

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

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

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

**1 October 2015**

### **Financial Services update**

The Council's Financial Services Team has now been completely restructured to generate over £600,000 of savings as part of the 3 Year Council Wide Savings Programme agreed in September 2014.

Work has now begun to review and refine the Medium Term Financial Strategy working through the impact of information received since the election of the new government in May and the Emergency budget in July. The team are now modelling through the impact of various assumptions in relation to potential changes in Council funding and the impact this would have in anticipation of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Comprehensive Spending Review expected later this year.

### **Capita Partnership review**

The Council and Capita continue to work together towards the end of the current partnership next summer. This includes making appropriate arrangements for the transfer of Accounts Payable, Account Receivable, Revenues and Benefits services back to the Council during the next 9 months.

Arrangements for re-procuring other services are also now underway and a successful bidders day was held in August for companies with a potential interest in delivering services prior to the issue of the OJEU notice later that month.

### **Welfare Reform**

The Welfare Reform legislation proposed by the Government following the budget has now been reviewed in full. The changes outlined in the act do impact a broad spectrum of welfare including housing benefits, annual increases of working age welfare payments and tax credits. In the matter of the reduction in the welfare cap from £26,000 to £20,000 the Benefits Service has undertaken a review of the Housing Benefit caseload and has identified that over 300 households could be affected by this change.

Whilst the impact of these changes cannot be fully quantified, the Council will be working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions to understand the welfare reform programme and its impact on residents of the Borough. Further updates will be issued once key dates and milestones have been established.

## **IT Update**

The Council has been reviewing its public access IT provision, including both PC's available for public use to access Council information and services online and for training purposes, and the provision of public wi-fi in some Council buildings. This will be rolled out once the business case for funding has formally been approved.

## **Legal Update**

The Council's litigation team has successfully prosecuted 24 cases over the last 3 months. These matters included planning enforcement, environmental protection issues, non-attendance at school and underage sale of fireworks.

Squatters who occupied a council owned property at Blakey Moor last month were evicted within 7 days when Legal Services obtained an immediate full possession order. The court would normally make an interim order followed by a full possession order some days or weeks later therefore this was a speedy outcome. As this was a commercial property the process was more complex but the case was fully conducted in house.

Social Media training sessions were delivered in August for elected members by the Head of Legal Services and our Media and Events Manager. This focussed on our new social media guidance which the Standards Committee recently recommended for approval. The training will assist members in using social media effectively, whilst avoiding common legal pitfalls. A further session will be planned for next month. Legal Framework for Fostering' training to foster carers was also delivered by Legal Services on 1 June, attended by approximately 25 foster carers.

The Council's RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) policy has recently been updated, setting ground rules for surveillance in connection with social media surveillance thereby protecting the Council from potential Human Rights claims and adverse reports from the Surveillance commissioner. Training on the policy changes is being provided to relevant officers.

## **Gov Delivery**

A new service information and engagement system is being piloted which enables citizens to sign up to receive information from the Council which is of interest to them. The information can be sent in various digital formats. It acts as an automated news and information service, enabling the Council to move to an effective on line Shuttle and improving access to a wide range of information. Some early promotion has taken place and new categories/subjects will be added. Citizens can sign up via the Council website:

[https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKBLACKBURN/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=UKBLACKBURN\\_24](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKBLACKBURN/subscriber/new?topic_id=UKBLACKBURN_24)

This project is part of the wider Council drive to improve effectiveness and make efficiencies through the use of a 'Digital First' approach to service delivery.