

Report to the Council

Subject: Finance and Technology Portfolio

Date: 5 November 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Stavrou

Recommending:

That the report of the Finance & Technology Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

The meeting of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on 19 September received the annual Financial Issues Paper to start the budget process for 2014/15. Whilst the Council is still in a strong financial position the size of the challenges ahead has increased substantially. The Paper set out in detail the position on grant funding, the top slicing of the New Homes Bonus and the state of our income streams. This combination of factors has increased the net savings target in the Medium Term Financial Strategy from £1.3 million to £2.3 million over the next four years.

Members have already seen several reports come to Cabinet which improve our revenue position and many other ideas will be evaluated through the budget process. However, as a Cabinet we do not have a monopoly on good ideas and so there is an open invitation for all Members to discuss any ideas on savings with myself or the Director of Finance & ICT.

Benefits

The results of the consultation on the Council's scheme for Local Council Tax Support for 2014/15 are still being analysed and will be reported to Cabinet on 2 December. I anticipate that the scheme for 2014/15 will be very similar to that for 2013/14, with more significant changes likely to follow in 2015/16.

Despite the increase in workload arising from the Welfare Reforms, the Benefits Service continues to perform well and has exceeded the performance targets at the end of the second quarter. The performance figures on processing new claims in the second quarter show the fourth consecutive quarter of improvement. During the second quarter new claims were processed on average in 25.59 days, compared to a target of 30 days, which is the best performance since the fourth quarter of 2010/11.

Performance on processing changes of circumstance was also good, with the figure of 8.23 days being below the target of 10 days and showing an improvement on the first quarter. During the first quarter performance in the Investigations and Interventions Team was affected by sickness but I am pleased to report that the Team have worked hard to recover that shortfall and are now back on target.

Revenues

The Revenues Service has also put in a strong performance in the second quarter. At the end of September in-year Council Tax collection was at 52.27% which is

above the target of 51.87%. Although this is slightly down on the figure of 52.53% at this time last year, due to the change to Local Council Tax Support.

For Non-Domestic Rates, the headline performance is 0.13% lower than at this time last year which has improved from quarter one being 1% behind. However, the indicator only includes in-year collection and collections for earlier years have been particularly successful. If the overall collection position is considered the trend is actually 0.5% up on last year.

Performance Management

(a) Key Performance Indicators 2013/14

Key performance indicators (KPI) provide an opportunity for the Council to focus attention on specific areas for improvement, and how opportunities will be exploited and better outcomes delivered.

The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel will review progress against the achievement of KPI targets for the second-quarter (30 June to 30 September 2013) of the year, at its meeting on 12 November 2013.

A number of KPIs are used as performance measures for the Council's key objectives for each year. Improvement plans have been developed for each KPI, identifying actions to achieve target performance, which have been agreed by the Management Board.

(b) Key Objectives 2013/14

The key objectives adopted each year focus on national priorities set by the Government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the district. The objectives represent the Council's high-level initiatives and over-arching goals for each year.

Second-quarter progress against specific actions intended to deliver the key objectives for 2013/14 will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (26 November 2013) and the Cabinet (2 December 2013).

Technology

(a) Telephone switch replacement project

The pilot within ICT and rollout to some of the Councils' remote service locations has been completed satisfactorily. The project is continuing with the Revenues and Benefits sections, which will begin moving over to the new system during the week commencing 4 November.

(b) Wireless coverage

Following a competitive tendering exercise, an order has now been placed with the successful supplier, Aerohive. In liaison with Facilities Management, cabling for the

wireless access points is also being progressed. It is still anticipated that full wireless coverage of the Civic Offices will be achieved by the end of this financial year.

(c) Mobile working trial

The next stage of this project heavily involves the Planning Directorate. A working party consisting of Planning and ICT staff has been created and potential hardware solutions identified. The hardware has been ordered and once received will be evaluated in a mobile working environment.

(d) Contract renegotiations

ICT are currently investigating the renegotiation of a number of contracts. Initial indications are that cost savings can be achieved by consolidating individual contracts and re-examining some of the terms.

(e) Member connectivity & email

A survey has been emailed to all Members to help establish people's requirements for Council provided ICT facilities. ICT will present the findings back to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel once the returned information has been collated. It would be helpful if everyone could complete and return the questionnaire promptly to enable ICT to establish the most appropriate solutions.