

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 20th April 2017

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
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2017/18 Budget update - The Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered his Spring Budget on 8th March which included an announcement of an additional £2 billion funding available to local authorities over the next three years to be spent on local adult social care services. For the council this will mean additional, non-recurring funding over the period of £6.857 million; 2017/18 in £3.589 million reducing to £2.186 million in 2018/19 and reducing to £1.081 million in 2019/20.

Local Authorities will have to work with NHS partners (much like the Better Care Fund) in determining how to utilise this money; at the time of writing we are awaiting further guidance on this

Financial Services - the new Civica ICON cash management system went live on 27th March replacing internet payments, touchtone telephone payments, Paye.Net, current e-returns, chip and pin devices and associated modules. The new system has also introduced PayPal as a new method of payment for customers.

The new Civica Financials and Purchasing system went live on 1st April. This means staff will no longer be using MasterPiece, ACE, P2P and other associated systems from that date, thereby delivering efficiencies through the use of an integrated system and by reducing many of the manual and paper processes currently in operation. The new system will also facilitate improved and timely access to finance information for budget holders; the development of new reports to facilitate this is now underway.

Training for both of the new systems has been delivered on-line, through the VLE (virtual learning environment).

The other key focus at this time is the 2016/17 year end closedown and production of the statutory accounts.

Benefits - The DWP has announced the schedule for the national roll out of the full implementation of Universal Credit. Each Local Authority has now been given a key date that will see the majority of new benefit applicants in the borough assessed and awarded Universal Credit. Blackburn with Darwen has been informed that it will adopt the full service from February 2018. Scrutiny received an update on Monday 27th March.

Council Tax and Business Rates – The new e-billing and online accounts for Council Tax and Business Rates payers have been successfully launched prior to annual billing. The promotion of these solutions will continue with customers being asked to use the online solutions whenever possible.

Business Rates – The revaluation of all rateable values and Business Rate liability has been completed with new bills, reflecting the change, issued in March. The revaluation and the changes to the legislation for small business rate relief have resulted in 3,263 accounts with nothing to pay following the award of full relief. Remaining businesses across the borough have seen both increases and decreases in Business Rate liability.

The March Budget produced three key announcements for Business Rates. For those Ratepayers worst hit by increases in Business Rates, a hardship fund will be created which will be administered by each council via its discretionary policy. In addition, pubs with a rateable value of less than £100,000 will be entitled to a £1,000 discount. Thirdly, any business losing existing small business rate relief will have their increase capped at £50 per month. The Government will be releasing further information concerning these changes in the coming weeks.

Audit & Assurance - following completion of a tender exercise for our insurance cover, the February Executive Board meeting approved the award of contract with effect from 1st April 2017 of long term agreements for an initial period of three years, with an option to extend for a further two.

The annual internal audit plan for 2017/18 was approved by the Audit & Governance Committee meeting at its meeting on 11 April. The plan sets out the work that Audit & Assurance will carry out during 2017/18 to support the Section 151 Officer's statutory obligations to maintain and adequate and effective audit of the Council's accounting records and its systems of internal control, and enable an annual internal audit report to be produced in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

IT – work continues to implement new and upgraded systems including the Finance system referred to above, a Public Access solution providing P.C access in key Council premises, a new Planning System, till replacement at King Georges Hall and other leisure sites and replacement of the Leisure booking system to allow self-service of bookings.

HR – The HR service is finalising the £500k budget reduction for the service which will see a reduction of 16fte posts delivering HR services to the Council. However, the number of redundancies has been mitigated significantly due to the increased number of schools buying the full range of HR & Payroll Services. The service continues to develop a digital first approach developing MY View further, an on-line health and safety reporting tool, on-line occupational health referrals, developments in e-learning, continued development of the HR intranet as a first point of contacts for all managers and employees and the introduction of netcall.

HR has continued to support workforce reviews and further downsizing to achieve the overall £13 million workforce savings. Priorities that have also been picked up are the introduction of the apprentice levy from April 17 and IR35 implications for off-payroll. The HR service is also working with the other 5 organisations to address the workforce implications of integrated health and social care across Pennine Lancashire.

Legal - In recent years law has required all deaths with a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) authorisation in place, to be referred to the coroner because such patients were treated as detained by the state, triggering an inquest. In practice, this had an unintended effect and led to a large increase in the number of natural deaths referred to coroners, particularly by NHS Trusts, Care Homes and GPs. Where the death is not a natural one, a jury is currently required.

From Monday 3 April 2017 the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 is amended so that people under DoLS will not be considered 'in state detention'. Accordingly, coroners will no longer have a duty to investigate a death just because a DoLS was in place. Such deaths will only be reported to the coroner if the cause of death is unknown or there are concerns that the death was violent or unnatural as the position is with deaths not involving DoLS. Also, circumstances where a jury will now be required will be rare. This change will reduce the number of referrals to the coroner, the number of associated witness statements, inquests and cost to the Council.

Following consultation the Law Commission has also recently published its report related to this issue and is seeking to overhaul the DoLS regime. Reforms include proposed 'liberty protection safeguards' to streamline the process. The proposed scheme focus is on whether a DoL is necessary and proportionate at the stage where arrangements are devised. The safeguards would apply to hospitals, care homes, domestic settings and supported living.