

Report to: Council

Agenda
Item

Meeting Date: 13 November 2012

Public/Private*: Public

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

GOVERNANCE

Licensing

The majority of the annual fees under the Licensing Act 2003 are due in November each year; this amounts to approximately 400 transactions and the associated paperwork. The fee legislation changed earlier this year and for the first time if the annual fee is not paid on time we must suspend the premises licence. It will certainly focus licence holders' attention before Christmas as some put off payment until the New Year!

We are liaising with the Police and Trading Standards regarding Christmas enforcement strategy. This will involve 'Taxi Marshalls' on the ranks at appropriate times, test purchase operations and a campaign to alert the public to irresponsible drinking, especially in relation to under age children.

Electoral Services

The annual canvass has been completed and a new electoral register was published on the 16th October.

Preparations are continuing in connection with the arrangement for the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner which is to be held this coming Thursday 15th November 2012. There will be 110 polling stations set up for the election. The verification will be held in the Sands Centre immediately following the close of poll with a County wide count held in Kendal on the Friday.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

2011/12 Final Accounts Process

The Audit Commission has issued an unqualified opinion on both the accounts and the VFM conclusion, by the statutory date of 30th September, and Member's of the Audit Committee received a very positive report from the Commission at their meeting on 26th September. The 2011/12 Statement of Accounts is now available on the Council's website and hard copies have been provided for the Customer Contact Centre.

The Auditor's notice of completion has been received for 2011/12 and this now concludes the formal audit process.

Strategic Planning

Following approval of the Budget Strategy documents by Council in September, the 2013/14 budget process has commenced. Detailed 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, with the Executive producing its draft Budget Proposals for consultation purposes at its meeting on 17th December to ensure that a balanced budget is approved by Council on 5th February 2013.

Audit Services

Final Audit Reports

Audit Committee on 26th September considered the key findings and recommendations/action plans rising from the following audit reviews.

IT Strategy, CCTV, Management Development, Early Retirement and Redundancy, Gifts and Hospitality – all were given a reasonable assurance.

The report on Data Quality & Records Management raised issues on management arrangements at a corporate level that need to be addressed so obtained a reasonable/restricted assurance rating.

Service improvements

Arrangements to measure Carlisle City's client satisfaction with the Shared Internal Audit Service have now been introduced. Client feedback will be closely monitored by Audit Services.

Refinements to the assurance ratings used by Internal Audit are being introduced. These changes will enable Internal Audit to provide more accurate opinions on the systems of internal control for each audit review undertaken.

Property and Facilities

Asset Review Disposal Programme

The programme of asset sales continues in line with the Business Plan, with just under £500,000 being realised from the sale of 60 acres of agricultural land adjoining Carlisle Airport, which went to tender in September. With the completion of further sales on Willowholme Industrial Estate to sitting tenants, currently the overall picture on the disposals shows gross receipts of circa £3.1 million. This is approximately 17% above target projections for completed sales. Two further portfolios of workshop units are amongst those assets being prepared for disposal prior to the end of this financial year.

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE

A digital version of the Service Standards is now on display on the monitor behind the reception desk. Policy & Communications are developing a set of team service standards, this approach will be rolled-out across all the teams.

Data security training is being rolled out across the council, sessions are taking place with Customer Services in October, HR and Service Support in November and Benefits Advice and Electoral Services in December. Guidance for staff on the use of mobile and portable devices has also been issued.

Recent counts for information requests (From 17 August 2012 to 23 October):

Environmental Information Regulations requests received - 4

Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to - 9

Freedom of Information requests received – 75

Freedom of Information requests responded to - 80

Data Protection Act subject access requests received - 1

Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 1

Member Learning and Development

The City Council was presented with an award for retaining the North West Member Development Charter award in Salford on 26 October.

Work is continuing with other councils to deliver joint training courses and in September a 'Holding effective surgeries and managing casework' workshop was held for Members. This continues to be a good way to promote partnership working and share costs. Four Members from Carlisle City Council attended the workshop along with three from Lancaster City Council, two from Allerdale Borough Council, two from Barrow Borough Council and two from South Lakeland District Council.

Organisational Development

The Cycle to Work scheme has been approved by the Employment Panel and will launch in late November. The scheme will operate under a salary sacrifice model which offers tax and National Insurance savings to staff and National Insurance savings to the City Council as the employer. Halfords has been chosen as the scheme provider and staff will be able to buy a bike and/or bike equipment costing up to £1000 from Halfords and from local cycle shops who have registered with Halfords. Members are also able to take part in the scheme but may not make the tax and National Insurance savings.

In the 2012 employee opinion survey, several staff said they would like to see more courses aimed at administrative staff. In response to this the Organisational Development Team has created an Administrators' Development Programme. The programme combines workshops specifically aimed at administrators, with IT qualifications, NVQs and personal development workshops.