

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 27 July 2010

Subject: Finance and Economic Development Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Chris Whitbread

Item: 6(d)

Recommending:

That the report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

The Government continue to make announcements about a number of projects and services and officers are working to evaluate the impacts of these. However, until the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review are made public in the autumn we will not have clarity over our revenue grants for the next four years. Against this background of uncertainty officers have started modelling a number of scenarios that will be reported as part of the Financial Issues Paper to the next meeting of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee.

Benefits

Members may have seen the press coverage of the largest benefit fraud prosecution the district has undertaken. Over a period of more than ten years a couple had fraudulently obtained £130,000 in benefit payments. The operation to investigate their activities involved close working with other agencies and the police. Initially the couple entered not guilty pleas but faced with the quantity and quality of evidence our officers had amassed they changed their pleas to guilty. The husband was sentenced to thirty months imprisonment and the wife received a twelve month suspended sentence and 150 hours of community service.

I hope this acts as a strong deterrent to other would be fraudsters and would like to congratulate our investigators who have again demonstrated their high level of professionalism and dedication in bringing this couple to justice.

Revenues

The first quarter collection statistics for both Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates show slight improvements on last year. This is very pleasing given the ongoing difficult economic circumstances and I would like to thank the staff in Revenues as I know they are facing increasing hostility and have to deal with some very challenging circumstances.

Economic Development

The District's six Town Centre Partnerships, with the help of the Town Centres Officer, are continuing to promote their town centres with several seeking to progress their partnerships into a new phase with business and marketing plans aimed at increasing their effectiveness.

The Economic Development section has provided a Local Economic Assessment to the County Council to enable its drafting of the County-wide Economic Assessment. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill placed a new duty on county councils and unitary authorities to conduct an Economic Assessment. The evidence collated in producing the Assessment will be used to inform a new county-wide economic development strategy (with a working name of the Integrated County Strategy) in late 2010.

Economic Development is continuing to work with Harlow and Uttlesford, as an M11 Corridor grouping to deliver a programme of work to EEDA. This comprises quarterly economic intelligence reports so EEDA is better able to understand what is happening on the ground locally and the development and delivery of an advocacy plan to ensure promotion of the key issues locally as well as our key priorities etc.