

## **COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED**

### **13 May 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.

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

2. 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 has recently concluded and the majority of comments received were positive towards the proposals. A further pre-planning consultation exercise for the Bank Top Station East and West Gateway scheme will commence in May.
  - (b) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
  - (c) The likely site requirements for the recently announced Treasury North Campus are being reviewed with the TVCA.
  - (d) A programme of demolition works continues across a number of locations to facilitate future regeneration opportunities. The demolition of the former Audio nightclub on Commercial Street is ongoing.
  - (e) The implementation of an integrated control point system 'Project in a Box' continues with the first phase of training to Capital Project Managers now complete.
  - (f) There remains a risk from COVID-19 related effects and possible Brexit implications to ongoing projects. There are some indications that material costs and demand for labour resources are increasing which will be monitored closely as schemes progress to understand the impact.

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

3. At its meeting on 13 April 2021, Cabinet received a report to release capital funding for repairs in our corporate buildings and advanced design fees to bring forward regeneration projects and prepare sites for development. The report also noted the successful bid to obtain £443,313 from the governments Heat Decarbonisation Scheme which will be utilised to reduce gas consumption and provide some elements of electrical improvements in the Town Hall and Hippodrome.

4. Cabinet also received the annual procurement plan and approved the assessment of strategic and non-strategic procurements in the plan.

## **Elections**

5. Staff have been working long hours on the arrangements for the elections taking place on the 6 May. This has included working over the bank holiday weekend.
6. Postal vote processing/verification has been taking place. To comply with safe working staff have been working in two separate teams in different Committee Rooms, with appropriate social distancing, masks and sanitation measures.
7. At polling stations voters will notice some changes with coronavirus measures evident. Staff will wear face masks and visors. Some smaller polling stations will also have plastic screens in use. Additional signage will give info about coronavirus measures. Floor markers will be used and voters will be advised of queuing arrangements and the need to wear face masks when entering. Spare face masks will be available for voters and also hand sanitisation. Voters will be encouraged to bring their own pencils/pens with them. Additional stocks of sanitised pencils will be available. At busier polling stations, staff will be assisting outside with info for voters and helping safe entry/exit management. Periodic cleaning will take place of contact surfaces throughout the day. Candidates, agents and polling agents will be expected to wear face masks when entering polling stations. We are employing 144 staff at the 49 polling stations. Training was taking place via Teams every day in the final week of April.
8. The count will not be immediately after close of poll, but the following days. The venue is the Dolphin Centre Sports Hall and the arrangements are as follows:  
  
Friday 7 May, 8.30am - verification of ballot boxes/total votes cast per election.  
Friday 7 May, 11.30am - Local Government by-election counts  
Friday 7 May, 2pm - Tees Valley Mayoral count  
Saturday 8 May, 9am – Police and Crime Commissioner count
9. The declaration of results for the by-elections will be in Darlington, but the Tees Valley Mayoral declaration will be in Stockton and the PCC in Durham.
10. Attendance at the count will need to be strictly managed because of coronavirus and safe working numbers and arrangements. Staff will be socially distanced and wearing face masks and visors. All persons entering the Hall will need wear facemasks and comply with coronavirus measures. Hand sanitiser will be available. A one-way system in operation, both to enter and exit the Sports Hall and in the Sports Hall. Floor markers will be used to maintain safe distances. There will be a separate media area will be on the balcony, but the media will not be invited down to the Sports Hall floor.

## **Virtual Democratic meetings**

11. Coronavirus legislation which allowed local authorities to hold virtual meetings rather than traditional 'in person' meetings expires on 6 May. A High Court case decided in late April that earlier local government legislation cannot be used to hold remote meetings.

12. For meetings in May we are therefore reviewing whether meetings need to be held and how they can safely be run. Our plans will include using larger venues to facilitate social distancing such as the Dolphin Centre Sports Hall. Consideration will also need to be given to rescheduling meetings in May where this is possible. We do need to have an Annual Council meeting in May, which will need to be held in person. We will plan this to comply with coronavirus guidance and with a view to minimise health risks.
13. For meetings after May we will need to take account of the state of the pandemic and the relevant public health guidance.

### **Revenue and Benefits team**

14. The Revenues and Benefits team have continued to prioritise the work to deliver a range of Covid-19 financial support measures to businesses introduced by the Government over the last year with over £42m paid out to date. The team have worked hard to ensure the new wave of support including the Restart Grants are administered as quickly as possible with over 650 awards already granted.
15. The collection of Council Tax and Business Rates has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic and residents have been supported with applications for Council Tax Support and other benefits.
16. For 2020-21, over £61 million of Council Tax has been collected, including £1.2 million of arrears. The in-year collection of Council Tax was 95.8 per cent and this was achieved despite courts being closed preventing the Council from taking any enforcement action. In addition, £8.8 million of Council Tax Support was awarded to residents on low income as well as £1.2 million of Council Tax Hardship payments.
17. Over £17 million of Business Rates was also collected with an in-year collection rate of 97.1 per cent. In addition, over £17 million of Business Rates relief was awarded to businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with most of these businesses paying no Business Rates in 2020-21.

### **Climate Change**

18. As mentioned above the council has been successful in a bid and received £443,313 from the Governments Heat Decarbonisation Scheme, which will be used to reduce gas consumption and make electrical improvement in the Council's Town Hall and Hippodrome buildings. It is anticipated the total project will save 870,500 kWhs.

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