

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

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

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LEGAL SERVICES

The Council has successfully defended a recent Appeal by a parent in the Court of Appeal, against the making of a Placement Order by a Judge on 14 March 2014.

The ground for the appeal was that the Judge was wrong to make a Placement Order where a dual plan of searching for an adoptive placement and a long term foster placement was envisaged in 6 months' time. The Appeal was made on the back of recent case law that Placement Orders should only be made where "nothing else will do" and on the basis that a long term foster placement was being considered, it was argued that the decision was contrary to this case law.

The Appeal was dismissed with full reasons to follow.

The implications of this Appeal are very important for all local authorities nationally as it means that local authorities can continue to legitimately dual plan, which is essential when looking to secure adoption for older children.

This judgment is likely to shape decision making nationally in relation to this issue.

Income project

A number of Council sites have now gone live with improved income collection solutions which expand the ability to take card payments and streamline the capture of transaction data. Services within the Place programme area make up the first tranche of income collection points to be upgraded. Other services are also considering income collection via the internet in line with the Council's digital first programme.

On-line budget management system (revenue monitoring portal)

A phased roll out of the new approach to budget monitoring has commenced in a number of service areas. The on line system enables managers to access their own budgetary information and record forecasts via a single portal.

Again this is part of our strategy to automate and enable digital services where possible to make savings in support services and protect front line services.

WELFARE REFORM - UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE

The Department of Work and Pensions and the Council will be agreeing the delivery partnership framework for Universal Credit over the next few weeks. At present, the agreement will only be for the period November 2014 to 31st March 2015. A further agreement will be required from 1st April which will provide greater detail on the wider roll out of Universal Credit.

HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT ON-LINE CLAIM FORMS TAKEUP

The take up of applying for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support on-line continues to improve month on month. Of the new claims that can be made on-line, 76% were completed in this way in September 2014. Whilst the benefit form is the most popular, the usage of the on-line forms is also increasing month on month in respect of applications and notifications to the Council Tax Team and the Business Rates team.

IT UPDATE

ITM&G continue to support colleagues across the council, implementing new and upgraded systems. The new customer portal continues to be popular with citizens: since its launch, over 1,750 accounts have been created and with 120 forms now available on the portal, we have had over 8,700 forms submitted electronically, with Beez Card applications, Council Tax Direct Debit requests and Tip permit requests, the top 3 transactions. Work continues to develop the portal to include more environmental services as well as replace the current outdated waste management system, testing of which is ongoing.

The councils new internet connection is now active and the project to update and refresh the wide area network is on track, as well as reducing costs, sites will benefit from faster and more reliable connections. Schools will also have the opportunity to benefit from the new network.