

COUNCIL
26 JANUARY 2023

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. To reduce the Council's energy consumption the setpoint for the heating boilers in the Town Hall has been reduced by four degrees. This has achieved a sixteen per cent weather corrected reduction in the consumption for December compared to the previous year. The sodium light fittings in the Central Hall at the Dolphin Centre, external light fittings at Eastbourne Sports Complex and fluorescent light fittings at the Town Hall are currently being replaced with LED's. In addition to this work, there is a renewed commitment to secure zero carbon electricity for 2023/24.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

3. The draft MTFP proposed at Cabinet in December is now out for consultation. Since then the draft Local Government Finance settlement has been received and the MTFP will be updated accordingly in the final draft going to Cabinet and on to Council in February. The details of the settlement are still being reviewed however the overall settlement was good news for the Council with additional funding for social care which will help to address some of the significant pressure in that area.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

4. The Council's Capital Programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
 - (a) On the Bank Top Railway Station the demolitions phase is ongoing on the eastern side of the scheme with a number of buildings already cleared. The Railway Heritage Quarter continues on site with the new engineering shed and refurbishment work to the 1861 shed on Whessoe Road and works are ongoing at the Central Library, and new Chapel development. The recently completed Innovation Central development on Central Park has some companies already operating from it. Issues around the impact of the Nutrient Neutrality requirements from Natural England are being worked through on the Sherborne and Skinnergate housing schemes.
 - (b) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
 - (c) There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

Council Tax collection

5. Collection of outstanding Council Tax arrears continues to perform well, with over £1.4 million of arrears collected by our Revenues and Benefits team since April 2022. Included in these amounts are the following cases, further demonstrating our commitment to pursue property owners who deliberately avoid paying Council Tax on their properties:
 - (a) A landlord responsible for a number of properties in the Northgate area had multiple Council Tax debts outstanding. Following the commencement of bankruptcy proceedings, the full amount of £3,825 owed was paid.
 - (b) A property in the Haughton and Springfield area was purchased in 2017, although the owner failed to notify the Council. Outstanding Council Tax remained unpaid but, following a charging order being obtained on the property in October 2022, the owner paid the full outstanding amount of £3,895.
 - (c) A property in the Pierremont area was purchased in 2020, although again the owner failed to notify the Council. Following the commencement of charging orders being instigated, the owner paid the full amount outstanding of £3,704.
 - (d) Charging orders had been obtained against an empty property in the Northgate area. The property was sold in December 2022 and the full amount outstanding of £4,593 was repaid from the proceeds of the sale.

Customer Services

6. From December 2022, our Customer Services team are running an on-line customer feedback pilot that will capture the views of Street Scene customers. A key theme of the Customer Services and Digital strategy is to listen to our customers and use this feedback to improve services. It is hoped that, following a successful trial, we will be able to roll this out to other services which Customer Services provide.
7. In line with our new Customer Standards of telephones being answered within an average of 5 minutes, I am pleased to report that performance continues to improve with the average waiting time for customers in November 2022 of 2 minutes 24 seconds.
8. Unison recently recognised our Customer Services as part of their Champions Day project for the hard work and excellent services provided by staff to support residents during the Covid pandemic.

Parliamentary Boundary Review

9. Public consultation on the 2023 Parliamentary Review has now closed. It is anticipated that the Boundary Commission for England will send their final recommendations to Parliament by 1 July 2023. Further information on the review and interactive maps can be found on the BCE's website <https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/>.

Register of Electors

10. The Annual Canvass, the third under the new canvass reforms, was completed in November with the new Register of Electors being published, on 1 December 2022. Work will continue during the year to keep the register up to date by locating new electors and encouraging them to register.

Elections Act 2022 - Voter Identification (ID)

11. The Voter Identification Regulations 2022 were made on 22 December 2022. These regulations will come into force for the Local Government Elections in May and for UK Parliamentary Elections from October 2023. The new regulations require voters, for the first time, 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. The full list of accepted ID can be found on the Government's website (www.gov.uk).
12. Should an elector not have an accepted form of photo ID, they can apply for a free Voter ID document, known as a Voter Authority Certificate. This can be done online via the Government's website or by completing a paper application form. The publicity campaign by the Electoral Commission for Voter ID commenced on 9 January 2023.

Councillor Scott Durham
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio