

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 26 January 2017

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
CHIEF OFFICER: DENISE PARK

**Financial Services** - Following a procurement exercise, Civica Financials was selected as the new Council finance system. The core modules of the new system should be implemented by April 2017 and will help to drive efficiencies by reducing the amount of manual/paper processes we use. It will also facilitate improved and timely access for budget holders to finance information. The other key focus at this time is development of the 2017/18 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in preparation for Finance Council next month.

**Benefits** - The implementation work for the Landlord Portal has now been completed and all landlords who receive direct payments have received numerous communications asking them to sign up to the new system as all paper payment schedules have now ceased.

**Council Tax and Business Rates** - In the continued roll out of the digital programme, Council Tax and Business Rates customers will see the launch of paperless/e-billing and an on-line account facility. This has recently been launched for members and staff who live in the borough. A major promotional push has commenced as we try to sign up as many customers as possible prior to March 2017. The Business Rates team ceased taking customer telephone calls in November as the service has become fully digitised/on-line. After consultation with the Magistrates Court, it has been agreed that we will still accept customer telephone calls that relate to the issue of a summons.

**Welfare Cap** - The DWP has now issued a further 104 cases that require a cap on welfare through a reduction of Housing Benefit. This new list increases the number of cases in the borough to 146, with a further 14 cases currently under review. A final decision will be made on these cases once we have liaised with both the DWP and the customer.

Below is a snapshot of welfare/benefit that has been lost (per week) by the claimant:

£1.00 - £49.99 = 73 cases

£50.00 - £99.99 = 68 cases

£100+ = 5 cases

The total weekly benefit loss of the capped cases is currently **£6,758.25** per week (this includes those re-capped at the new rate).

**Audit & Assurance**- Under the Council Constitution and Financial Regulations, the Council and schools are required to have adequate insurance cover in place. The Insurance Team has commenced re-procurement and requested bids for three year contracts, with an option to extend this for a further two years.

**Registrars** – In the recent Stock and Security Assurance Audit Assessment by the General Register Office, the Registrars service was given a positive rating of “High” in their assessment.

**HR** - The new HR & Payroll System has recently been upgraded to facilitate the continued roll out of manager/employee self-service. New modules continue to be introduced which are meeting the Council’s digitisation objectives and contributing to the Council’s ability to reduce costs of back office services. The HR Service will also see reductions in size this year as the impact of these changes and other workforce review changes are implemented, whilst at the same time the service continues to develop its service offer to an increasing external customer base.

**Legal** - The well documented challenges facing social care services and the increased demand particularly for children's and adults social care interventions, has continued to place pressure on the legal services team which at the same time has had its part to play in contributing to budget savings as part of the approved finance plans of the council. The team has recently been restructured to deliver the final phase of a 3 year budget reduction programme and the revised structure is expected to be fully in place by April 2017. The new structure will continue the development of more flexible working to support the challenges presented by the increasing workloads referenced above.

**Corporate Services** - The team has been working to deliver one of the most significant workforce changes as part of the workforce review programme. This restructure will deliver savings of approximately 40% from administrative support services by a combination of new ways of working, cessation of certain activities, automation of processes and combining support systems currently operating independently across council departments. The Corporate services team will from April provide administrative support across all departments. Corporate Services also includes Communications and Democratic Services both areas have also been subject to review with new models of service being put in place for April 2017. For these areas, as in others, their ability to maximise the digitisation of services provided and increase income from external sources is increasingly important as the funding provided to the Council has reduced so significantly over recent times.

## **CIVIL CONTINGENCIES UPDATE**

Schools Community Resilience Programme – This has been successfully piloted with 2 primary schools, and their feedback and comments have been incorporated into a final package which is now available as an off the shelf pack for all BwD primary schools. This raises pupils' awareness of self-resilience, community self-help, grab bags and home emergency plans and fits into PHSE and Key Stage programmes.

The Get Ready for Winter Campaign was promoted through a number of opportunities with partners. It is aimed at the community to engender self-resilience and self-help especially through the winter months. The Flood Awareness Campaign included our updated policy on Sandbags with letters issued to all businesses and residential properties within potential flood zones and 2 face to face drop in sessions were held in both Blackburn and Darwen in September 2016.