

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

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

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

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### **Human Resources**

As this report is being written, (mid Jan), the modernisation of our HR & Payroll system is progressing well. To make savings in the costs of support and administration, Resourcelink, the Council's new HR system is going live this month to pay employees. Following our go-live date, we will start to roll out employee and manager self-service, which will start with employees being able to view their payslip on-line and change personal details such as address, bank details. This will be followed by on line recruitment from February 2015 and workforce development and health & safety modules with full manager and employee self-service in place by March 2016.

### **Corporate Services**

To help meet budget targets for 15/16 a new 'Corporate Services' division has been created which will sit alongside existing HR and Legal Services responsibilities under David Fairclough. Corporate Services merges PR, digital engagement, both democratic services teams (executive and scrutiny), Chief Executive's and directorate business support as well as administration of the Police and Crime Panel. These responsibilities will sit under a single Head of Corporate Services role, delivering savings of £275k for 15/16. Further reviews will take place across these service areas to maximise the opportunities for closer working and identify opportunities to deliver further savings for 16/17.

### **Legal Services**

Emergency cover arrangements were implemented for Registrars and Legal Services over the Christmas/New year close down period. There were no major issues other than a higher level of death registrations which is unfortunately usual over the winter months.

### **Budget setting 2015-16**

Detailed work is ongoing across the finance teams to build up and finalise the 2015-16 budget in the Councils management information system following the decisions taken at Council Forum on 25 September 2014.

## **Local Government Finance Settlement 2015/16**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the main elements of the local government finance settlement for 2015/16 on 19th December. Unfortunately, this broadly confirmed the indicative figures published last year which saw continuing reductions in the level of government funding received by the Council, which will be approx £100k+ worse than we thought. The figures for specific grants and business rates are being worked through and the final budget proposals and council tax for 2015/16 will be agreed at Finance Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

The coalition government has not produced any local authority information for 2016/17 or beyond although we will continue to review and revise our forecasts as any other information on projected levels of public sector spending become available. It remains very likely that we will have to make further savings in the coming years in line with the forecasts in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

## **Welfare Reform – Universal Credit**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commenced the roll out of Universal Credit in the borough on 24th November. Currently this is limited to new claims from single people and couples who meet the DWP criteria for this stage of the rollout. Up to week ending 2nd Jan there are 130 claimants on Universal Credit in Blackburn with Darwen and the vast majority are single. However, only a very small number of these have a housing benefit impact.

## **IT Update**

ITM&G continue to support colleagues across the council, implementing new and upgraded systems. The new customer portal continues to be popular with citizens: since its launch, over 2,300 accounts have been created and we have had over 12,000 forms submitted electronically, with Beez Card applications, Council Tax Change of Address and Direct Debit requests the top 3 transactions. Work continues to develop the portal to include more environmental services as well as replace the current outdated waste management system, the testing of which continues.

As mentioned earlier, following an intensive testing period, the new payroll system will go live. The Wide Area Network (WAN) project continues and the first services have started to be delivered. A new contact centre telephony solution based on the Voice over IP (VoIP) technology has also been completed, providing additional flexibility to manage the contact centre and allow the council to deliver service improvements across its core sites.

The project to implement Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) for the libraries inventory has now reached the testing phase and is on track for completion by end of March. The project will enable self-service across the libraries.