

Report to the Council

Subject: Finance and Technology Portfolio

Date: 17 December 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Stavrou

Recommending:

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

Accountancy

The publication deadline for this agenda requires this report to be written before the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 5 December and the date of the meeting itself is before our grant figures are likely to be confirmed. Recent economic data has been more encouraging but it is unlikely that we will see any easing of the funding reductions for local government. If there is either something of particular significance in the Autumn Statement or our grant figures appear earlier than anticipated I will provide an oral update.

The Accountancy section is always busy at this time of year working on the budget and this year they have the added complication of producing the budget in the new four directorate structure. In order to get a budget in the new structure in the available time it will be necessary to make some broad assumptions and allocations. These will need to be revisited once the structure has settled down and the various service reviews have been concluded.

Benefits

Later on the agenda we have the Council's scheme for Local Council Tax Support for 2014/15. This is similar to the scheme that has been in place for 2013/14. As the current scheme appears to be working well so far, Cabinet on 2 December decided against any significant changes. When we come to consider the scheme for 2015/16 we will be looking at the possibility of a residency qualification and, given the likely further reductions in grant, options for reducing the overall cost of the scheme.

Revenues

Also at Cabinet on 2 December, the previous in principle decision to enter a pool for business rates for 2014/15 was confirmed. Not all of the eligible authorities in Essex decided to join the pool but ten have. The outcomes from the pool will be determined by how the economies of the participating districts perform during 2014/15. If current economic trends continue there should be some growth within the pool. Although it is worth highlighting that the financial modelling undertaken shows a benefit in excess of £2 million across the pool even with zero growth. Our share could be approximately £100,000 but as this is not certain and we always take a prudent view on potential income it will not be included in the budget for 2014/15.

Performance Management

Key Objectives 2013/14 & 2014/15

Mid-year progress against the Council's key objectives for 2013/14, was reported to the recent meetings of Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The objectives reflect national and local priorities, specific service challenges, and provide a statement of the authority's plans for the year.

Initial proposals for key objectives for 2014/15 are being developed by Directors and Portfolio Holders, and these will be considered at a joint meeting of Cabinet Members and Management Board on 11 December 2013. The key objectives will be formally considered by the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, early in 2014.

Key Performance Indicators 2013/14

The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel has recently reviewed six-month performance for the key performance indicators adopted for 2013/14.

The position with regard to the achievement of target performance for the KPIs at the end of the first six months (1 April to 30 September 2013) of the year, was as follows:

- (a) 26 (74.3%) indicators achieved the second quarter performance target; and
- (b) 9 (25.7%) indicators did not achieve the second quarter performance target, although 5 (55.5%) of these KPI performed within an agreed tolerance for the indicator.

Cumulative KPI performance reports for the third quarter of the year will be considered by the Scrutiny Panel in March 2014, alongside proposals for KPIs for 2014/15, which will be developed with the key objectives for the next year.

Technology

Telephone switch replacement project

Implementation is well underway and around 20% of staff have been trained and are using the new system. Feedback has been very positive and it is still anticipated that the project will be completed by the end of the financial year.

Wireless coverage

This project will allow site wide, secure wireless access to Council systems and to the internet. The cabling of the Civic Offices for the wireless access points has commenced and will be completed before Christmas. The access points and control centre software have been configured and it is anticipated that the system will be live shortly after cabling has been completed.

Internet connection upgrade

The upgrade to the 30Mb fibre connection has been completed and the old connection terminated. This higher speed connection has been implemented at no extra cost to the Council.

Mobile working trial

Staff from the Planning Directorate are now working with a variety of mobile devices. ICT staff are accompanying them during various times in their working day to offer assistance in the best use of the device and to help establish the most suitable solution. Feedback will be monitored for future mobile working solutions within other Directorates.