

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**

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

### **Financial Services**

The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement information was received from Central Government just before Christmas. The team have been reviewing the data and updating the draft Budget for 2019/20 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for discussions with members and officers, in preparation for Finance Council in February.

### **Benefits**

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced an end to the funding for Universal Credit digital assistance and personal budgeting support currently provided by the Council. The replacement will be reduced funding for a service to be provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau under a national agreement. An urgent meeting has been requested with the DWP to discuss the potential effects and implications for residents of the borough to minimise any adverse consequences for individuals and families.

A number of changes to the existing Council Tax Support scheme have been agreed for 2019/20 financial year following the Policy Council's decision.

### **Revenues**

#### **Business Rates**

The details of the new Business Rates Retail discount have been released by the Government. The new discount will provide a 33% discount (after application of other reliefs) for those properties with a rateable value of less than £51,000 and that are wholly or mainly being used as shops, restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments.

The Business Rates team is continuing to address cases that fail to pay or contact the office for bankruptcy/liquidation proceedings. The cases are generally those with large debts or business ratepayers who fail to contact or engage with the Council.

#### **Council Tax**

In preparation for the new financial year the Council Tax team will be undertaking a major promotion of the benefits of paperless bills which will save money and promote digital engagement with the Council. The team will also be reintroducing text messages in 2019 as a way of notifying and contacting customers e.g. to remind customers of unpaid Council Tax instalments; to request additional information and to notify customers of benefit assessments.

A number of pilot Council Tax cases have been issued to solicitors for escalation to a personal bankruptcy petition or the imposition of a charging order on a property. The pilot consists of 8 cases, on which a full review of their progress will be undertaken before the end of the March.

### **Digital & Business Change**

An overview and update of the digital programme was presented to the policy and corporate resources overview and scrutiny committee. An expanded Council digital board has been formed and has started work on revising the organisation's digital strategy and vision. Recent engagement events have been well attended by internal and external stakeholders.

The Council has agreed to enter into a subscription deal from 2019 with Microsoft for the Office 365 service. This will include hosted email, storage and back office productivity tools, replacing the current onsite solutions and providing a more cost effective, future proofed solution.

As part of the equipment refresh programme, we have started rolling out new computer and mobile devices across the organisation. At the time of writing we have deployed over 200 devices to staff. The capital programme to replace core infrastructure continues with regular implementation month by month and minimal disruption to services.

Throughout November 'Lean' training was undertaken by our Business Support team. The training was provided from within the directorate to over 70 staff. Lean training provides staff with skills and knowledge in order for them to continually improve processes and services. Feedback from staff was positive and over 50 service improvement ideas have been raised as a result.

A mobile engagement hub for digital health and care was arranged in November. Members of the public and staff were engaged throughout the day outside of the town hall, raising awareness of digital tools to access services and manage health conditions.

### **Human Resources**

The team continues to have a successful Payroll, HR/Health, Safety & Wellbeing and Recruitment services offer to Schools.

The team have recently led on the implementation of new pay spine for Green Book employees as part of the 2018 - 2020 pay agreement, linking closely with schools, ensuring they have had the opportunity to contribute to the proposals.

As part of the overall digital strategy, the digital workforce priorities are being refreshed. These incorporate the device modernisation programme and links in to the accommodation strategy. The team are leading the consultation and engagement with the workforce with regards to what the "office for the future" needs to look like and have opened a demonstration office, where employees can give feedback and inform/influence the shape of future working.

The service is also continuing to roll out new functionalities for its e-service platform via MyView continuing the digital evolution of HR and related support services across the Council making it easier and quicker for managers and employees alike to engage and utilise services efficiently and effectively.

### **Legal Services**

Since March 2018 Legal Services have secured over 1,300 convictions via the new Single Justice Procedure [also known as 'the SJP'].

In addition to undertaking some non-school attendance cases and littering cases, cases of breaches of section 80 abatement notices under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 have also been successful.

On the 12th December 2018 members of the legal social care team attended the annual Lancashire Family Justice Event at UCLan. This was also attended by other local authorities practitioners, senior members of the Judiciary including the President of the Family Division, Clinicians, CAF/CASS and the Governor of Styal Prison.