

PORTFOLIO:

GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

Report of
Portfolio Holder:

**COUNCILLOR JOHN
MALLINSON**

GOVERNANCE

Electoral Registration

Preparations are being made for the Local Elections to be held on 5th May 2011. This year the Local Elections are expected to 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 24 parishes.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

Strategic Planning

The Council, at its meeting on 1st February, approved the revenue and capital budgets for 2011/12, including a council tax freeze for 2011/12 for the city and surrounding areas. Tonight's Council will formally approve the overall council tax for the Carlisle area.

2010/11 Final Accounts Process

Work is commencing on providing the timetables and instructions to budget holders to support the year end process and training sessions are also planned to enable the Statement of Accounts to be prepared by the statutory deadline of 30 June. A significant piece of work is currently underway to restate the 2009/10 accounts in line the new International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and the Code of Practice, under which local authorities accounts must now be prepared.

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 January 2011 is 95.30%. This represents an increase of 0.27% compared to 2009/10 when our best ever performance was achieved. Business Rate, in year collection performance at 31st January 2011 is 96.77%, an improvement of 1.34% 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 January 2011 of 13.86 days against a target of 10 days. Performance is comparable to the previous year at the corresponding stage and improves significantly in statistical terms due to the annual uprating in the 4th Quarter.

The Department for Works and Pensions are unable to provide data to show our performance under the 'right benefit' indicator. Based on the published National statistics, our performance for the 2nd Quarter 2010/11 of 9,461 is within the range expected based on DWP targets.

Further details relating to the Government proposals indicate that the benefit changes, aimed at reducing entitlement will be introduced from April 2011. Guidance and legislation is awaited for the subsequent 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 implementation of common software systems continues. System upgrades are being applied to the CIVICA document management system and then the conversion of images held in Copeland and Carlisle systems will commence. After user training, following the year-end period, it is anticipated that the system will be operational in 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

The main area of focus for Audit Services at this time of the year is the satisfactory completion of the material system reviews which historically dominates available audit time in the latter half of the financial year.

The last Audit Committee on 14th January 2011 received progress against the Audit Plan in accordance with the revised format. The last full monitoring period (4th October to 10th December 2011) showed productivity of 56% against the annual target of 66.4%. The difference is explained by unplanned training time, the fact that ongoing shared audit service deliberations necessitated the utilisation of more time for discussion and consultation and served to unsettle staff (time against this element should now cease as the shared service is now in place) and high levels of sick leave which were taken in the period.

The outcome of the audit review on the Use of Consultants was considered by this last meeting of the Audit Committee. This review followed on from the work undertaken by the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Consultants. One of the key issues raised by the audit was that there was no corporately agreed definition of what a consultant is. Other issues raised concerned the accuracy of expenditure coding, procurement practices and central monitoring records. Additional measures and revised procedures have now been implemented to address these issues. Audit Services will be undertaking a follow up review of this area in Spring 2011.

Lastly, Internal Audit is proactive in its approach to identifying new risks and opportunities to the Council. One of the key areas for focus is the changes brought about through different service delivery models e.g. shared services, Trusts and new areas of partnerships working. Such arrangements will be factored into the draft Audit Plan, which will be considered by the Audit Committee on 11th April 2011.

Property and Facilities

Accommodation Review

An Officer Working Group chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive is co-ordinating a project reviewing our accommodation, 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, already underway, involves the back office accommodation at the Civic and Boustead's Grassing. Phase Two, a review of our stores and depots, is in the early stages of development.

Corporate office accommodation standards have been set, the Civic 8th floor refurbished to open plan, the new service support team has been located here. Work on the 9th floor west wing has been completed to open up this space, removing cellular offices and corridors. Building Facilities and Resource Planning teams moved across from Boustead's Grassing and Personnel up from the 2nd floor. This completes the refurbishment and rationalisation of the 8th and 9th floors for the Resources and Governance Directorates. 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 to move into once the open plan arrangement is complete – moves are planned for week commencing 7th March.

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 will be 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.

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

Councillor J Mallinson
Governance & Resources Portfolio Holder