

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 22nd March 2018

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

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

Audit & Assurance

Following the completion of a sector lead procurement exercise, which was managed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), Grant Thornton was confirmed as the Council's external auditor for a five year period commencing with the audit of the accounts for 2018/19. The PSAA has an option to extend the contract for a further two year period, to a total of seven years, if it chooses to do so. This appointment was formally confirmed to the Council following the PSAA Board meeting on 14 December 2017. The Council will benefit from reduced fees in 2018/19 as a result of the success of the procurement process. The PSAA has estimated that the savings will be the equivalent of approximately 18% in the scale fees payable by local bodies. The fees for the statutory audit of the Council for 2016/17 were £102,839.

Audit & Assurance Team will report its progress in delivering the 2017/18 Annual Audit Plan to the April Audit & Governance Committee meeting. As well as the internal audit outcomes achieved to date the report will include commentary on the progress of work to follow up the data matches highlighted from the 2017 National Fraud Initiative (NFI) exercise. In addition, the team is preparing the draft annual internal audit plan for 2018/19 for approval by the Committee at this meeting. This will set out the work that Audit & Assurance will carry out during 2018/19 to support the Section 151 Officer's statutory obligations to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit of the Council's accounting records and its systems of internal control, governance and risk management, and enable an annual internal audit report to be produced in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

Financial Services

The 2018/19 Revenue and Capital budgets and the Medium Term Financial Strategy were approved at Finance Council on 26th February 2018. Budgets are now being finalised in the Civica system. The restructure of the Finance Team is currently being developed prior to consultation with staff and the Trade Unions. The team needs to identify savings of circa £500k. The restructure will include a digital review of all areas which is already underway. The Finance team are also preparing for year end closure with new templates and information to be circulated to managers across the Council to enable working efficiencies to be generated from the new Civica system.

Benefits

Universal Credit 'full' service was rolled out on the 14th February 2018. Despite the so called "efficient" service, and to improve the coordination between the council, the DWP and claimants on Universal Credit issues, 3 council funded posts have been co-located in the DWP office (two of our own customer service staff and resources from Shelter). Whilst it is still early days in the roll out, the number of individuals and families requiring support with debt and budgeting advice has increased significantly beyond that which was originally indicated to the council. The council will continue to monitor the impact of Universal Credit and will report back to members and the management board on a regular basis. Because of the lack of support from DWP to claimants, we will continue to give support to claimants in whatever way we can so that any negative impact on their lives is minimised as far as possible.

Digital

The Digital Board and dedicated Digital Task Team (DTT) have continued to review individual service areas within the council to support digital improvements. A business case has now produced for the replacement and modernisation of the current website with a decision expected shortly. The team working on the '*digital borough*' workstream have now mapped the digital facilities and support available in the borough from the council. The details will now be shared across the council and with partners. It is envisaged that increasing the awareness of the facilities and support available will enable improved digital participation by residents. This workstream will continue to look at developing the support and facilities further and improve usage, particularly in hard to reach groups.

IT

IT continue to implement new and upgraded systems to deliver improved services and efficiencies. The New Leisure system (Legend) and payments for Registrars on-line are now live. Various projects are in train including a new ticketing system for King George's Hall and Darwen Library Theatre, Planning Services and Property Management with other system implementations in the early stages of development including a new Legal Case Management system and implementation of a new Pennine Lancashire Building Control system. Work is also continuing on the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which takes effect in May 2018 and sets out clear guidelines on how EU citizen data is handled and on the ownership rights of each citizen over their data.

HR & Apprentices Update

The team reports that we have been successful in all schools re-signing SLA's with the service for the up and coming year and new business is being achieved through continued successful engagement with schools and some local CIC's. The transition to one monthly payroll for all Council employees has now been completed successfully and this completes the programme of efficiency changes which has resulted in savings for the council.

The annual apprenticeship recruitment process has commenced and the Council will be advertising for apprentices in March. We are looking to recruit another 20 apprentices for the September intake. HR will continue to work with local education partners to ensure the most suitable courses can be offered to the new intake which will benefit the Council in having a range of different apprenticeships across departments. HR also continue to monitor the use of the apprentice levy to ensure the Council can maximise the opportunities for employees.

Governance & Democracy

Plans are progressing for the delivery of the elections in May. Special arrangements are in place to ensure that the majority of voters are able to attend similar polling stations as in previous years although with the change in polling district boundaries, this has not always been possible.

Legal Services

Compensation claims can be made by people who have been physically or mentally injured because they were the victim of a crime. Under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2012, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority ['CICA'] determine a victim's eligibility by following a set of criteria, with minimum conditions which must be met before an innocent victim of crime can make an application. No conviction is required. In the last 6 months Legal Services have secured 2 compensation payments for children in social care related matters totalling almost £13,700. This money is then held on trust by the CICA.