

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 March 2011

Subject: Finance and Economic Development Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor C Whitbread

Item: 6(d)

Recommending:

That the report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio

Holder be noted

Accountancy

There are some key issues where we are still waiting for final confirmation from the Department for Communities and Local Government. It is anticipated that the amount of New Homes Bonus we are to receive in 2011/12 will be confirmed during April. However, the amount of debt that the Council will be required to take on as part of the reform of the Housing Revenue Account, and the effect this will have on the General Fund, is unlikely to be confirmed until the Autumn.

The recent meetings of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel and the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee were updated on the probable outturn for 2010/11. When the original estimates for 2010/11 were revised it was anticipated that the planned use of reserves would reduce from £544,000 to £309,000 and the outturn should be in line with this figure.

Benefits

The performance data for the third quarter was reported to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel on 10 March. Despite increases in caseload and the number of documents being processed performance has continued to improve. New claims are now being processed on average in 23.45 days. This is an improvement of more than 10 days against last year's figure of 34.81 days and is inside the target of 25 days. Changes of circumstance are now being processed in 8.92 days and this continues the improving trend from the first quarter of 10.67 days and the second quarter of 9.39 days. The target of processing changes in an average of 8 days should be achieved before the year end.

Revenues

Collecting local taxes remains an extremely challenging activity. At the end of the third quarter 77.94% of Council Tax had been collected. This is slightly behind the quarter three figure for last year of 78.44% but it is still anticipated that the target for the 2010/11 of 97.8% will be achieved. Conversely, Non-Domestic Rate collection is slightly ahead of last year's third quarter performance (81.64% v 81.25%). However, it is likely that performance for the year will fall slightly short of the target of 98%.

Sickness Absence

This is a subject that is more usually commented on by the Performance Management Portfolio Holder but, in view of the report presented to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel on 10 March, I felt it appropriate to highlight the figures for the Directorate of Finance and ICT. The figures at the end of the third quarter show a reduction in average absence for the Council as a whole from 6.19 days in 2009/10 to 5.84 days in 2010/11. Within these overall figures the Directorate of Finance and ICT has the lowest level of sickness of the five service directorates with an average of only 3.75 days absence.

North Weald Airfield

The Halcrow report was considered by the North Weald Airfield and Asset Management Cabinet Committee at its meeting held on the 22nd. I will provide Members with an update of the outcome of that meeting and any recommendations put forward for Cabinet to consider at its meeting on the 18th of April.