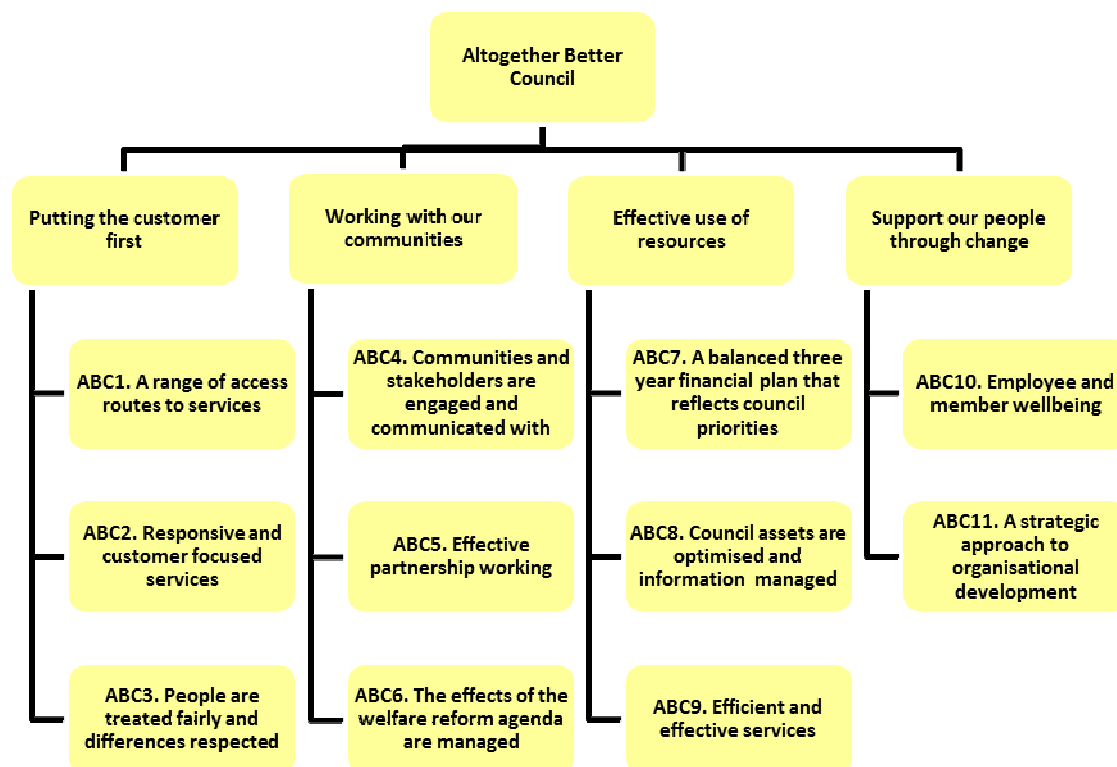
Disability Issues

See equality and diversity implications above.

Legal Implications

None.

Altogether Better Council



The Altogether Better Council priority theme looks at those things that enable us to effectively manage change and deliver improvement across the other themes within this plan. Our plans in this area are structured round four key objectives of serving our customers effectively, working with our communities, using our resources in an effective manner and supporting both councillors and employees through change. These are important areas and they relate to all services within the council. Achieving these objectives is increasingly important in times of significant change.

1. Putting the customer first

Providing good customer service remains of paramount importance. This is why we have revised our Customer First Strategy to reflect changing needs. Residents and customers pay for the services that we deliver through their taxes and through fees and charges. We need to understand what services our customers want from their local council and ensure that they have a say in the shaping of services delivered to them. Increasingly, people want to do their business with the council at a time and place which is convenient to them. Many people are comfortable with booking tickets for the cinema, paying bills or reporting a fault online either using a computer or through their mobile phone. It is more cost effective for the council and the customer to divert much of the business transacted with customers to online delivery channels. The council's new Customer First Strategy will set out how we intend to further improve how we deliver services to our customers.

