

COUNCIL
24 November 2022

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

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

Revenues and Benefits Debt Recovery

2. Our Revenues and Benefits team has continued to achieve a number of recent successes in recovering some long-standing high debts and further demonstrates our commitment to pursue residents who deliberately avoid paying amounts owed to the Council:
 - (a) a debtor living in the Cockerton area had a number of outstanding Council Tax debts for previous addresses totalling £12,095. No contact was received from the debtor, so bankruptcy proceedings were commenced. However, before the court hearing, the debtor made a full payment, together with costs of £1,635.
 - (b) a debtor living in the Northgate area owed over £7,365 in Council Tax for his home he had moved into in December 2016 and had not made any payments. No contact was received from the debtor, so extensive investigations were undertaken by Recovery Officers to locate his employer. An attachment of earnings order was then served on his employers and so far, £2,121 has been collected.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

3. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of projects being developed and delivered. Design work is progressing on a number of schemes.
 - (a) Darlington Station - the demolitions phase is now underway on the Eastern side of the scheme with a number of buildings already cleared.
 - (b) The Railway Heritage Quarter continues on site with the new engineering shed and refurbishment work to the 1861 shed on Whessoe Road
 - (c) works are ongoing at the Central Library and the Crematorium and new Chapel development.
 - (d) The Innovation Central building has recently been completed on Central Park and is now being operated by NE-BiC.
4. The impact of inflation continues to be monitored on a project-by-project basis across the capital programme.

Parliamentary Boundary Review

5. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) published the revised proposals for the new constituency boundaries on Tuesday 8 November 2022. The consultation on the revised proposals will run from 8 November to Monday 5 December 2022 and it is the last opportunity to participate in the 2023 Boundary Review. Further information on the review, how to be involved and interactive maps can be found on the BCE's website <https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/>.

Annual Canvass (Electoral Registration) 2022

6. This year's Annual Canvass commenced on 4 July 2022, the third 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.
7. The final stage of the Annual Canvass commenced in September and is still on-going whereby those households that were required to respond, but the forms were still outstanding, would receive a personal to encourage them to complete the form. This work will be finalised by the end of November with the updated Register of Elections being published on 1 December 2022.

Elections - Draft Legislation

8. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DHLUC) has laid draft legislation before Parliament, on Thursday 3 November 2022, to implement the establishment of voter identification at elections, as stipulated in the Elections Act 2022. It is anticipated that the regulations will become law in mid-January 2023 and will be in force for the elections scheduled to take place from May 2023. The regulations, when implemented, will require voters to identify themselves by showing an approved form of photographic identification at a polling station before being issued with a ballot paper to cast their vote.
9. DHLUC has also laid before Parliament draft Statutory Instruments on changes to the voting arrangements for Combined Authority Mayoral Elections from May 2023. The legislation amends the practical arrangements to reflect the change to the first past the post voting system and provides for new forms of ballot papers and other forms to be used at future elections.

Councillor Scott Durham
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio