

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

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

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

**DATE: 3 December 2015**

### **Finance Update**

The Council, and by definition our residents, are facing significant challenges both in this financial year and moving forward into 2016/17 and beyond; the forecast funding gaps for 2016/17 and 2017/18 reported to Finance Council in March 2015 of £12.7 million and £13.2 million respectively are set to increase; these are in addition to the £26m savings proposals already agreed for 2015-16 by Council in September 2014.

A thorough review of the 2015/16 financial position for each portfolio at the half yearly point has been undertaken to assess;

- their likely outturn at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016,
- their progress against the 3 Year Saving Programme approved by Council back in September 2014 and
- and gauge the impact of identified cost pressures into future years, particularly those in Adult Social Care as identified in the latest Corporate Budget Monitoring Report.

Whilst the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Comprehensive Spending Review on 25th November provides an outline of the future funding landscape for local government, we now await our local settlement, due to be issued by Christmas, to understand the implications of the detail behind this. However in advance of this, work has been underway to refine and remodel the Medium Term Financial Strategy with updated assumptions in relation to areas such as future funding, inflation rates, cost of finance projections and the impact of the Growth Strategy on the Council Tax and Business Rates base. Indications are that the forecast funding gaps noted above are set to significantly increase over the next 3 to 4 years. This will be a separate report to Council.

### **Capita Partnership review**

Following further discussions, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable and Cash Collection services are on target to transfer back to the Council in early January 2016. In addition, arrangements are progressing for the transfer of Revenues and Benefits services back to the Council during April 2016. New arrangements for design and print services are also being procured which will enable local firms to provide services to the Council.

### **Town Hall Accommodation Improvements**

As a result of our decision to bring in house the revenues and benefits service, and to improve Customer Service delivery, there will be several changes taking place in the customer focussed areas at the front of the Town Hall over the next 4 months;

- the Collecting Hall space within the Town Hall will have extensive work undertaken over the next 4 months to allow for the relocation of the Registrars service. From March 2016 all face to face customer interaction for this service will be provided from the Town Hall, whilst provision for wedding ceremonies will remain at the Northgate facility in King Georges Hall.

- in addition to the Collecting Hall, as more transactions are performed online and by telephone, the customer appointment desk will be replaced with a smaller facility which will allow the Contact Centre to be located close to the front desk. This change will allow for the multi-skilling of all Customer Service staff and provide for the flexibility of using resources across all aspects of the service and improve services to customers.

## **Audit & Assurance**

At its September meeting the Audit Committee approved the approach for the Peer Review of the Internal Audit Team, as part of its requirements to comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The review was carried out by Chief Internal Audit colleagues from three North West Authorities in late November.

## **Legal Services**

An interactive question and answer session was recently held in the Council Chamber with His Honour Judge Rawkins. This was well attended by both the Council's legal social care team and by social workers. Under the umbrella of the Local Family Justice Board, this innovative approach to working in partnership is aimed at improving safeguarding outcomes in the borough for children and families.

Our litigation team secured a £15,000 fine against Little Italy Cuisine Ltd. This prosecution was taken under section 179 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for tarmacking over a large part of countryside.

A Public Space Protection Order was obtained to deal with large gangs of youths throwing fireworks on Bonfire Night in the Bastwell Area. PSPO's are designed to stop individuals or groups committing anti-social behaviour in a public space. This power forms part of the tools and powers available to the Council under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The new tools and powers were approved by the Council Executive in August 2015.

As part of the multi-disciplinary partnership team involved in bringing about the Cathedral Quarter developments, the Legal Property Team have facilitated the Council sale of the long leasehold interest in the office block at Cathedral Quarter to Legal & General and taking back a 25 year lease from them. The Premier Inn has now also opened for business. This recent progress will bring a number of economic benefits to the borough.

## **Civil Contingencies**

Civil Contingencies provide annual Elected Members awareness training. This year's event was hosted on the 21 November 2015. Fifteen Elected Members attended and were given a refresher on their role in an emergency, what Council Officers and Management roles are in an emergency and how the two link together. They were given re-assurance around where they can access confirmed information in times of emergency and were asked to confirm any media messages before sharing with the community to ensure a consistent message and co-ordinated response. The session finished with a discussion on identifying real and perceived risks in the community so that the Blackburn with Darwen Community Risk Register could be as realistic as possible.