

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
EXEC DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK
DATE: 23rd April 2015**

Income project

50 teams have now gone live with improved income collection solutions which expand the ability to take card payments and streamline the capture of transaction data. Over £1 million has now been processed through these improved methods. The remaining 17 teams will transfer during April 2015. Procedures are being developed that will enable direct processing of bank credits, releasing further efficiencies. Other services are also considering income collection via the internet in line with the Council's digital first programme.

Budget setting 2015-16

Elected members set a balanced budget for 15/16 at the meeting of the Finance Council on Monday, March 2. Many of the savings decisions were taken at the September Council Forum meeting. The method of closing the funding gap that existed for 2015/16 at that stage was identified without having to return to services for further reductions. Departments are working with resources colleagues on the detail of savings plans for April implementation and as is our usual practice, close monitoring of progress will be undertaken during 15/16.

Financial Services Review

Review and restructuring of the Financial Services team to deliver a fit for purpose service and the agreed savings for 2015/16 is underway. This has commenced with a revised and reduced Head of Service structure across Resources and the appointment of two HoS in Finance. Staff consultations on the proposed structure will begin in April 2015.

IT Update

The Council continue to look to deliver improved access to services and financial efficiencies through new systems including HR which is now being rolled out to Departments, Adult Social care systems and the IT in the new Blackburn Sports and Leisure Centre. Improvements to the Wide Area Network are underway to update all the links to all corporate and schools sites (approximately 106 of which 5 are implemented and the programme is gathering pace). The new customer portal referenced previously continue to prove popular, since its launch, 2,908 citizens have created accounts for themselves and we have had over 15,000 forms submitted electronically. The most popular forms are Beez card, council tax direct debit, council tax change of address and household waste permits.

Registrars

Following significant preparation, the Immigration Act 2014 was smoothly implemented by our Registrars Team on Monday 2 March 2015 this includes new sham marriage provisions with a Referral and Investigation Scheme.

Legal

The Council has now signed and sealed an agreement under section 75 of the National Health Services Act 2006 ("the Section 75 Agreement") with NHS Blackburn with Darwen Clinical Commissioning Group ("the CCG") to formalise the partnership arrangements in relation to the Better Care Fund and for health and social care integration, as approved by Executive Board in February of this year.

Corporate Resources

From 1 April the new Corporate Services structure will be in place covering Communications, Democratic Services and Business Support. The department will be working across other programme areas developing key priority areas such as digital first, image and branding and income generation. The business support function will provide efficient multi-skilled support for managers and teams to allow them to focus on the council's key priority areas and improve internal processes. The department is managed by the head of corporate services and will report into Director of HR, Legal and Corporate Services.

Universal Credit

The roll out of Universal Credit has recently expanded from new single and couple claimants to new claims from families. All existing legacy claimants will continue with their existing benefits until the DWP begins the migration to Universal Credit, timing to be confirmed.

At the beginning of March the number of people within Blackburn with Darwen in receipt of Universal Credit is 443 of which there are 3 families, the remaining 440 claimants are either single or a couple.

The Council is committed to supporting residents in the borough and a new support agreement between BwD and the DWP for the coming financial year is being considered. The purpose of this agreement is to help claimants within Blackburn with Darwen to access Universal Credit (on-line) and to help claimants to manage a monthly budget (Personal Budgeting Support). In the past month we have received our first few direct referrals for Universal Support from the DWP for the reconnection of gas, electric and food as well as debt advice.

Recent initiatives have included a staff and partner training course to keep services up to date with the changes, helping services to manage these additional pressures cost effectively. We have also identified the supported and exempt accommodation across the borough as defined by the Housing legislation and have written to relevant landlords.