

Report to:

Council

Agenda
Item

10(b)(ii)

Meeting Date: 10th September 2013

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Finance, Governance & Resources Portfolio Holder's Report –
Councillor Dr Les Tickner**

GOVERNANCE

Legal Services

The Legal and Property Services Teams are continuing to work closely to achieve the targets set in the Council's disposal programme and the project. Legal Services are preparing legal packs for the sale by auction of that part of Willowholme Industrial Estate that was not sold to tenants and of Treasury Court, both of which will be taken to auction in October.

Following the Executive Committee's resolution to acquire the leasehold interest in the former Woolworths site on Victoria Viaduct, legal documentation has been prepared. Completion has, however, been delayed because of the necessity for further reports on the building.

After complicated negotiations and numerous redrafts, the funding agreement for the Harraby Community Centre redevelopment has been agreed and signed.

Meanwhile, Legal Services continue to provide specialist advice and support to other directorates and Members. This has included preparation of contracts, planning agreements and Criminal Court prosecutions for environmental offences and benefit fraud. In addition, legal officers have provided training on the Constitution and on attending Court as a witness.

Licensing

I have previously reported on the new legislation covering scrap metal dealers, of which we have 35 registered with this authority. The new Scrap Metal Dealers Act comes into effect on 1st October 2013; however we are still awaiting regulations covering the transitional arrangements, format of licence and fee setting procedure. We will have just a short time to take this through the committee process before the commencement of the Act.

Licensing staff and Environmental Health officers are currently investigating complaints of noise nuisance associated with the good summer weather. Many licensed premises have entertainment and keep their windows and doors open to cool the premises. The noise from the entertainment has filtered out to the surrounding area causing nuisance. Advice has been given and action plans drawn up with particularly problem premises.

Taxi vehicles and drivers are renewing in July/August which entails nearly 500 renewal applications being processed in this two month period.

Carlisle Racecourse has held a number of large events in recent years featuring headline entertainment acts; these invariably follow on from one of the larger race meets. A multi agency meeting, including licensing, have been piloting different traffic management methods over the last two years to control the buses, taxis and private vehicles. These have ranged from full road closure to one way systems. The most recent scheme, which did not involve road closure, has proved the most successful and will be adopted in future.

Electoral Services

The Yewdale by election will take place on 5th September.

The claim has been submitted for reimbursement of costs in respect of the recent County Council elections for the Carlisle area.

Arrangements continue to be made in preparation for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. The Confirmation Dry Run, when the City Councils electoral register were matched against records on the Department of Works and Pension site, was carried out on 8th July as part of a national dry run that was carried out throughout July and August. The outcome of the dry run was that slightly over 82% of the Councils electoral register was matched (green matches). If this performance is repeated when the Confirmation process is run in June / July 2014 it would mean that from the 84781 electors that we have on the register we would have been writing to 69752 electors confirming their

Individual Registration and those electors would have to do no more with regard to registration.

With regard to the 15029 Red / Amber matches we would need to look at other information that we could access to see if we could change the match status. Once any local data matching has been carried out the remaining Red/ Amber matches will need to be sent Household Enquiry Forms and IER invitations. Non responder to these invitations will need to be canvassed by door step canvassers on more than one occasion.

As a further part of the preparations for Individual Registration the Absent Vote Refresh scheduled to be carried out at the turn of the year has been brought forward and has been carried out during August. The exercise is scheduled to be completed by 12th September. Just over 1000 postal vote electors were asked to refresh their signature in this year's exercise and any electors who have not responded by the 12th September will have their postal vote cancelled and will either need to submit a new postal vote application or will need to attend at a polling station to cast their vote.

Preliminary arrangements are also being made to carry out the Annual Canvass. The canvass is usually carried out from September with the new electoral register being produced at the start of December. However legislation has been passed the effect of which is to delay this year's canvass which will commence in October with the new register produced in February 2014. This is so that the register will be as up to date as possible prior to the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014.

Health & Safety

Main areas of work:

- Talkin Tarn and the review of systems following transformational change and a reduction of on site presence.
- Working with Tullie House to review their safety systems.
- The introduction of our Corporate Safety Files and Risk Assessments and our shared services site – Allerdale and Copeland.
- Events – Starting the process of the Fire show, assisting with TOB safety.
- Wellbeing review – Looking at providing joint Wellbeing days at both Copeland and Allerdale.
- Recently completed the measuring and auditing of Hand and Arm Vibration Equipment with all relevant teams.

- Preparing for a visit from the Health and Safety Executive who have requested a few days to audit our refuse and recycling operations.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

2012/13 Final Accounts Process

The annual statement of accounts (subject to Audit) were scrutinised by the Audit Committee on 22nd July and are currently subject to audit by the External Auditors (Grant Thornton) which will continue through to the end of September. Grant Thornton will report the outcome of the audit process through its Annual Governance Report which will be considered by the Audit Committee on 26th September, following which the Accounts will be formally approved by Members. The statutory deadline for the completion of the audit and approval process is 30th September. There have been no significant issues raised by the Auditors to date.

