

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK**

**DATE: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

### **HR – WORKFORCE REDUCTIONS UPDATE**

Work has progressed on the delivery of the budget reduction programme for 2013/14 agreed by Finance Council and to date 608 staff have been placed 'at risk of redundancy'. The HR team and managers across the Council have been working hard to reduce the impact of these reductions on staff where possible. There have been a wide range of interventions deployed to review and amend the way the Council delivers its services, commonly referred to as re-modelling. These activities have also maximised ER/VR (early retirement and/or voluntary redundancy) opportunities with 105 employees leaving the service in these circumstances, the ending of fixed term contracts where practicable and provision of redeployment opportunities across services. Currently the number of staff remaining 'at risk of redundancy' has reduced to 117 as at 13<sup>th</sup> September 2013. It is likely however that this number will increase again when the delivery of the 2014/15 agreed savings plans progress to the next stage of consultation later in the year.

Although the Council has successfully delivered the removal of large numbers of staff from 'at risk' status, sadly 31 employees have been dismissed as compulsory redundant.

### **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

There has been, as expected, an increase in recovery documentation issued to Council Tax Support recipients since April 2013. At present we have issued an additional 11,241 reminders and 3,060 summonses compared to previous years. The Council will now be using a debt collection agency for debts of low value.

The approach to recovering arrears of Council Tax Support arrears will be to follow the current procedure by first seeking a Deduction from Benefit or Earnings, or an agreement of a payment arrangement with the debtor for these small debts. If this is unsuccessful, the arrears will be issued to a debt collection agent. This will involve the issuing of letters and telephone calls to the debtors to arrange repayment of the arrears. This approach will mean that no additional costs will be added to the accounts or incurred by the debtor for small debts. The Council will continue to instruct bailiffs where large amounts are outstanding.

### **WELFARE REFORM**

The Council has continued to manage the impact of the under occupancy of social landlord properties and welfare cap legislation. To date there has been good co-ordination between a number of departments in the Council and the housing associations affected. A number of additional applications for

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) have been processed for customers who have requested additional help with the subsequent reduction in Housing Benefit.

A breakdown of the decisions and awards is detailed below:

Number of applications received from 1/4/13 to 19/8/13 - 518

Number of applications awarded from 1/4/13 to 19/8/13 - 374

Number of applications declined from 1/4/13 to 19/8/13 - 144

Total amount of fund committed until 31/3/14 £175,138

Of the 374 applications that were successful and awarded additional support:

284 have been awarded as a direct result of the under occupation legislation;  
7 have been awarded as a direct result of the Welfare Cap legislation;  
83 have been awarded as a result of other legitimate reasons.

### **UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE**

Because of the difficulties government is experiencing, the proposed national roll out of Universal Credit in October 2013 has now been replaced with a phased approach. The number of pilot areas will be increased from October 2013.

### **IT UPDATE**

Following the launch of the new website, work is continuing with improvements to the online facilities available to residents, with the aim of improving the service and reducing costs.

Improvements include some Environment Services functions and a self-service Council Tax and Benefits function.

At the end of June, ITM&G took on responsibility for providing support to the borough's BSF schools until at least the end of the 2013/14 academic year. The transition of support has gone very well with a number of schools complimenting the team on its performance and thanking staff for their efforts.