

**COUNCIL
24 SEPTEMBER 2020**

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits

1. I have ensured that collection of Council Tax and Business Rates remain a high priority during the Covid-19 pandemic and residents have been supported with applications for Council Tax Support and other benefits. At the end of July, the in-year collection of Council Tax was 35.6 per cent compared to 35.8 per cent for the same period in 2019. Business Rates collection was 40.2 per cent compared to 39.1 per cent for the same period in 2019.
2. Applications for Council Tax Support have increased by 6.3 per cent since March and I have awarded an extra £1 million to support residents affected by the pandemic. In addition, I have also awarded a further £1.1 million of Council Tax hardship rebates to all working aged residents in receipt of Council Tax Support, which equates to £150 for each household affected.

COVID funding

3. The Council has received a further £0.943m in Covid-19 funding from the Government bringing the total to £7.174m. We will also be accessing the Local Government Income Compensation Scheme for lost sales, fees and charges which was announced in July. The scheme will compensate for the loss of sales, fees and charges income for 75 pence in every pound lost after the first 5% of planned income. The scheme is available for the full financial year and a claim is currently being prepared for the April – July 2020 period.

Business Support Grants

4. I have provided £24.9 million of support to over 2,000 Darlington Businesses through the Business Support Grant and Discretionary Support Grant schemes. This cash injection has come from central government to help businesses survive the difficult trading conditions through the lockdown period.
5. The grants and loans have been administered through Darlington Borough Council with staff working under pressure to meet deadlines and get support to those who needed it as quickly as possible.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2020/21

6. Cabinet has received information on the delivery of the Council's Capital Programme.
7. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work, with the current project position statement showing that there are 42 live projects currently being managed with an overall project outturn value of £136.217 million. The

majority of the projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Health and Safety

8. The Health and Safety team have continued to work to ensure all staff are using safe systems of work and following the corporate risk assessment. They have also worked closely with schools during this period providing support and assistance to teaching staff completing risk assessments for children returning to school.
9. The annual review of the Corporate Health and Safety Statement of Intent has been undertaken and this year has included a specific reference to COVID-19 and our commitment to provide a safe and healthy working environment and the need to have in place suitable working arrangements to manage the risk.

Furlough

10. As our cultural venues are reopening our furloughed staff have been moved onto flexible furlough which enables them to work part time basis. At the time of writing we have 128 staff on flexible furlough.

Xentrall Annual report

11. Xentrall Shared Services, the Stockton and Darlington partnership was established in 2008 and is now in its twelfth year.
12. The original business case identified a number of efficiencies and benefits to be delivered resulting in initial savings of £7.4 million over the original ten-year period. The partnership has delivered all of these plus additional efficiencies and benefits and has now achieved £17.2 million of savings.
13. Both the quality and performance has improved over this period with both customer and staff satisfaction increasing over the life of the partnership.
14. This is a significant achievement for a public/public partnership and it compares very well to other private sector partnerships many of which have failed over the same period or been brought back in-house for a variety of reasons. Both Councils have benefited both financially and through a continued programme of service improvements brought throughout the lifetime of the partnership.
15. In recognition the on-going success of this public/public partnership, in 2015, Members agreed to amend the original ten-year period into an on-going rolling agreement, which continues to this day.

Annual Procurement Plan

16. In accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, Cabinet has approved a number of additional contracts to be added to the Annual Procurement Plan.

Member Meetings

17. Remote Committee meetings are on-going and, apart from a few technical issues, seem to be going very well with some positive feedback being received.
18. In addition to Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees being held remotely, there have been three remote meetings of the Planning Applications Committee and one of the Licensing Sub Committee, both of which have successfully involved external participation.

Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration) 2020

19. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 3 July 2020, under a new reformed process. An initial data match with national and local data sets suggested that a significant number of properties had no changes in composition of the household when compared to the previous year. As such, the residents within these properties were only required to respond to the Annual Canvass Form where there was a change within the household composition.
20. This allows Officers to streamline their approach, and target those non-responding properties where the data match suggests that there could be a potential change to the composition of the household. Annual Canvass Reminder Forms were issued in August, and further action will be undertaken throughout September and October to encourage the completion of outstanding forms.

Town Centre Strategic Acquisitions

21. As part of the Council's on-going commitment to the Town Centre Strategy, we recently completed on the purchase of the former Sports Direct premises on East Street. We are continuing discussions with landowners regarding other potential strategic acquisitions.

Councillor Charles Johnson
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio