

Report to the Council

Subject: Finance and Technology Portfolio

Date: 20 February 2014

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Stavrou

Recommending:

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

Accountancy

This is always a very busy time of year for the Accountancy Service with the work to compile the budget and produce a variety of reports to the many meetings that consider the budget. As there is a separate report on the budget I will not say anything more about it here.

Benefits

The quarter three position on the key performance indicators will be considered at the March meeting of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, but I will take this opportunity to give a brief update. New claim processing shows an improvement for the third quarter running. The current average time taken on a new claim is now 23.44 days, which is significantly ahead of the target of 30 days. The other processing indicator is for changes of circumstance. These are also showing an improving trend and are currently at 8.07 days, compared to a target of 10 days.

We also have key performance indicators for our work on benefit fraud and these are showing a mixed picture. By the end of the third quarter we were hoping to have completed 225 investigations but the actual number is only 203. This is as a result of staff turnover and one member of the team having a serious illness. However, on the positive side the work that has been completed has yielded better results than we had hoped. There is a target that fraud should be proven in 30% of the cases investigated but we have proven fraud in 44% of cases.

Revenues

Having touched on fraud above, this is an issue that affects Council Tax as well as Benefits. A particular area of concern is the abuse of single person discounts and Audit Commission studies have shown this to be a problem across the whole country. We are pro-active in trying to address this problem and use an organisation called Datatank to assist us. In the last year this work has resulted in the removal of 664 discount awards which has generated additional income in excess of £250,000.

The key performance indicators at the end of quarter three are positive for both Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates. At the end of December the in-year collection rate for Council Tax was 77.55% which was slightly ahead of the target of 76.90%. Similarly, Non-Domestic Rates is also ahead of the target of 81.88% with 82.66% having been collected.

Performance Management

Key Performance Indicators

As I mentioned above, third quarter performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for 2013/14 will be reported to the next cycle of meetings of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee and Scrutiny Panel.

The continued relevance of the KPI set for each year is reviewed at the end of the third quarter of each preceding year, and this exercise has therefore recently commenced for 2014/15. In order to address recommendations made by the National Audit Office following the completion of a process management review in late 2013, a 're-balancing' of KPIs of different kinds is currently being investigated, in order to focus relevant indicators on quality considerations. Performance targets for the KPIs for 2014/15 are currently being developed, and will be also considered by the Cabinet Committee at its next meeting.

Key Objectives

Third quarter progress against the Council's key objectives for 2013/14, will be reported to the next meetings of the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The objectives reflect national and local priorities and specific service challenges, and provide a statement of the authority's priorities for the year.

Draft key objectives for 2014/15 are currently being developed. The proposed objectives will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting, prior to adoption by the Cabinet on 7 April 2014. Once agreed, the key objectives will be published on the Council's website as a supplement to the current Corporate Plan and quarterly progress will be reported throughout the year.

Technology

Telephone switch replacement project

The majority of new phones are now on desks awaiting activation and configuration. Unfortunately, due to the sickness of a crucial member of the network team, completion of the project is likely to slip into the new financial year. There were problems earlier this month with an equipment failure that temporarily affected some calls but these were promptly dealt with and normal service was resumed.

Wireless coverage

Wireless access to the Local Area Network commenced in early February and this will soon be followed by access to the public and Member connection. Members will be advised through the Bulletin when this connection is available for use.