

**COUNCIL**  
**30 SEPTEMBER 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.

**Council Tax and Business Rates Collection**

2. For the first quarter of 2021-22, 26.7 per cent of Council Tax due has been collected, compared to 26.8 per cent for the same period in 2020-21. However, in cash terms, £18.38 million has been collected (including arrears of Council Tax) compared to £16.64 million for the same period in 2020-21; an increase of £1.74 million (or 10.5 per cent). In addition, £8.96 million of Council Tax Support has been awarded to residents on low incomes.
3. For the first quarter of 2021-22, 27.04 per cent of Business Rates due has been collected, compared to 30.52 per cent for the same period in 2020-21. The main reason for this difference is due to the way Business Rates reliefs have been awarded in 2021-22 as most retail businesses have been exempt from making any payments during the first quarter. However, in cash terms, £9.06 million has been collected (including arrears of Business Rates) compared to £5.43 million for the same period in 2020-21; an increase of £3.63 million (or 66.9 per cent). In addition, £7.88 million of Business Rates relief has been awarded to businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors.

**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 are currently being determined, and approvals are anticipated by end of September.
  - (b) The Hybrid Innovation Centre on Central Park has now commenced on site.
  - (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. Pre-demolition information is currently being pulled together for properties on King Street.

- (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 construction sector nationally continues to see significant resource pressures, material price and supply issues. The impact on projects and programmes is being monitored.

### **Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration) 2021**

- 5. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 8 July 2021, the second Annual Canvass under the new reformed process. As reported at the previous meeting, an initial data match with national and local data sets was undertaken prior to the Canvass commencing, and this suggested that a significant number of properties had no changes in terms of the household composition. As such, the residents within these properties were only required to respond to the Annual Canvass Form where there was a change.
- 6. This allowed 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 for those properties from which a response was required, but had yet to be received, were issued in August, and further action, including household visits, will continue throughout September and October to encourage the completion of outstanding forms.

### **Investment Fund**

- 7. Cabinet received an update on the use of the £50m Investment Fund; it is pleasing to see the fund being utilised as envisaged for investment opportunities and economic regeneration initiatives which are benefitting our Medium Term Financial Plan. The Joint Venture house building initiatives are working well with two of the schemes having fully repaid the investment. This repayment is then recirculated and available for future initiatives.

### **Workforce**

- 8. The Council has 600 Flu vaccinations on order for staff with clinic's scheduled to take place in October following receipt of the vaccines. An appointment system will be in place to allow staff to book a place at one of the clinics, with front line staff being encouraged to take up the vaccination.
- 9. The Workforce Strategy and Workforce Plan with new values was approved by Joint Consultative Committee in July. Roll out and promotion to the workforce will commence shortly to ensure the new strategy is embedded into working practices.
- 10. The employee survey was completed over the summer and closed on 27<sup>th</sup> August. 869 employees completed the survey, a return rate of 46.13 per cent, which was a welcomed increase of just over ten per cent on the last employee survey (which received a 35.29 per cent response). Analysis of the results will now take place to identify key action areas.

### **Climate Change – Staff Training**

11. Climate Change is an essential module which all staff are required to complete on Academy 10, which is the Council's online training portal.
12. Staff who cannot access the online system will be given a tool box talk with their manager where the presentation will be reviewed and questions undertaken as a group. At the time of writing, there was a 76 per cent completion on Academy 10, and a 10 per cent hard copy completion with an overall total of 58 per cent. It is recognised that tool box talks have been more difficult during the pandemic with the emphasis being on service delivery, however, as we begin to recover the tool box talks will begin in earnest.

**Councillor Scott Durham**  
**Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio**