

# REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020

COUNCILLOR VICKY McGURK

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
CHIEF OFFICERS: LOUISE MATTINSON

## **People: A good quality of life for all our residents**

### **Council Tax**

The last 3 months has seen the Council Tax team proactively assisting customers with the deferral of instalments and promoting reductions where applicable. The month of June has seen the recommencement of recovery action with several thousand reminders being issued to those customers in arrears. At all interactions with customers, the team has looked to identify financial difficulty and promote the council's advice service.

### **Benefits**

It is not surprising that there has been a significant increase in the number of Council Tax Support claims, and changes to circumstances for existing claims. Whilst the number of claims has stabilised in June, we are expecting additional work coming into the team once furloughing reduces. This coincides with the Department of Work and Pensions expectations who are planning for further increases in Universal Credit from August to December.

### **Business Rates**

The Government Grants for certain businesses in the borough has been a significant piece of work for the team. In total, 3609 grants have been paid, totalling £39,600,000.

All businesses entitled to the expanded retail relief have also received their new bill for the financial year 2020/21.

In line with the Council Tax team, Business Rates have also recommenced recovery action and issued several hundred reminder notices.

## **Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council**

### **Financial Services**

External audit have now commenced their annual review of our accounts with the intention of concluding the audit by 30<sup>th</sup> September. The publication date for final, audited, accounts has been moved to 30 November 2020 for all local authority bodies as a result of the COVID 19 crisis.

The team is supporting the Growth portfolio in the payment of the COVID 19 discretionary business grants, this scheme is designed to support small and micro businesses with fixed property costs that are not eligible for the other business support grants made available by the Government.

### **Audit & Assurance**

The draft 2020/21 annual internal audit plan will be presented to the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 29 July for approval. The plan sets out the work that the Audit & Assurance Team will carry out during 2020/21 to support the Section 151 Officer's statutory obligations to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit of the Council's accounting records and systems of internal control, governance and risk management. A progress report summarising the internal audit outcomes achieved to the end of May will also be presented.

In addition, the Committee will receive the 2019/20 Annual Internal Audit Opinion, Risk Management and Counter Fraud Reports for consideration. The detail within these reports helps to inform the draft 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement, which the Committee will also receive, to enable it to be satisfied that the Statement properly reflects the governance and control arrangements in place within the Council during 2019/20. It will then be presented to the Leader

and the Chief Executive for signature and included in the Council's 2019/20 Statement of Accounts.

### **Contracts & Procurement**

The Contracts and Procurement Team have now completed their work on securing supplies for the Food Hub, managing stock levels to ensure there has been enough supply to meet demand through to the end of the project.

Working with colleagues in other departments, the Team have worked hard in managing the logistical and distribution arrangements for the Council's supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring Council services, care providers and local schools have the PPE that they need.

The Team have also been progressing a number of other procurements, including new audio visual equipment for the Council Chamber, plumbing supplies for Disabled Facilities Grant works, weather stations for the Highways department and also for the resurfacing of carriageways and supply of recycling bins.

### **HR, Legal & Governance**

As set out elsewhere on this agenda the HR, Legal & Governance Team have been supporting the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. This has included important activity in support of Health and Wellbeing of Employees and others, ensuring the Council's legal obligations in support of Statutory Services continue to be met and facilitating effective and continued local democracy.