

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 4th October 2018

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

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

Audit & Assurance

The Audit & Assurance Progress Report will be presented to the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 16th October. This will provide an update on the delivery of the 2018/19 Annual Audit plan, including details of the outcomes from internal audit reviews completed to the end of September and a commentary on the counter fraud work undertaken in the period.

Financial Services

The statement of accounts has been signed by external audit and has been published on the Council website. The team are now focusing on 2019/20 budgets and are working closely with Directors to prepare budget options.

Benefits

Proposals have been put forward to modify the existing Council Tax Support scheme (CTS).

A full consultation exercise is now underway during which, Council Tax Support recipients, Council Tax payers, residents and the voluntary sector are all being asked to comment on the proposals. The consultation will close on 22nd October. The results of the consultation exercise will be considered and published in November.

Revenues

Universal Credit (UC) continues to have a major impact across the Revenues and Benefits service. All changes of income and circumstances are issued by the DWP to the council on a daily basis, resulting in a significant number of adjustments and therefore additional bills being issued to customers.

At present there are approximately 1000 additional bills per month being issued to Council Tax payers than at the same time last year. These additional work volumes are being monitored as they impact on the ability to maintain service levels within the Council Tax section. As UC is rolled out more widespread, volumes will likely increase to an unmanageable degree without significant changes to CTS.

Digital & Business Change

The 2018/19 Digital capital projects are now in delivery with the first orders being placed for both the Device Modernisation and Core Infrastructure projects. We are working alongside services to establish computing device requirements for different roles throughout the Council.

We have continued to develop designs for the new Council website and are working with users of services to inform the work.

The Digital strategy and programme governance has been reviewed and we are working on an update to the governance model and the strategy document itself. Workshops will be taking place in October to develop plans and inform the strategy revision.

Work across the portfolio continues as we support digitisation projects across the Council as well as the day to day support of technology and systems.

Human Resources

HR have finalised the apprentice intake for 2018/2019. This year there have been 30 new apprentices across the Council. All inductions are underway, and managers are working closely with their teams to ensure that they integrate well.

Following the Council signing the Time to Change Employer Pledge, there has been an increase in requests and attendance on mental health and mindfulness training. HR working with other colleagues across the Council is also developing mental health champions and health and wellbeing champions. These champions are volunteers from departments who want to support knowledge and awareness of wellbeing issues. The team are also working on plans for Wellbeing Week which starts on 8th October 2018.

A new Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions Scheme (AVC Wise) is now implemented and we have seen a number of employees take the opportunity to join. We will continue to outline the benefits of joining this scheme in the hope that the numbers increase.

We are working with the Trade Unions to consider the implications of implementing the new pay spine for Green Book employees in April 2019 following the 2 year pay agreement. We also need to engage with schools to recommend that they adopt the Council's approach.

Governance & Democracy

Following the Boundary Review in 2017 which changed the number of wards to 17, the draft proposals for the polling districts/polling places have been prepared by the Team as referenced in the Leaders report. Work also continues on this years Canvas.

The Local Government Ombudsman received 37 complaints for Blackburn with Darwen Council in the reported year 2017-18. This is a 20% decrease from the previous year. The LGO upheld only two of the cases that they investigated this year compared to the nine from last year.

Legal Services

The Legal Services team continues to support a range of operational activities ongoing across Departments. Workloads for various prosecutions remain at high levels as does our statutory legal work to support our ongoing commitments to support vulnerable adults and children from the Borough. The high level of social care activity in particular continues to place significant workload and resultant additional financial pressures on the portfolio. Work with the Health & Social Care and, Children, Young People and Education Directorates, nevertheless continues to ensure children and vulnerable adults remain safe.