

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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

Business Rates and Council Tax

2. Members will be aware that from April 2026, Darlington businesses will face a number of simultaneous changes in relation to their business rates.
3. Full details of the changes can be found on the DBC website. Over 4,000 Business Rates bills for 2026-27 have already been issued to Darlington businesses, including 444 digital e-bills, and we are anticipating a significant increase in enquiries and appeals.
4. In addition, over 54,800 Council Tax bills for 2026-27 have been issued to Darlington residents, including 7,848 digital e-bills. Our Revenues and Benefits team will be dealing with a significant increase in enquiries during this period and the best advice if residents have enquiries about their bill is to complete one of our on-line enquiry forms on the DBC website.

Digital Envelope

5. As previously reported to Members, our Revenues and Benefit team introduced a new, quicker way for residents and businesses to sign up for electronic bills for their Council Tax and Business Rates, called Digital Envelope. Since introducing the new service, over 1,100 Council Tax and Business Rates payers have signed up for the Digital Envelope service and in January 2026, just under a quarter of all bills were sent electronically, compared to 14% for the same period in 2025.
6. A reminder about signing up for Digital Envelope was sent as part of the annual billing exercise. The advantages of receiving e-bills are reductions in our carbon footprint, quicker notifications for resident and businesses and cost savings for the Council in terms of less paper, printing and postage.

Climate Change

7. The Dolphin Centre Solar PV installation is now completed. The performance forecast is anticipating 160,000 kWh energy generation per year with the amount of CO2 emissions avoided of 75,000 kg per year.
The estimated savings from the electricity bills is £35,500 per year.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

8. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects. A selection of some of the larger projects are outlined below.
 - (a) TVCA continue to manage the Darlington Station project; with works continuing to complete the internal fit out, the new pedestrian link bridge, platforms and canopy.
 - (b) Neasham Road and Sherborne housing schemes continue to progress well with units being handed over on a phased basis.
 - (c) The refurbishment works to provide office space at No.156 Northgate are due to complete by the end of March.
 - (d) The refurbishment works at the former Northern Echo building are also progressing well but there remains a delay with the new electrical supply required. The scheme's stakeholders are aware of the delay and mitigation measures are in place.
 - (e) The remaining demolition at the Skinnergate Housing site is progressing and is expected to complete in the coming weeks.
 - (f) CityHeart are bringing forward proposals for a number of key sites and are working on the business case and survey work required to inform the design of the proposed STEM Centre on Central Park.
9. Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
10. There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

Cyber Security

11. The world of technology continues to advance but this makes the job of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) team more complex. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence and the growth of Cyber Crime as a service presents significant challenges for businesses, particularly for Local Government, as demonstrated by a number of cyber threats we experienced over the Christmas period. The threat actors who perpetuate these attacks are continually testing our defences and the most prevalent attacks, Business Email Compromise, are becoming increasingly difficult to detect.
12. The Xentrall ICT team are continuously strengthening our cyber security posture to protect against this. ICT work very closely with Information Governance to conduct regular phishing simulations to educate our users and raise awareness. ICT also now have a dedicated Cyber Team to reduce the risk and impact of attack and an external Security Operations Centre that runs 365/24/7 to monitor and detect suspicious activity across our network.

Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio