

Report to:

Council

Agenda
Item

10(b)(ii)

Meeting Date: 30 April 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 have worked closely to achieve the targets set in the Council's disposal programme and the project. Transactions have recently been completed in relation to Currock Retail Park with sales to sitting tenants of the medical practices at Eastern Way and Fusehill St., Morton Petrol Filling Station, agricultural land assets around Carlisle airport and a number of sites at Willowholme Industrial Estate - all have been completed since December last realising proceeds totalling in excess of £2.7m.

Licensing

- In the last few months we have been dealing with the aftermath of a local businessman with cash flow problems, which resulted in six Botchergate licensed premises closing over a period of months. Guidance was given to the property owners and following negotiation, premises licences were transferred to a holding company. All of the properties have now been re-let and are in various stages of refurbishment and opening.
- A Licensing sub-committee considered a review of a Botchergate premises licence following representations from the Police and neighbouring property owners. As a result of the hearing the premises licence was suspended for two months, they have 21 days to appeal the decision.
- We have worked with Cumbria Police in recent months with regard to scrap metal dealers following a rise in metal crime due to the current high price of scrap. A number of joint operations have been carried out resulting in increased awareness by the trade and new registrations being made. New scrap metal legislation is currently being considered by Parliament.

Electoral Services

The Postal Vote Refresh exercise for the current year has been completed. A total of 2,772 postal vote signatures were due for renewal this year and those notices were dispatched in mid January. In late February it was necessary to send 866 reminder notices which resulted in 402 postal votes being deleted as voters had not responded to either the initial notice or the reminder. The formal removal notice included a postal vote application form should the elector wish to apply for a postal vote again in the future.

Arrangements are being made to administer the County Council elections for the Carlisle area on 2nd May 2013. It has been necessary update the electoral register to reflect the new County Council Electoral Divisions following the review of the County Council carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission in readiness for this election. There will be a total of 110 polling stations in operation across the City Council area. The costs of the election will be borne by the County Council.

Arrangements continue to be made in preparation for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

2012/13 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 31st May and by Council on 16th July. 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 Accounts & Audit Regulations in time for the External Auditors to commence the audit of the accounts in early July.

Audit Services

The Audit Committee, at its meeting on 15th April, received the quarterly progress report in respect of delivering the 2012/13 Audit Plan. In summary:

- The Plan calls for 540 direct audit days to be delivered in 2012/13 – 546 days have been delivered, which is 6 days over the annual target. Further (planned) audit days are necessary up to the end of March in order to complete the remaining work on the material financial systems reviews.
- Investigatory work has had some impact on planned work during 2012/13.

The outcome of 8 recently completed audits were then considered:

Council Tax	Substantial
Treasury Management	Substantial
Systems Administration	Reasonable
Bereavement Services	Reasonable
Car Parking Income	Reasonable
Leisure Services Contract	Restricted
Recycling	Restricted
Bring Sites	Restricted

Specific attention was drawn to the three above restricted assurances which highlight a 'themed' weakness in the area of client monitoring and performance reporting arrangements of key service contracts.

The Committee also received the Draft Annual Audit Plan 2013-14.

Property and Facilities

Asset Review Disposal Programme

Before the end of the financial year on 31st March 2013 the sale of a further 4 assets were completed realising additional receipts of just over £2m for the Council. The most significant of these sales was of the ground leases at Currock Road Industrial Estate, which went to a sitting tenant for £1.9m. The Petrol Filling Station site at Morton also sold to the sitting tenant and, at Pugh and Co's Auction on 28th February, the freehold reversions in the surgery sites at Fusehill St and Eastern Way went under the hammer, selling for figures in excess of their reserve prices.

We are now halfway through the 4 year disposal programme, both in terms of the timetable and number of assets sold. Of the 25 assets sold total gross receipts achieved as at 31st March 2013 stand at £5.442m which, after the deduction of costs (circa 2%), nets down to a figure of £5.33m. This still remains ahead of target predictions for the assets involved at this stage in the disposal programme.

