

**COUNCIL  
25 MARCH 2021**

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**OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Resources Portfolio.

**Modern.Gov**

2. As Members will be aware, Democratic Services have recently rolled out the Modern.Gov app to Members. Modern.Gov is an electronic committee management system which is designed to facilitate committee and decision management within the Council and was implemented in Darlington in 2018. As well as providing good accessibility for members and the public to electronic meeting information and documentation it has enabled more efficient working in the Democratic Services Team.
3. The app which has now been rolled out, will enable Members to securely view, annotate and download Committee agendas and reports and, in enabling this, will help to reduce the organisations carbon footprint. Using less paper will also mean reducing our costs; we currently spend around £17,500 on paper every year.
4. Can I encourage all Members to use this app with the expectation that the Council will move to paperless committee meetings with effect from May 2021.

**Police and Crime Commissioner Election and Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election (and the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward By-Election) – Thursday, 6 May 2021**

5. Arrangements are now at an advanced stage for the forthcoming Police and Crime Commissioner Election and Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election, together with a local Ward By-Election which is to be held in the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward, following the resignation of Councillor Sam Howarth.
6. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on education and possible school closures as a result of schools being used as polling stations, the Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, and Lord True CBE., Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, wrote to all Returning Officers and Head Teachers on 11 February 2021. Following this all schools used as Polling Places were contacted to find out whether they remained available, or whether they wished to not be used for this election. A number of schools subsequently asked not to be used as Polling Places at this election.
7. Officers from Democratic Services have therefore been working hard over the course of the last few weeks to identify, visit and acquire suitable alternatives, which are listed below:

<b>Original Polling Place</b>	<b>Polling District</b>	<b>New Polling Place</b>
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The Rydal Academy	BLB	King William Street Community Centre
The Rydal Academy	BLC	St. John's Church of England Academy
Holy Family RC Primary School	CKA	Cockerton Library
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College	COA, COB, COC	Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Sports Field, Abbey Road
Carmel College	HKA, HKB	Salutation Hall, Salutation Road
Mowden Junior School (Federation of Mowden Schools)	MOA, MOB	The Mowden Public House, Staindrop Road
St. Thomas Aquinas Church Hall	NRA	Darlington Elim Pentecostal Church, Bowman Street
St. Augustine's Parish Centre	PEA	Darlington Friends Meeting House, 6 Skinnergate
St. Augustine's Parish Centre	PWC	Darlington Baptist Church, Grange Road
Great Stainton Church Hall	SMA, SMC	Bishopton Village Hall, Church View

8. The Team have also been working closely with our Public Health Team and Health and Safety Team to ensure that Polling Stations will be safe places to vote. Face coverings will be required in Polling Stations, except where a medical exemption applies, with social distancing and hand sanitisation encouraged. Cleaning regimes will also be in place, and those staff working on Polling Stations will be required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout the day.
9. Those residents wishing to vote at these elections, but who are not yet registered, must do so by Monday, 19 April 2021. In line with the Electoral Commission's national drive, we are encouraging as many registered electors as possible to apply for a Postal Vote for these elections, and to do so in good time. An Application Form to Vote by Post appeared in both January's and this month's 'One Darlington' magazine, and we continue to use our social media channels to promote postal voting. The deadline to apply for a Postal Vote is 5pm on Tuesday, 20 April 2021.
10. Residents displaying symptoms of Covid-19, or who are self-isolating should not attend a Polling Station, however provisions will be in place to apply for an Emergency Proxy Vote if required due to health circumstances. This is to ensure that no-one is disenfranchised from voting due the current pandemic.
11. The Verification and Count for these elections will take place in the Sports Hall at the Dolphin Centre over the course of two days, with the verification of all votes and the Count for the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward By-Election taking place on the morning of Friday, 7 May 2021, and the Count for the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election taking place later that afternoon. The Count for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election will then take place on Saturday, 8 May 2021. Covid safety measures will be in place throughout the Count venue, with face

coverings required, and social distancing and hand sanitisation protocols to be observed.

### **Cabinet Updates for the Resources portfolio**

12. At its meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021, Cabinet received a number of reports, including the Medium Term Financial Plan which was agreed along with the Capital Strategy and forwarded to Full Council for approval on the 18 February 2021.
13. Cabinet received a presentation from the Council's external auditors EY who confirmed the Council's accounts give a true and fair view for the year ending 31 March 2020, and that the Council have put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources.
14. At the meeting, Cabinet also received an up-to-date forecast (Quarter 3) of the 2020-21 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process and the latest projections demonstrated an overall improvement against the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) of £2.943m. The report also noted the Government's funding package of support to assist with Covid-19 was anticipated to adequately cover the Covid-19 pressures faced in 2020/21 and that any surplus would be earmarked to cover 2021/22 expenditure.
15. Cabinet gave consideration the latest Capital resource and commitment position, to inform monitoring of the affordability and funding of the Council's capital programme and received an update on the current status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council.
16. At its meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021, Cabinet approved a revised policy dealing with surveillance activity under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, which was updated following recommendations arising from a periodic inspection last autumn by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office and also to reflect staff retirements and senior management changes requiring changes to Authorising Officers and the Senior Responsible Officer.

### **Capital Projects and Design Services Management**

17. The Council's Capital Programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
  - (a) Design work is progressing on the programme, with a number of schemes recently submitted for planning consideration and more being prepared. A pre-planning consultation exercise for the Railway Heritage Quarter scheme proposals is under way.
  - (b) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
  - (c) A programme of demolition works is ongoing across a number of locations to facilitate future regeneration opportunities with the Union Street Church site recently reaching completion. The demolition of the former Audio nightclub on Commercial Street is due to commence shortly.
  - (d) The implementation of an integrated control point system 'Project in a Box' continues with training to be rolled out to team members from March.
  - (e) There remains a risk of delay costs from Covid-19 related effects and possible Brexit implications to ongoing projects. There are some signs that material

costs are rising, for example steel, and this will be monitored closely as schemes progress to understand the impact.

## **Furlough**

18. The Governments Furlough scheme has now been extended until 30 September 2021. From July employers will need to contribute 10 per cent and from August to September 20 per cent. The Council will continue to use the flexible furlough scheme which allows employees to work some hours where possible and this has been invaluable in regard to flexibility when running the COVID testing sites.

**Councillor Charles Johnson**  
**Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio**