

# ***Report to the Council***

**Subject: Finance, Performance Management & Corporate Support Services**

**Date: 18 December 2007**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor C Whitbread**

**Item: 7(f)**

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Finance, Performance Management & Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **Local Housing Allowance**

Members will be aware from the recent article in the Bulletin that the Local Housing Allowance is being introduced from 1 April next year, but that the 'Broad Rental Market Areas' (BRMA's) are already starting to have some impact. The Local Housing Allowance rates across the District are likely to be lower than the rent levels that we have been using for assessing Housing Benefit and, in the case of Epping Town, the rent levels will be significantly lower. Officers from the Benefits Division have been liaising with Citizens Advice Bureaux and have placed additional information on the Council's website.

The Housing Benefit scheme and the Local Housing Allowance are statutory schemes for the authority and we have no choice but to operate these schemes. It is intended to publicise the Local Housing Allowance extensively once the BRMA's and rates are confirmed. However, if concerned individuals contact Members in the meantime they should contact the Director of Finance and ICT or the Assistant Head of Finance.

## **Use of Resources**

The Council has received a draft report on the external auditors Use of Resources Judgements 2007. The Use of Resources (UoR) assessment evaluates how well the Council manages its resources. The assessment is carried out each year and focuses on the importance of strategic financial management, sound governance and effective financial reporting arrangements.

In the previous two years the Council has been assessed as a 2 – "Only at minimum requirements – adequate performance". Whilst the current scores are still subject to the external auditors quality control review, they are encouraging, as the Council's score has increased to a 3 – "Consistently above minimum requirements – performing well".

The external auditor will present the final version of the report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 30 January.

## **Budget for 2008/09**

The budget is still being drafted and will continue to be amended and updated as the estimates for each area of the Council's activities are finalised. However, it is possible at this time to confirm that the budget will be contained within the Continuing Services Budget ceiling for 2008/09 of £17.3M and that the increase in Council Tax will be below the rate of increase in the Retail Prices Index.

Figures are still awaited on the grant settlement for the next three years. If these figures are available before 18 December an update will be provided.