

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 21 July 2016

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: DENISE PARK**

Finance

The Finance Team have closed down the 2015/16 accounts and our external Auditors, Grant Thornton are now auditing our statutory accounts. The outturn position was reported to Executive Board earlier this month.

The team have now commenced procurement of a replacement Finance System for the Council. The current system has been in use now for over 15 years and has reached the end of its useful life; a new system will enable the Council to benefit from the advancement in Finance system capabilities and will deliver significant efficiencies in working practices both within Finance and across the wider Council.

Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Business Rates

Following the transfer of the Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Business Rate Teams from Capita in April, the related IT systems transferred from the Capita datacentre to the Northgate Cloud at the end of June. The Revenues and Benefits teams will now begin roll-out of further self-service modules for customers and partners. These will include a Housing Benefit landlord portal, fully integrated on-line forms. electronic access to account and claim details for customers and e-billing.

Welfare Cap

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has informed the Council of the initial list of families who will be impacted by the revised Welfare Cap rates. Commencing this month, the DWP will be writing to and interviewing those who will be affected. Once contact has been made with the families, the Council will be instructed to make an appropriate deduction to the Housing Benefit payment. It is expected that this process will commence in August 2016.

Advice for All service

Following a formal tendering process for Advice Services, the new contract was awarded to a partnership comprising of Shelter, the Women's Centre and Blackburn with Darwen Carers Service. The partnership will have an initial contract period of three years with the option to extend for a further two years. The service will continue to be run from Blackburn Library and Darwen Town Hall.

The council is working closely with Shelter in the transition to the new arrangements and council employees are providing support in the interim, dealing with customer enquiries and liaising with voluntary partners.

Customer Services

To improve service delivery and provide for a more flexible workforce, the Contact Centre has been relocated to the front of the Town Hall. It is hoped that the move will allow resources to be deployed to the front desk and the telephones as customer needs require.

IT

The team have continued to progress the implementation of new and upgraded systems to improve service delivery and more efficient ways of working including:

- MOSAIC (the Adults Social Care system)
- The Wide Area Network rollout, to update the links to all corporate and schools sites
- Environment SRM system
- Strategic Partnership - relocation of Property and Highways systems.
- Revenues & Benefits applications following the transfer from Capita
- Public Access solution – Citizen Wi-Fi enabled in Libraries
- Direct Access roll-out.

Legal

During May recruitment took place for the Independent Person for the Standards Committee for the next term of office. To provide resilience two persons have been appointed, Paul Fletcher and Tassadaq Hussain. Given the timing of the finalisation of their appointment it was not possible to report these appointments as normal to the Annual Council Meeting on 19th May 2016 and Council Forum is asked to note these appointments.

HR

HR completed work on the final TUPE transfers from Capita on schedule on 1st July 2016. HR also continues to support managers and employees across the organisation to improve attendance at work and further reduce employee absence levels. Our HR and IT teams have also recently launched an e-learning portal which provides a large number of training and development on-line courses. HR are continuing to provide more services to schools and the projected income for 2016/17 is expected to exceed original targets. The roll out of manager/employee self- service modules linked to the digitisation and efficiency agendas is progressing and all council employees now have access to `on line payslips' saving money on printing and distribution.

Capita Partnership

The new place based partnership with Capita started on the 1st July with a focus on Property, Highways and Transport services to support housing and employment growth in the borough and continue to improve our assets and infrastructure. We also acknowledge the previous 15 year multi-disciplinary public private partnership with Capita which ended on 30th June and was one of the longest lasting and most successful of such partnerships.