Strategic Planning

The Medium Term Financial Plan and Corporate Charging Policy, the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan for 2014/15 onwards have been considered by the Executive and the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel. These are presented elsewhere on this agenda for formal approval by Council, and once approved, will inform the detailed work required to enable a balanced budget for 2014/15 to be approved by Council in February 2014. A timetable for the process will be prepared and reports on the core budgets, individual spending pressures and savings, and the charging reports will be considered by the Executive and the relevant overview and scrutiny panels in November and December.

Audit Services

The Audit Committee, when it last met on 26th July, received the 2012/13 Outturn Report which summarised the work carried out by the Internal Audit Shared Service during the year and also provided the annual audit opinion on the adequacy of the control environment for that period. It was reported that the Authority's system of internal control was operating satisfactorily and this opinion should be reflected in the Governance Statement.

When considering the review of the effectiveness of Audit Services in line with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government, it was concluded that the Shared Internal Audit Service had provided an effective and resilient audit service during 2012/13.

The audit progress report for 2013/14 provided members with an outline of the progress made against the 2013/14 Audit Plan in the first quarter period of the year. Delays in

progressing the Audit of Customer Services were raised. Assurance that the audit had now commenced were provided to members and it was recommended that future consideration be given to providing an interim report to the Audit Committee where such significant delay as attributable to the Customer Services Audit may occur.

There were 8 audit reports for consideration by Members at the meeting; attention was drawn to the audits of IT Service Desk, Incident and Problem Management; Debtors and Payroll. These audits were agreed after some discussion around specific recommendations.

Digital and Information Services

Two new infrastructure projects are close to completion which will improve the provision of ICT to our customers, members and staff alike:

- A new 1 gigabyte Internet connection will be operational in September providing faster access to our web services for our customers.
- A new Wi-Fi network is being rolled out throughout the Civic Centre which will provide secure access to our services via any authorised Wi-Fi enabled device

Work is underway to upgrade the council's credit card processing software and associated security; this is due to the need to maintain our Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliance. This is essential if we are to continue to provide debit and credit card payment options to our customers.

The development of a new digital strategy has begun. Consultations with senior management and service managers will take place in September. This strategy will focus on how ICT can solve business problems within the Council and improve our service to customers. It will set out a three year roadmap of development projects.

Property and Facilities

Property and Legal Services are drawing together the final touches to the preparatory work for the October Auction Sale when several properties will be offered for sale on the open market. These include sites on Willowholme Industrial Estate, which didn't sell to sitting tenants, and Treasury Court in Fisher Street.

A number of disposals in the earlier part of the programme, which were delayed or postponed pending further Member consideration, have been cleared for sale. These include the Garages at Broad Street (the amenity land will be retained for use by the local residents) and the BBC Premises at Annetwell Street. Officers will now bring forward the marketing and sales of these assets in the near future.

The transfer and disposal of the 2 housing development sites on Raffles, Dalton Avenue and Thomlinson Road, to the Riverside Group for the provision of 48 social houses to rent is progressing in conjunction with the Council's private sector partner at Raffles, Lovell Partnerships Limited, and completion of the legal documentation is expected soon.

Building and Facilities Projects

Civic Centre

Re-wiring work to the council chamber is now complete, work to the reception / contact centre is ongoing.

Female and Family Accommodation

The new hostel was officially opened on 15th July, the move from Staffield House will take place at the end of August.

Flood Problems

Recent heavy rainfall has caused surface water flooding in several properties, particularly the Enterprise Centre, Harraby and Morton Community Centres and Tullie House.

Policy and Performance

The Carlisle Plan first quarter update reports are being prepared for the next round of Overview & Scrutiny Panels.

Service Standards have been reviewed by SMT and changes have been made to the Revenues & Benefit standard to strengthen the links to the service plan. The Govmetric tool has been replaced with an in-house solution for the collection of customer satisfaction data.

The annual review of the Business Continuity Plan should be completed and an updated plan will be published within the next two weeks.

The first 2013/14 quarterly contract and performance monitoring meetings of the Carlisle Leisure Ltd. (CLL) contract, Tullie House Trust agreement and YMCA Shaddongate Community Resource and Training Centre contract have taken place. A draft revised performance framework for CLL for 2013/14 has been developed and will be formally adopted upon agreement. CLL financial accounts are now presented to City Council officers every quarter for inspection.

Information Management

Recent counts for information requests (From 29 June 2013 to 15 August 2013):

- Environmental Information Regulations requests received - 7

- Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to - 6
- Freedom of Information requests received – 69
- Freedom of Information requests responded to - 53
- Data Protection Act subject access requests received - 2
- Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 1

Organisational Development

Member Health Initiatives

The Member Learning and Development Working Group (MLDWG) has approved using some of the Member Training Budget to pay for health initiatives for Members. The first project was to give Members access to the Employee Assistance Programme which was introduced for staff last year. Details about this have been circulated to Members by the Organisational Development Team along with information about prostate cancer and supporting people at risk of suicide, two issues identified by the MLDWG as of interest to Members. A health check session is being held for Members before Council on 10 September from 4.00pm to 6.30pm in Flensburg. Members can drop in and have their blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol checked and get their body stats assessed.

Member/Officer Forum

The Member/Officer Forum was reintroduced last year and following positive feedback from Members, another has been planned for 5 November 2013. It will take place in Flensburg from 12.00pm to 2.00pm and 4.30pm to 6.00pm. If there are any specific City Council teams or projects that Members would like to know more about please let the Organisational Development Team know on 817597.