Going well

- We have added 25 more venues to the current 1000 buildings in County Durham listed on the DisabledGo website www.disabledgo.com including access information for disabled residents and visitors.
- New Customer Access Point including a library service, at the Witham, Barnard Castle.
- Joint working with Cestria Housing, resulting in a co-located Customer Access Point in Chester-le-Street town centre.

Cause for concern

- Some key council services still cannot be accessed online.
- Increased demand for some services as a result of the economic downturn and changes to the welfare system.

Did you know?

- Each year our Customer Services Team, answer more than one million telephone enquiries and deal with almost 333,000 face to face enquiries.
- You can apply for housing benefit or council tax support online.
- You can report potholes, blocked drains and street lighting issues online through our website.

Look out for:

- Our new Customer First Strategy.
- Ongoing quarterly editions of County Durham News and the annual service guide.
- Web-based search and pay facility for bereavement records (including grave, burial and headstone information).
- E-billing for council tax and business rates bills.

High level Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Adoption of new Customer First Strategy	Head of Projects and Business Services	July 2014
Improved customer access to online services		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New website to improve access to customer information and services 		May 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the way in which we capture data from our customers in order to streamline service delivery and develop better customer insight 		September 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase online transactions 		Dec 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it easier for customers to contact the council by reducing telephone numbers through an integrated approach 		March 2017
<p>Improve complaints reporting and monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Corporate Complaints Pilots to inform revised process 	Head of Policy & Communications	June 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Customer Complaints process 		March 2015
<p>Strengthen integration of equality and diversity requirements to support effective decision making by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the process to ensure that equality and diversity implications are considered in all procurement and commissioning contracts 	Head of Planning and Performance	Sept 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that decisions relating to making future financial savings take account of the impact on those groups protected under equality legislation 		March 2015

2. Working with our communities

Effective engagement with local residents has been a major focus for Durham County Council since local government reorganisation. Our 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) across the county are key to achieving this. To date, just under £21 million has been awarded to local communities through AAPs, attracting an additional £34 million in

matched funding. As a council we believe that it is important to involve communities in making major decisions on the future of local services and let people have a say about their local communities. Our nationally recognised work on participatory budgeting through the 'Your Money, Your Choice' events held in 2013 involved nearly 10,700 people, allocating £449,000 to 120 projects. Over 3,300 people participated in our consultation on the council's budget with 1,300 taking part in our financial prioritisation exercise. The public have also played a major part in deciding on the future of a range of services from community buildings to leisure centres.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 heralded some of the largest policy changes introduced by the current government. Areas with a history of heavy industry have a larger proportion of the population with a disability and who are dependent on benefits. The government's welfare reforms have had a significant impact on County Durham. The council has been working in partnership with housing providers and the voluntary and community sector to help residents most affected by the changes to the benefits system.

The government's reductions in public sector spending have meant that we have had to make large spending reductions across our whole range of services. Other public sector organisations have also been affected by the savings requirements. In these times it has been critical to maintain a focus on effective partnership working, in particular working through the County Durham Partnership to ensure continued integrated delivery of public services across the county. It is also important that we protect insofar as possible vulnerable people. We continue to assess the potential impact of all our spending plans on those people who characteristics are protected by equalities legislation and identify what we can do to reduce these impacts.

Going well

- Our ongoing work with the voluntary sector and local Town and Parish Councils.
- Over 10,000 voted in the 'Your Money, Your Choice' participatory budgeting exercises, allocating £449,000 to 120 community projects.
- Just over 3,300, or about one in three people, also gave us their views on our medium term financial plan including 1,300 who took part in the financial prioritisation game.

Cause for concern

- County Durham has a high proportion of low income and benefit dependent families and is therefore more affected than other parts of the country by changes to the welfare system.
- Government spending reductions mean that financial support for voluntary and community groups will have to be continually reviewed like all areas of council spending.

Did you know?

