

**RESOURCES AND PERSONNEL PORTFOLIO
COUNCILLOR G MARSHALL****Report to Council – 13 December 2023****Revenues, Benefits, Quality and Control and Customer Services****Revenues**

The Revenues Team are responsible for the administration of Council Tax and Business Rates, including the recovery of these.

Council Tax is collected by Broxtowe Borough Council on behalf of the main major precepting authorities, such as Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner and Nottinghamshire Fire as well as the Parish Councils. In 23/24, the net charge is £79.9m, with 8% of this being retained by Broxtowe.

Business Rates is a significant income generator for the Council with us being able to retain 40% of the amounts collected (with limits imposed by Central Government), with the remaining amounts being split between central government, NCC and Nottinghamshire Fire. A business is evaluated on its Rateable Value, as determined by the valuation office agency. This council now collects over £28m in business rates.

The Council Tax collection rate for 2022/23 was 97.4%, an improvement of over 0.4% on the previous year. Business Rates collection rate was 98.7%, an improvement over 1.2% on the previous year. The Current collection rates are reported on a quarterly basis and continue to show an improvement on 2022/23 in both Council Tax and Business Rates.

Benefits

The Benefits Team is responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. Both of these are designed to support the most vulnerable in our community. With the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) we have seen a reduction on the number of Housing Benefit claims processed, however, most of those receiving UC will still be required to apply for assistance on Council Tax Support.

The Department for Works and Pensions have written to the Council to advise them of their intention to accelerate the roll out of UC to a managed migration of those on Housing Benefit in 2024/24. Although, there are limitations on certain categories of households that will migrate.

Performance in Benefits continues to be in the upper quartile of the Country.

Quality and Control

Quality and Control is a small team that is responsible for the recovery of Sundry Debtors, Housing Benefit Overpayments and the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's).

DHP's are to assist those receiving Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit and experiencing hardship. This pot of money is received by Central Government but is reducing year on year. This year's balance is £88k, which is equivalent to the 2022/23 amount but lower than previous years. Nottinghamshire County Council have awarded a further £28,000 that the Council can add to the DHP fund through their allocation of Household Support Fund.

Customer Services

The Customer Services Team is responsible for handling phone calls and face to face interviews for the following seven services as well as the switchboard. Outside of these, it is the responsibility of the back office team

- Council Tax
- Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support
- Business Rates
- Housing Rents
- Grounds Maintenance
- Street Cleansing
- Refuse

The Council receives over 100,000 telephone calls / year (on average 380 per day), as well as an average of 200 switchboard calls. In addition to this, they provide a reception service at the Beeston Council Offices as well as seeing customers face to face with more detailed queries regarding the services above.

The Customer Services Team. The main Key Performance Indicator for Customer Services is the number of abandoned calls as a percentage of calls received. In October, this was 5.3% against a target of 10%.

Flooding

The Revenues and Customer Services Teams have developed and implemented the support for those that were adversely affected as a result of Storm Babet. The information regarding the flooding is provided below, as at 22 November 2023:

Total number of properties flooded	-	310
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Community Recovery Grant - This a grant payment of up to £500 per household for those badly affected by the recent Storm Babet.

£500 community grant awards	-	201
Total value of Community Grant awards	-	£100,500

Council Tax Discount Scheme - This is 100% discount on your Council Tax for a period of at least 3 months. To receive this support, your property must have had flood water enter the habitable areas of your property during the recent Storm Babet.

Properties where Council Tax relief awarded	-	202
Total value of Council Tax Relief	-	£88,509.21

Communications and Engagement

Award winning work in Stapleford

Work undertaken by the Council alongside BakerBaird Communications on the Stapleford Towns Fund has won a Community Relations award at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) East Midlands Pride Awards.

The judging panel praised Shaping Stapleford: from left behind to levelled up for its well thought through approach and how it set a great example of collaboration with different community groups.

Budget Consultation

The recent budget consultation attracted more entries than ever before this year, at more than 1,393 submissions. As with other engagement projects, the Communications Team have promoted the consultation across both digital communications channels such as social media and the email me service, as well as more traditional media. Work has also been undertaken to engage directly with over 250 stakeholder groups on the Council's stakeholder map across different ages, ethnicities and interests.

Flooding response

A vast amount of communications and engagement work was delivered in response to the recent flooding in the Borough, from warning and informing messages during the incident, to keeping partners and stakeholders up dated and promoting clean up and relief funding. More recently work has been undertaken to support the Environment Agency's Flood Action Week and help residents ensure they are prepared for future incidents.

Communications and Marketing Projects

Recent projects undertaken by the Communications Team include:

- **Climate Change** – The team have been working with the Environment Team on a number of initiatives including the recent free trees scheme and videos to engage residents on recycling correctly during the festive season.
- **Economic Development** – Supporting promotion of the new grant schemes as part of UKSPF and Levelling Up Funding. As part of a CCity recipe book project, the team is also developing a campaign to launch in the new year to promote local food businesses in the Borough and the role they play in Broxtowe's community and cultural offering, as well as encouraging local people to support our local businesses.

Civic Office

The Civic Office, supported by the wider Communications, Cultural and Civic Services Team have delivered a number of successful events since the last Council meeting.

This included the fantastic Broxtowe Volunteer Awards, which saw local people recognised for the significant contribution they make to the local community across eight award categories. The awards were attended by over 140 people and also raised more than £400 for the Broxtowe Community Fund.

Remembrance Services took place across the Borough organised by Town and Parish Councils and partners. In Beeston, the Council delivered another well-attended service which was a befitting tribute to all those who have lost their lives for our country.

Arrangements are now underway for the upcoming Freeman and Aldermen Ceremony at Eastwood Hall on 24 January and the Holocaust Memorial Event on 26 January at Bramcote Hills Park.

Human Resources Update

Broxtowe won the Diversity and Inclusion Award at the Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Apprenticeship Awards, and this was collected on the Council's behalf by Charlotte Nicholls, HR and Apprenticeships Officer.

National Pay Award Negotiations

The 2022/23 Local Government Pay Award was agreed and will be implemented in December's salary for employees up to Head of Service level. The increase is a flat £1925 on each point of the pay band (pro-rated for part-time employees).

Learning and Development

The HR Manager continues to deliver a Coaching and Mentoring Programme to a small number of Senior Managers looking for career development coaching. This follows a successful programme delivered throughout 2022 to six Heads of Service. The coaching programme is available to any Senior Managers or aspiring Managers for the future and delivered on a 121 basis, bespoke to the individuals' needs. The Learning and Development Team has arranged an Institute of Leadership and Management Level 5 course for 14 employees, beginning in January. This will be delivered on site and will develop employees in Leadership and Management.