

**COUNCIL**  
**12 May 2022**

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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 a number of schemes. The Bank Top Gateway East and West scheme Compulsory Purchase Order proposals are progressing through RIBA Stage 4, and work is still ongoing to try and acquire the remaining land interests by agreement. The Railway Heritage Quarter scheme is due to commence on site 4 May 2022 with some highway restrictions on Bonomi Way. Site work continues on the Hybrid Innovation Centre on Central Park, Central Library, Crematorium and new Chapel development. The demolition of the ex-Sports Direct building on East Street is due to commence 4 April 2022.
  - (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 and is hoped to have a final location decision through shortly.
  - (d) There remains a risk of delay costs from Covid-19 and also possibly a risk from Russia's invasion of Ukraine causing inflation related effects on construction material prices.

**Property Asset Management**

3. Following the confirmation of the Bank Top Compulsory Purchase Order, proposed acquisitions are being progressed and will continue to be reported to Cabinet in the Schedule of Transactions.

**Household Support Fund**

4. The Household Support Fund (HSF) was set up in October 2021 to support households in the most need with food and energy bills over the winter months. From October 2021 to March 2022, over £900,000 in food and energy vouchers were distributed to 6,100 households in Darlington.
5. The Government has recently announced an extension to the scheme with a further £913,854 funding available from April 2022 to September 2022. Again, support should primarily be

provided to households with their food and energy bills with at least a third of the funding spent on households with children, whilst at least a third must be spent on pensioners.

- Options for the delivery of the HSF currently being considered include providing food vouchers to families who qualify for free school meals, food vouchers for care leavers and Fuel Bank vouchers. Options to support pensioners who qualify for Council Tax Support are also being considered.

## **Elections Bill Update**

- The legislation is currently being considered in Parliament
- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, have established an Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP) and a Business Change Team to help support Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and elections staff with the delivery of the changes that will be required. The EIP is working with suppliers on the electoral management software changes needed and a digital team is working on voter ID card production and the on line application process. New burdens funding will be allocated to councils to assist with the initial implementation costs. The Electoral Commission are going to run a national communications campaign on voter identification and they will also be producing resources that local authorities can use.
- Electors will be able to apply for a Voter ID Card in person, by post or online. A Voter ID Card application can also be made at the same time as making an application to register to vote. The applicants electoral registration status will be checked and their identity will also need to be confirmed. These checks will use local data, such as Council Tax Records, but further information can be requested from the applicant if necessary. The government intends to implement automatic checks where possible in order to assist in validating the applicant's identity and speed up the application process for electors. This will operate in a similar way to the Register to Vote service. An elector will be able to request their Voter ID Card be posted to their registered address, or can collect it in person.
- Deadlines for Voter ID Card applications have not yet been finalised, but it is likely to take account of emergencies with the that the last possible point electors can apply for a Voter Card having been suggested as 5pm the day before the poll. If it is not possible to produce Voter Cards in time for a poll, at Temporary Voter ID Cards can be printed as an interim measure. Late applications for Voter ID Cards will increase the pressure on staff working on elections
- Appropriate equipment and facilities to take photographs and print Voter ID Cards will need to be available. Voter ID cards will have security features and the design will be standardised throughout all local authorities.
- A workstream to prepare for the changes arising from the legislation is underway in Democratic Services. A vital part of this is a local communications plan to ensure that the public and are notified of the changes and in particular the need for voters to show photo identification and about how they can obtain voter identity cards if they need one.
- Members will be interested to note that the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011 was repealed on 24 March 2022 by the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022. This

means the dissolution prerogative has been revived - this enables the PM to advise the Monarch to dissolve Parliament (a general election must then be held 25 days after dissolution).

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