- We have 14 Area Action Partnerships covering the whole county. These are used by the council to engage with residents. Anyone can get involved. More

information is available at www.durham.gov.uk

- Any member of the public can take part in our online consultations through our website. Last year we ran consultation exercises on a range of issues including street lighting, garden waste collections, taxis in Durham city, school crossing patrols, provision of play parks and the council's budget.
- We staged 20 'Your Money, Your Choice' consultation events across the county, working with parish councils and the community and voluntary sector through our network of 14 Area Action Partnerships.
- We were short-listed for Council of the Year in Local Government Chronicle Awards 2014

Look out for:

- The new Sustainable Community Strategy 2014 – 2030 setting out the County Durham Partnership and Council's long term vision for the county, to be published in April 2014.
- The new look Durham County Council website which will go live in April 2014.
- World War I Centenary project – interactive map of commemorative sites and information.

High level Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Support better use of community buildings and the wider asset transfer approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain agreement for council owned community buildings to asset transfer, close or formally agree alternative individual building strategies with Cabinet 	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	December 2014
Improve partnership working with the VCS and Town and Parish Councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a volunteering action plan 	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	May 2014

<p>to improve co-ordination and outcomes for volunteers, clients and host organisations</p>		October 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop on-the-shelf projects for VCS funding. 		March 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote increased input of Town and Parish Councils in participatory budgeting exercises and Asset transfer programmes for community facilities 		
<p>Increase the level of external funding attracted:</p>	<p>Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement</p>	Sept 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a community led local development structure to maximise involvement of AAPs to increase resources for local actions 		Sept 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current approach to use of AAP resources to maximise degree of matched funding 		
<p>Completion and monitoring of all risk and project plans, and compliance with the Electoral Commission's performance standards for the following elections:</p>	<p>Head of Legal and Democratic Services</p>	June 2014 May 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Union Elections • Parliamentary Elections 		
<p>Individual Electoral Registration Prepare to implement Individual Electoral Registration in line with government guidance and deadlines</p>	<p>Head of Legal and Democratic Services</p>	December 2014
<p>Work with communities to commemorate the centenary of WWI</p>	<p>Head of Culture and Sport</p>	March 2015

2014-2018 by developing a programme of events in partnership with AAP's.		
Review of the Local Council tax Support Scheme for 2015/16: Undertake a review of the LCTSS adopted 01 April 2013 and extended into 2014/15	Head of Finance (Financial Services)	March 2015
Programme manage a series of projects and activities to ensure that the changes identified through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 are fully understood, administered effectively and communicated to residents, stakeholders and other specific groups	Head of Policy and Communications	March 2015

3. Effective use of resources

Like all public services, we have had to plan for and cope with a shrinking public purse since 2010. Against an initial plan to save £125 million over four years, from 2011 we have delivered just under £114 million by 31 March 2014 and are on track to meet our target. In line with our strategy, 64 percent of savings have been made from non-frontline services and 29 percent through rationalising management. Our plans have been informed by extensive public consultation in 2010 and again recently in 2013. Balancing the books has meant taking some tough decisions such as on the restructuring of residential care, waste management, refuse collection, home to school transport, libraries and indoor leisure provision. We have worked with communities to protect them as far as possible from funding reductions. Five leisure facilities have been transferred into community ownership and we are currently at an advanced stage in transferring 120 community buildings too.

Recent government announcements show that it is unlikely that there will be any let-up in funding reductions in the foreseeable future. We will continue to plan for and manage any further changes as required.

Going well

- The council has delivered or is on track to achieve savings identified in our financial plans for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14
- The council continue to develop sub-county information to better understand the local communities and help identify and tackle disadvantage and target resources.
- Our accounting systems continue to be improved to provide more user friendly financial information to allow service managers to manage their own budgets.
- Processing performance in the Benefits Team and in-year recovery rates for council tax, business rates, and sundry debts are all improving.

- The statutory value for money conclusion made by our auditors identified that the council has robust arrangements in place to secure financial resilience.
- The county and Parish elections held in May 2013 were well managed.

Cause for concern

- Evidence has been presented to the government showing that local authorities with greater levels of deprivation have had to face greater funding reductions than more affluent areas. Despite this, the funding formula for local government has not been changed for the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial settlements.

Did you know?

- We successfully handled 1,368 requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations over the last year.
- Our ICT Service supports over 30,000 desktops for internal and external customers, over 1000 servers and over 800 buildings.
- The council manages £2bn of investments on behalf of the Durham County Council Pension Fund.
- The council's ICT service brings in £6million worth of income from external customers.
- The council is the largest social landlord in Durham with owning around 40% of all social properties generating £60m rental income.
- There are 236,000 residential properties in County Durham with a gross Council tax liability of £266m and over 80% are in the lowest bands A to C.

Look out for:

- Quarterly corporate performance reports to Cabinet, setting out latest information on the council's performance.
- Digital Durham, an ambitious programme to provide superfast broadband access to all homes, businesses and communities, starts in spring 2014.
- On-line access to Council Tax Accounts, Business Rates Benefits and e-billing, e-reminder functionality from April 2014.

High level Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Develop the 2015-2016 -2017/18 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP 5)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-ordination of Service Grouping proposals for additional MTFP savings and Capital Bidding 	Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) /Head of Policy & Communications/Head of Finance (Financial Services)	October 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse and report upon the impact of Budget announcements and Finance Settlements 	Head of Finance (Corporate Finance)	April 2014 & December 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to deliver robust monitoring of delivery of MTFP savings programme 	Head of Policy & Communications	Quarterly through to March 2017
Improve data protection arrangements regarding customer data sharing:	Head of Planning and Performance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A rolling programme of data protection audits, eg, records storage and procurement clauses. 		May 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the use of Privacy Impact Assessments for regular data sharing. 		March 2015
Deliver and complete the current accommodation programme for council buildings	Head of Economic Development & Housing	November 2015

4. Support our people through change

The Authority is continuing to undergo significant change in relation to the workforce over the medium term, due to the challenge we face in having to find savings as a result of reductions in government grant support. The council's original estimate in 2011 of 1,950 reductions in posts by the end of 2014/15 is still expected to be accurate. Further work will be carried out over the forthcoming year to estimate the impact of further reductions on posts up to 2016/17.

Expressions of interest in early retirement, voluntary redundancy and flexible working continue to be invited from all employees from across the council in order to minimise the impact on compulsory redundancies in meeting the significant savings that are required. We will continue to engage with the workforce in helping us to manage and implement the necessary changes, alongside developing strategic workforce development plans that can support the development of skills and capacity in a continually changing workforce, in order to support the future needs of the organisation over this period.

Going well

- An induction programme successfully delivered to all newly elected councillors.
- The Durham Manager programme was successfully launched.
- Introduction of an Attendance Management Framework across the council to effectively manage sickness absence.
- Continued reduction in the number of accidents and health and safety reportable incidents.

Cause for concern

- Reductions in organisational capacity together with increasing levels of demand for many council services.
- Industrial relations in the light of continuing budget reductions.

Did you know?

- Since the launch of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing policy, approximately 50 line managers have accessed the Managers Competency Indicator Tool (MCIT) to assist with management of stress in the workplace.

Look out for:

- Changes to Local Government Pension Scheme affecting 17,000 employees.
- A new Council Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy launched in Feb/Mar 2014.

High level Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Workforce Development Planning: Develop a strategic approach towards workforce development planning that ensures adequate support for managers in relation to progressing		

planned MTFP savings and meeting future business needs:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modernise process for management of starters/leavers and changes 	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development	Sept 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify critical roles and occupational groupings and put plans in place to ensure that the potential to recruit in these areas is increased 	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development	March 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and promote existing policies and initiatives that support effective workforce management i.e. Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy, Establishment Control 	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development	March 2016
Improve the level and quality of appraisals undertaken across the council with a view to increasing individual and organisational performance	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development	March 2015
Improving Attendance (By reducing sickness absence) Provide support to services and implement actions to improve attendance and the management of sickness absence and associated costs.	Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development	March 2015

