

PORTFOLIO:

GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

Report of
Portfolio Holder:

**COUNCILLOR JOHN
MALLINSON**

GOVERNANCE

Legal Services

The Legal Services section underwent its annual Lexcel inspection on 17th March and retained its accreditation again. The inspection lasted one full day and included an appraisal of policies and procedures in the legal section, as well as an audit of a number of files. The auditor commented that “a significant number of areas of good practice were identified during the assessment which is a good indicator of the organisation’s continued commitment to maintaining high levels of service”. The auditor also commented on two areas where further improvement could be made and steps will now be taken to address these.

Electoral Registration

Preparations are being made for the Local Elections to be held on 5th May 2011. This year the Local Elections will be held on the same day as the Referendum on the Parliamentary Voting System. Voting in the Referendum will take place right across the City Council area and City Council elections are scheduled to be held in 18 of the City’s 22 Wards. Parish elections are also scheduled to be held in 4 parishes.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

2010/11 Final Accounts Process

Work is continuing on the production of both the revenue and capital outturn reports, which will be considered by the Executive on 3rd June and by Council on 28th June. These will show the year end outturn position and highlight any slippage against the annual budget.

The annual Statement of Accounts are also being produced which will be prepared in accordance with the new Consolidated Accounts & Audit Regulations in time for the Audit Commission to commence the audit of the accounts in early July. The main change for 2010/11 is the requirement for local authorities to prepare their accounts in line with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) which is a significant piece of work, and the auditors are currently in the process of reviewing the restated IFRS accounts for 2009/10.

Revenues and Benefits Services

Council Tax collection, measured against targets as set out in the Service Plan, is in-line with previous year performance. In year collection performance at 31st March 2011 is 97.55%. This represents an increase of 1.08% compared to 2009/10 when our best ever performance was achieved. Business Rate, in year collection performance at 31st March 2011 is 98.1%, an improvement of 0.2% compared to 2009/10.

Under the 'right time' indicator the Council is assessing claims and changes in circumstance at a cumulative average for the year to 31st March 2011 of 8.36 days against a target of 10 days. Performance improved by 2.64 days compared to the previous year.

The Department for Works and Pensions are unable to provide data to show our performance under the 'right benefit' indicator and this is no longer being provided as an indicator.

Guidance and legislation is awaited for benefit changes which are expected to apply from October 2011. The proposed introduction of the Universal Credit is also to be clarified to determine how this scheme will provide assistance towards housing costs.

Within the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service partnership, the process for the provision of common software systems continues. The implementation of the CIVICA document management system is progressing with the conversion of images held in the current Copeland and Carlisle systems continuing. User training is scheduled throughout May 2011 and it is anticipated that the system will be operational in June 2011. Completion of the conversion will enable the Shared Desk Top, giving access to all databases within the service, to be implemented during June 2011. The programme of activity associated with the implementation of the shared service continues to be a significant project, whilst we maintain operational service delivery and performance levels.

Audit Services

2010/11 Audit Plan

Progress against the 2010/11 Audit Plan for the last monitoring period (13th December 2010 to 18th March 2011) reported audit productivity as 54% direct audit days against the annual target of 66.4%. This shortfall is fully explained by the

unprecedented high levels of sickness absence which was experienced within the Audit Team during this last period.

To alleviate the pressure on the Team and to help achieve the completion of year end audit work, some additional audit resource was provided from other areas of the Audit Shared Service. This clearly demonstrates one of the main benefits of the Shared Service arrangement in terms of having access to a wider pool of suitably skilled and experienced audit staff and continuity of audit service provision.

Despite the staffing pressures in that last quarter of the year, the Audit Team has successfully completed all material system audits before the year end. These reviews are agreed in advance with the Audit Commission and have a high impact on the main financial system and therefore on the Authority's accounts.

2011/12 Audit Plan

In preparation for the 2011/12 Audit Plan, the Strategic Risk Based Audit Plan has been updated in line with best audit practice. Assistant Directors have reviewed and commented on the Strategic Audit Plan for their respective directorates. Reference has been made to those systems that have been identified by directorates as being business critical. Transformational changes which will impact of intended audit work during 2011/12 have also been factored into the Plan.

The 2011/12 Audit Plan allows for 519 audit days available under the shared service arrangements, plus an additional 16 days which is expected from shared service efficiencies in 2011/12. This, in total provides for an Annual Audit Plan of 535 direct audit days.

Planned audit time for delivery in 2011/12 can be summarised as:

High risk audit reviews	247days
Material reviews	140 days
Medium / low risk audit reviews	40 days
ICT audit reviews	30 days
Audit Management	40 days
Contingency	28 days
Follow up audits	10 days
	<u>535 days</u>

Progress against the 2011/12 Audit Plan along with completed audit reports will be reported to each Audit Committee throughout the year.

Property and Facilities

Accommodation Review

An Officer Working Group chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive is co-ordinating the project which is reviewing accommodation needs, on a phased basis. The aim is to change the way we work and use space, to ensure we are operating as efficiently as possible; our accommodation suits our needs, and matches up with best practice.

The project will deliver corporate standards for the space we occupy, maximise usage and increase capacity. It will reduce wasted space; identify savings and potential for additional income or capital receipts.

Phase One, which is now complete, involved the back office accommodation at the Civic and Boustead's Grassing. Work is complete on the 8th and 9th floors for the Resources and Governance Directorates and the Revenues and Benefits teams have now merged and are located in the ground floor offices on the Lowther Street side of the building with the Benefits performance team moving up to the 2nd floor. Community Engagement staff have relocated to the ground floor and this has in turn freed up the whole of 5th floor for office staff from Bousteads Grassing, who relocated in March 2011.

The Roadside building at Bousteads Grassing is currently empty and in the process of being decommissioned.

The Police moved into the Octagon on 11th October and have a public reception desk in the Customer Contact Centre. Further expansion of the Customer Contact Centre was completed in February 2011 with 4 additional customer desks and 2 additional interview rooms being constructed in the area where the print room was located – the print room is now on 2nd floor where it can be manned more effectively by ICT Connect. Discussions have taken place with the Passport Office re providing accommodation for them.

Other short term moves are in place with staff from John St Hostel being temporarily located in the former Overview & Scrutiny office on 1st floor whilst the Community Resource Centre is being built. Staff from the Biodiversity records centre are also located on 1st floor in the Policy office.

Phase Two, a review of our stores and depots, is in the early stages of development.

Initial target savings / income generation, which will be built into the transformation targets, have been identified of £40,000.

PERSONNEL Transformation

Work continues on supporting services with this work in all Directorates. The new structure in Economic Development is almost complete and Communities, Housing and Health are in their final stages with some appointments still to be made over the next few weeks. More than half of Local Environment is complete. In Resources Directorate, the Cleaning review is complete and implemented and plans are in hand for service reviews in the Garage, Stores and Building Maintenance. The service review in Governance is in progress.

LICENSING Royal Wedding 29/04/11

The Licensing and Highways sections have come together to produce a simple guide to organising street parties to celebrate the forthcoming Royal Wedding.

A leaflet has been issued, a press release and an item on the Council website explaining the procedures to simplify the process. This in effect creates a one stop shop for applications for a road closure and any licence that may be required for either sale of alcohol or entertainment. A number of enquires and applications have been received.

Councillor J Mallinson
Governance & Resources Portfolio Holder