Going forward into the financial year 2013/14, the next piece of work for officers is to bring the remaining industrial sites at Willowholme Industrial Estate, where sitting tenants have not taken up options to purchase, to the open market either through private treaty sales or by auction. Officers are now starting work to consider the portfolio of residential land assets, earmarked for sale over the next financial year, weighing up the planning position, strategy and methodology for bringing these to the market over the coming year where it is appropriate. With regard to this, Executive members will be reviewing the position on these residential assets, also a number of postponed disposals, and the programme generally in the near future in order to determine the next tranche of asset sales.

Building and Facilities Projects

Civic Centre

There have been problems with the heating system recently exacerbated by the unusually cold weather. Two out of three compressors in the contact centre heat pump system failed and the system struggled to heat the ground floor area adequately. It is proposed to provide some back up heating in the form of fan convectors to this area. It is also planned to install more heat emitters in the tower block over the summer to enable the building to heat up more quickly.

The re-wiring work to the first floor is nearing completion with the executive room and council suite still to do. The new training room is complete and has been well-received by the staff who have used it.

Female and Family Accommodation

This major project, despite suffering delays due to bad weather, is still on programme for completion on 7th June 2013 and remains within budget.

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE

Consultation has been completed on the Carlisle Plan and it is part of the agenda for tonight's Full Council. A quarterly performance report will be available for Overview and Scrutiny; this will be developed to include progress on key actions and a round up of service standards.

It has been a successful year in developing the Council's service standards. Performance against the high-level 'Corporate' Service Standards has been consistently good, where good performance previously existed it has been maintained (e.g. Planning Applications); where performance was poor at the start of the year it has been steadily improved upon (e.g. New Benefits Claims). The end of year performance report is currently being prepared and will be presented later in the year. The next phase of developing standards for discussion and review at DMTs is continuing. It is being supported by recently completed service standard modules on Learning Pool that are being advertised via the front page of the Intranet.

Information Management

Recent counts for information requests (From 2 February 2013 to 4 April 2013):

Environmental Information Regulations requests received - 9

Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to - 13

Freedom of Information requests received – 91

Freedom of Information requests responded to - 102

Data Protection Act subject access requests received - 1

Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 2

Organisational Development

A new corporate training directory was launched in April which covers courses for staff taking place in the next seven months. New courses in the directory include Essential Skills for First Line Managers, Providing Administrative Support for Projects, Mental Health Awareness and Developing Personal Resilience. Members are also welcome to attend many of the courses and further information can be found on the intranet.

An Employee Opinion Survey took place earlier this year and the results were reported to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 4 April. This year 89.4% of staff rated the City Council as a good employer compared with 87.6% in 2012. 59.3% said the Senior Management Team provided strong leadership (57.1% in 2012) and 56.6% said senior managers effectively communicated the City Council's priorities (50.3% in 2012). 53% of staff said they felt valued at work compared with 46% in 2012 but there is still work to do to improve this. 76.6% of staff thought there were opportunities for career development (courses and qualifications) and 74.7% said they understood how their work contributed to achieving the City Council's priorities. Staff said the best things about working for the City Council were working with good colleagues, providing a service to the people of Carlisle, training opportunities and terms and conditions.

A wellbeing and learning day for staff and Members will be taking place on Tuesday 14 May at the Civic Centre as part of Adult Learners' Week 2013. There will be a wide range of information about health and wellbeing as well as health checks offered by the Occupational Health nurses. A healthy eating cookery demonstration will be given by local chef, John Crouch, and hair and beauty students from Carlisle College will be building up their experience of working with clients. Information about learning and development opportunities including courses and qualifications will also be available.

The City Council's Cycle to Work scheme will be open for staff and Members to buy cycles from 22 April to 24 May. Thirteen staff bought cycles in the pilot scheme last year. Staff or Members interested in buying a cycle should contact the Organisational Development Team for more information.

A new season of lunchtime learning sessions for staff and Members started in April with a 'Composting for Beginners' workshop run by Brampton Food Network. Further workshops will be promoted to staff and Members through the intranet.