

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

3rd October 2019

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING

Benefits

The annual performance figures for assessments of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support during 2018/19 have been released by the Department of Work and Pensions. The performance of our service has continued to improve significantly since its return from Capita, with last years figures being the best to date. In addition to having the best performance across Lancashire and Greater Manchester, Blackburn with Darwen is now in the top 10 performing authorities in the country.

Council Tax and Business Rates

Over the next few months the Council Tax and Business Rates teams will be undertaking some promotional and marketing of the online forms available to customers. A large part of this will be focused at landlords and managing agents who have been reluctant to use these forms.

Finance

Closure of Accounts 2018/19

External audit have finalised their work on the statement of accounts and this now requires final formal sign off which should take place prior to Council Forum on 3rd October.

Council Budget 2020/21

Work has begun with Members and Management Board to formulate the 2020/21 Council budget. This work is at an early stage and we are waiting confirmation from Government with regard to possible additional funding for Social Care as announced in the recent Spending Review on 4th September 2019.

Audit & Assurance

The Audit & Assurance Progress Report will be presented at the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 15 October. This will provide Members an update on the delivery of the 2019/20 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.

The Committee will also receive the Quarter 1 Risk Management Report setting out the risk management activity undertaken in the period, along with a summary of the corporate risks as at the end of June.

During the summer the Insurance team has worked with ITM&G colleagues and the software supplier to implement an upgrade of the software package used to manage and monitor insurance claims received by the Council. The upgraded version went live on 1 October. It enables the software to continue to be used following the transfer to the Windows 10 operating system.

Governance Services

Complaints – The team has successfully updated the process known as the *Caution List* which provides for a risk assessment of people where previous contact with the Council indicates the individual may present a risk to officers of the Council or others when presenting for or, receiving service. This is an important aspect of health, safety and wellbeing. Attention is also brought to the introduction of ADR (alternative dispute resolution), which sees an increase in

informal complaints however a significant reduction in formal complaints, for corporate, adults and children's. We are successfully resolving complaints at the earliest stage.

Democratic Services

Planning is underway for Remembrance Weekend, with liaison with partners including the Armed Forces, Police, Cathedral, British Legion, Volunteers and the Traffic Management company amongst others to ensure that this most important Civic Event is successfully delivered and a suitable tribute of remembrance for those who gave their lives. The second round of Scrutiny Committees have been held, as reported elsewhere on the agenda, and the team are supporting Joint Scrutiny work with Unitary Partners in Lancashire. The team also support the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel and the Council continues to be the Host Authority. The Panel scrutinises the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner in delivering the key outcomes identified in the Police and Crime Plan for Lancashire 2016-21.

Legal Services

The litigation section of the department continues to undertake prosecutions reflecting the Council's drive to assure compliance across a range of areas, including public protection. Over approximately the last 5 years the litigation section of the team has undertaken approximately 75 full prosecutions a year. Last year in addition 1,500 new SJP (Single Justice procedure) prosecutions [mainly for littering offences] were also undertaken.

Since April this year:

- 516 littering prosecutions have been issued. Average fine for the majority proven in absence is 220 plus victim surcharge of 30 with costs awarded to the Council
- Also undertaken were 5 other regulatory prosecutions under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Trade Marks Act 1994, tobacco labelling and packaging Regulations and food safety legislation. The fines for these offences totalled £5148, the victim surcharges totalled £403 and costs awarded to the Council totalled £4497.20.

HR Services

The trade unions have submitted a national pay claim for 2020/21 for Green Book employees for a *`real living wage of £10 per hour`* and an increase of 10% on all other points. This is in addition to claims for additional leave, a reduction in the working week and a joint review of workplace stress and mental health. Over the summer the HR team managed and delivered the recent apprentice recruitment resulting in the Council recruiting 31 new apprentices for 2019/2020 and all have now commenced employment in their respective departments. In October the HR Service will be promoting and managing health and wellbeing month for all employees across the Council.