

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

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

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

**DATE: 26 June 2014**

### **HR & Legal Services - Registrars**

The Service recently submitted its Annual Performance Report and the high quality of service achieved by the local authority during the past year have been noted by the General Registration Office (GRO). They noted in particular our excellent attainment against the two key performance targets, the consistently good timeliness of registrations, which are above both the regional and national averages and our continuing improvements in staff training and development.

The GRO has congratulated the Service on its performance and achievements this year.

### **Welfare Reform - Universal Credit Update**

The Council has received an update from the Department of Work and Pensions that identifies Blackburn with Darwen BC as a phase 2 local authority for Universal Credit roll out. Whilst no exact date has been specified, it is expected that from autumn 2014 all new claims for single people and couples, where no Housing costs are required will be made under the new benefit called Universal Credit.

The management of the implementation and introduction of Universal Credit within the Borough will be overseen by the Welfare Reform Programme Board. One of the first elements of the communications plan will be to conduct workshops and presentations with members over this issue.

### **Changes to Business Rates**

#### **Retail Rate relief for properties with a rateable value of below £50,000.**

As detailed in the previous Council Forum update a new relief has been introduced for the financial years 2014-15 and 2015-16. This new relief allows some Business Rate payers to receive relief of up to £1,000. This relief can be allowed to shops, restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments that have a rateable value of below £50,000.

Due to the lateness of the Government announcement and the subsequent delay in receiving the software upgrade, the relief has only recently been awarded with amended bills issued to all qualifying businesses within May.

## **Introduction of text message reminders for Council Tax arrears**

To contact Council Tax payers earlier over non-payment of instalments, the Council will introduce text messages. Where the Council holds mobile telephone numbers on its records, and the individual has not paid the instalment at the required time, a text message will be issued in early July 2014.

It is hoped that the introduction of text messages will reduce the number of paper reminders we currently send and earlier reminders will hopefully assist in helping customers to avoid incurring additional costs.

## **IT Update**

ITM&G continue to support colleagues across the council, implementing new and upgraded systems. The new customer portal which was mentioned in the previous report is proving very popular: since its launch, 895 citizens have created accounts for themselves and we have had 3568 forms submitted electronically, including 684 citizens who have applied to pay their council tax by direct debit, 608 citizens who have applied for Beez cards and 452 citizens who have applied for recycling centre permits.

In addition, the following business led projects are close to completion: a new customer contact centre telephony solution has been installed and tested, and users are now being trained; a new Youth Offending Information System has been implemented and tested, the project should be complete by mid-June; the IT elements of the Davyfield road redevelopment; a major upgrade of the Flare system; corporate and public Wi-Fi Access across the core council sites; a major upgrade of the Leisure Management System.

The following business systems will be going live in the next few months: the new Adult Social Care System; the new Library Management System; new waste management system; the first phase of the new HR and Payroll system; a second Internet connection to improve overall capacity and resilience. The project to redesign and redevelop the corporate wide area network is progressing well and the procurement process should be completed by September.