

COUNCIL
15 JULY 2021

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

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

Climate Change

2. Funding has been secured through a successful Salix funding bid that will involve the installation of technologies within the Town Hall and Hippodrome which directly contribute to the heat decarbonisation of each building. Additionally, other works will be carried out at the same time to reduce energy demand as a secondary benefit to the scheme. (Salix provides Government funding to the public sector to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and lower energy bills).
3. The Hybrid Business Innovation Centre (HBIC) on Central Park that is progressing towards the construction phase will be constructed to BREEAM 'Excellent' standard (BREEAM - Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method).

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

4. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered:
 - (a) Planning applications for both Darlington Station scheme and the Railway Heritage Quarter scheme have been submitted.
 - (b) The Hybrid Innovation Centre on Central Park is progressing towards the construction phase.
 - (c) The new build Crematorium scheme progresses on site.
 - (d) The site requirements for the Treasury North Campus are being reviewed with the TVCA and meetings progress.
 - (e) 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 now complete.
 - (f) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities, including to support the Railway Heritage Quarter Scheme, Learning Skills Centre within the Northern Echo building and Central Park.
 - (g) 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. It is envisaged that read access can be provided to Cabinet

Members.

- (h) The construction sector nationally is seeing significant resource pressures and material price and supply issues. The impact on projects and programmes is being monitored.

Council Tax and Business Rates collection 2020-21

5. The Collection of Council Tax and Business Rates during 2020-2021 has been a significant challenge due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. Courts have been closed, which has meant that the Council has been unable to obtain liability orders for unpaid Council Tax or Business Rates, preventing any enforcement action, such as attachment of earnings and deductions from benefits from being taken. In addition, recovery action through the Council's Enforcement Agents (bailiffs) has been suspended.
6. However, despite the challenges, the following amounts have been collected. For Council Tax, a total of £59.3 million of the £61.9 million due was collected in 2020-21 (or 95.8 per cent). In addition, £1.2 million of Council Tax arrears relating to previous years was also collected.
7. For Business Rates, a total of £17.1 million of the £17.6 million due was collected (or 97.0 per cent). In addition, over £17 million of additional Business Rates reliefs were awarded in 2020-21 to support businesses in Darlington through the Covid 19 pandemic.
8. A supportive stance in relation to collection has been taken by staff throughout 2020-21 to assist residents and businesses to pay their Council Tax and Business Rates and claim the benefits and reliefs they are entitled to.

Medium Term Financial Plan

9. The draft 2020/21 accounts have been prepared and as anticipated there was an improvement against the original MTFP which has increased our reserves position. The outturn position was aided by the Government grants received for COVID expenditure and loss of income due to the pandemic which have adequately covered the pressures sustained in year.

Health and Safety

10. In situations where there is risk of threats or violence against the employee, a lone worker device can be used as part of a safe system of work. It is a discreet device carried by the employee as their ID badge. The device used can either be dedicated to one employee or else a pooled device which is shared between two or more employees.
11. The Reliance Protect ID Ultra currently used by the Council comes with e-learning training for employees. The employee will use the ID Ultra to record a message stating where they are working/visiting.
12. In the event of an emergency or threat they can raise a red alert (push a discreet button). The red alert is received by trained operatives who will assess the situation and take appropriate action. This action might be a call to the employee,

their manager (using a pre-determined escalation contact), or if needed, the emergency services.

13. A new contract for our lone working devices has been implemented and upgraded. ID Ultra devices were issued for use across 40 teams, with approximately 500 employees trained and having access to a device when lone working.

Elections

14. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Local Government Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 postponed the elections scheduled to be held on 7 May 2020 and any other polls that arose between 7 April 2020 and 6 May 2021 to a 'backstop' of the 6 May 2021.
15. The postponed elections for the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Durham Police Area and the Mayor for the Tees Valley Combined Authority took place on Thursday 6 May 2021. Two ward by elections also took place on 6 May 2021, following the resignations of Councillors Paul Howell and Sam Howarth, and Councillors Jack Sowerby and David Willis were elected to fill those vacancies, in the Hummersknott and Red Hall and Lingfield Wards, respectively.
16. In response to the pandemic, Democratic Services introduced a number of new systems and processes for the elections, in order to adhere to public health guidance and to ensure that they were conducted in safe and secure covid environments keeping candidates, agents, staff and electors safe at each and every stage.

2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

17. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE), which is an independent organisation responsible for reviewing Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries, published its initial proposals for new Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries on 8 June 2021, with consultation running on those proposals, until 2 August 2021. Hard copies of the proposals and maps for the North East Region are available to view, by request, at the Crown Street Library, Monday to Saturday between 10.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. and on the BCE website at [North East | BCE Consultation Portal \(bcereviews.org.uk\)](https://www.bcereviews.org.uk).
18. For the 2023 Review, the Commission is promoting the use of a specifically-designed consultation website as the primary tool for receiving comments, from all interested parties and individuals, on the proposals. Further information on how to submit comments can be found at www.bcereviews.org.uk.
19. In early 2022, the next stage of the review will commence, when all of the responses received during the first consultation will be published on the BCE website, and a six-week period of 'secondary consultation' will be undertaken, during which people can give their views on what others have said in the first consultation. As part of this 'secondary consultation' stage, a limited number of public hearings in each of the nine English regions will be held. There will be no new proposals from the BCE at this stage.
20. After analysing all of the responses received during both consultations, the BCE will make appropriate changes to the initial proposals and these 'revised proposals' will

be published for a final four-week period of public consultation towards the end of 2022, with the final recommendations expected by July 2023.

Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration) 2021

21. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 8 July 2021, and is the second such canvass under the 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, and 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.
22. 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 will be issued in August, and further action, including personal visits, will be undertaken throughout September and October to encourage the completion of outstanding forms.

Councillor Charles Johnson
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio