

COUNCIL
25 NOVEMBER 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. The £100,000 allocated from the MTFP has, so far, funded three projects. Work is ongoing to determine where it can add best value to actions in the climate change action plan.
3. Officers are working with the climate change team to develop milestones for reporting progress on the action plan.
4. We continue to include climate change messaging in One Darlington magazine, via social media and on the website. A new blog series has been launched on the Sustainable Darlington page.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

5. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered:
 - (a) Design work is progressing on a number of schemes. The Bank Top Gateway East scheme has now gained planning permission and work is ongoing on the land acquisition process. The planning application for the Railway Heritage Quarter scheme is currently being determined. Site work has commenced on the Hybrid Innovation Centre on Central Park and continues on the Crematorium and new Chapel development.
 - (b) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
 - (c) The likely site requirements for the Treasury North Campus are being reviewed with the Government Property Agency.
 - (d) The implementation of an integrated control point system 'Project in a Box' continues with the new projects starting to be added to the system.
 - (e) There remains a risk of delay costs from Covid-19 related effects and construction material price increases. There are more signs that basic material costs are rising and there are some material shortages, the impact is being monitored.

Revenue Budget Management 2021/22

6. Cabinet considered the Quarter 2 Revenue Budget Management report and the Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2021 are £29.536 million, £4.610m higher than the initial 2020-21 budget position and include a brought forward amount of £2.317 million from 2020-21 and the rebasing exercise of £0.993 million.
7. This in year positive position is welcomed given the pressure the pandemic has had on services. The government's grants along with the sales, fees and charges recovery fund have been maximised and have assisted in covering in year Covid pressures. The improved balances will assist in supporting the MTFP in future years.

Capital Project position 2021/22

8. Cabinet considered the Quarter 2 Capital programme and project position report. The council currently has 46 live projects the majority of which are running to time, cost and quality expectations.
9. As members will be aware the construction industry is facing challenges in regard to cost increases and the availability of resources. Officers are monitoring contracts to ensure any impact is minimised.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23

10. Officers have been working on detailed estimates in preparation for the 2022/23 – 2025/26 Medium Term Financial Plan. Whilst the local government financial settlement won't be received until mid-December, we have been reviewing the Chancellors Autumn Statement and departmental level budgets to estimate the implications for Darlington. The MTFP for consultation will be coming to Cabinet in December.

Workforce Strategy

11. The Council's new workforce strategy and workforce plan has commenced roll out to staff. The workforce strategy is the Council's commitment to ensure the workforce's needs and priorities are met so to help achieve the Council's objectives. The strategy looks at how we develop, support and motivate our staff. The workforce plan sets out the operational actions that will take place to meet the priorities in the workforce strategy. As part of the strategy new words have been chosen to represent the Council's values namely, respect, innovate, collaborate and deliver.
12. Managers are rolling out both the strategy and plan to employees, through team meetings and supervision to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded into every day working practices.

Think Safety

13. Following the appointment of the Council's new management team, a refresh of the health and safety "Think Safety" campaign is underway. All Assistant Directors have agreed to sign up to the campaign and a new logo has been agreed in line with the

Council's new corporate branding. This roll out will re-enforce the message that health and safety is a key priority for the Council and in the delivery of all its services.

Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration) 2021

14. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 8 July 2021, the second Annual Canvass under the new reformed process. As reported at previous meetings, 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.
15. This allowed Officers to streamline their approach and target those non-responding properties whereby 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.
16. The final stage of the Annual Canvass commenced in September and is still on-going, whereby those households that were required to respond and were still outstanding would receive a personal visit to encourage the completion of the form. This work will be finalised by the end of November and the updated Register of Electors will be published on 1 December 2021.

Elections Bill 2021

17. The Elections Bill 2021, which is currently at the draft legislation stage, proposes eleven new measures that the government believes will enable UK elections to 'remain secure, fair, modern, inclusive and transparent'. Those measures include the requirement of voters to present photographic ID at polling stations in order to vote, extending the franchise for overseas British voters, clarifying which European Union citizens may vote / stand for election at which elections and tightening up of rules around postal and proxy voting. Other measures included in the Bill include clarification of undue influence, accessibility of polls, notional expenditure, political finance, digital imprints and intimidation.
18. The Bill has had its second reading in the House of Commons and is currently at the 'report stage' of the process, whereby further amendments can be made, prior to it having its third and final reading. It is anticipated that the measures contained within the Bill, should they receive Royal Assent, will be implemented for the next Parliamentary Election.

Mobile Phone App

19. At the beginning of November, the Council launched an app that allows residents to use their phone or tablet to quickly report issues to the council, check bin collections, see where roadworks are along with a number of other functions. Since its launch, hundreds of people have already installed the app.
20. The progressive web app was developed in-house by the web team enabling costs to be kept to a minimum. It has been designed to allow people to install it directly via their phone or tablet web browser as soon as they visit the Council's website as opposed to

downloading and installing it via the iOS or Android stores. This approach also removes the need for the Council to seek separate specialist iOS and Android developer skills for the ongoing enhancements to and maintenance of the app.

Councillor Scott Durham
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio