

Meeting Date: 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Public/Private\*: Public

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

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## **GOVERNANCE**

### **Legal Services**

Purchase of the freehold of the former Woolworths site has now completed. The latest tranche of property disposals proceeded to auction on 16<sup>th</sup> October. Several criminal cases have been successfully prosecuted at the magistrates' courts – summonses were raised for environmental offences and benefit fraud. Meanwhile, Legal Services continue to provide specialist advice and support to other directorates and Members.

### **Licensing**

The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 is new legislation covering scrap metal dealers, of which we have 38 registered with this authority. Long awaited Regulations have just been published in the last few weeks prior to the legislation commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013. Due to the tight time scales and late publication of Regulations, considerable work was required to prepare us for the changes. One omission of the Home Office was that the new Act has not been included in the LA (Functions & Responsibilities) Regulations 2000, which means that instead of being a committee function, it falls to the Executive. To assist the trade in understanding the new legislation we arranged a presentation at the Civic Centre where staff were available to assist applicant's with forms, DBS checks etc.

The Carlisle & Eden Best Bar None 2013 assessments are being carried out this month prior to the judging later in October. We have 23 entries from Carlisle and 22 from Eden.

Standards are high and this year we have introduced a 'Hotel Bar' category which has resulted in applications from 3 large establishments.

We are currently preparing our financial 'Charging Review' which is presented to the Regulatory Panel for approval. Following a high court case earlier this year where it was concluded that enforcement charges against unlicensed operators cannot be included in licence fees, we are reviewing all of our licence fees individually. Fortunately most of our enforcement work is actually ensuring compliance of existing licence holders which can be included in the fee. Following the case we have received a number of FOI requests as to how we determine our fees. There is a considerable amount of ongoing work involved in determining the fee structure.

## **Electoral Services**

The Absent Vote Refresh exercise was completed on 11<sup>th</sup> September. Just under 1100 postal vote signatures required to be refreshed, in the refresh of that initial figure just under 180 postal votes were cancelled as the electors did not respond to either the initial letter or the reminder.

Arrangements are progressing for the Annual Canvass. The Canvass forms are currently being printed and are due to be posted at the start of October. The remote registration service is in place and the team of canvassers have been appointed and briefed on their role. The canvass will lead to the publication of the new electoral register in February 2014.

Arrangements are also being made to carry out a polling review which will commence at the start of October. Following the consultation phase a report will be produced for consideration by Council in January 2014.

IER is taking up a considerable amount of time in both attending seminars/ courses and preparing documents such as the public engagement strategy, risk plan, project plan etc. In preparation for going live with IER in the summer of 2014.

## **Health & Safety**

Main areas of work:

- Working with the Refuse and Recycling team to address issues raised at a recent meeting with the Health and Safety Executive.
- Project managing alongside Margaret Miller the annual Fireshow.

- Organising staff wellbeing: main area for November the provision of flu vaccinations.
- Working with relevant team to ensure the Arts Centre Provision is safely managed and suitable provisions and advice to prospective users are covered.
- Collating Tullie House safety policy information.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Financial Services**

#### **2012/13 Final Accounts Process**

The External Auditors, Grant Thornton, has issued an unqualified opinion on both the accounts and the VFM conclusion, by the statutory date of 30<sup>th</sup> September, and Member's of the Audit Committee received a very positive report from the Commission at their meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September. A separate report on Financial Resilience was also presented which concluded that the authority's arrangements meet or exceed adequate standards. The 2012/13 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 2012/13 and this now concludes the formal audit process.

### **Digital and Information Services**

Project Updates:

- Work has begun on the replacement of the existing HR and Payroll services; the existing service will not be supported by the supplier from April next year. The new service will be "live" in April 2014 and will provide enhanced self-service opportunities for members and staff. It is planned to implement additional modules later in the year; these will cover performance management, training and expenses.
- The project to upgrade the council's credit card processing is due to be complete on the 16th October. This project has progressed well and no problems are foreseen with the final implementation.
- Work has begun on sharing our licensing software with Allerdale BC. This will mean the cost of running this software is reduced.
- Our main project for the Autumn and Winter is the automation of business processes from the initial contact with the customer until the transaction is complete. We have already implemented such "end to end" automated processes for Council Tax and Housing benefits. We are currently developing a detailed project plan for the roll out of automated services across the Council over a three year period.

- Work is underway on the redesign of the council's web site. The focus will be very much on the customer needs and making interaction with the site for customers as intuitive and as simple as possible. It is hoped new web site will be live by March 2014.
- As part of the automating business processes we are developing an online customer account service which will allow the customer to manage all their communications and transactions with the Council. This will be similar to online services provided by the gas and electric utility companies.

## **Property and Facilities**

### **Property Services – Disposal Programme**

At the time of writing a further 3 assets go to auction through the Auctioneers' Pugh and Co on 16<sup>th</sup> October. These are the mixed commercial investment at Treasury Court, the remaining sites at Willowholme Industrial Estate, (excluding the Showmen's Guild Sites) which haven't sold to sitting tenants and the former Willowholme Recycling Depot. A verbal update on the results of the Auction will be available for inclusion in the Report by the close of play on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup>. The sale of the BBC site at Annetwell Street has been agreed with the sitting tenant and this will be completed as soon as the legal documentation is in place.

The purchase of the Bhs leasehold interest in the former Woolworths building, now occupied under a sub lease by B and M, was completed on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October. This represents a significant reinvestment into the portfolio which, not only fulfils the Business Plan's objective of increasing the Council's financial return on its investment property, but also goes a long way towards consolidating the Council's ownership and interests in this important part of the City.

## **Information Management**

### **Finance, Governance & Resources**

The second 2013/14 quarterly contract and performance monitoring meetings of the Carlisle Leisure Ltd. (CLL) contract and the YMCA Shaddongate Community Resource and Training Centre contract have taken place with Tullie House Trust agreement meeting due to be scheduled for November.

For the first five months of 2013/14 sickness absence levels were reported at Overview and Scrutiny in October as having reduced by over twenty percent in comparison to the same period last year.

## Information Management

Recent counts for information requests (From 16 August to 11 October 2013):

Environmental Information Regulations requests received - 12

Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to - 8

Freedom of Information requests received – 81

Freedom of Information requests responded to - 90

Data Protection Act subject access requests received - 0

Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 0

Data Protection Act s29/s35 requests received - 1

Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 2

## **Organisational Development**

### **Member Health Initiatives**

A health check session was held for Members before Council on 10 September. The session was attended by 22 Members who had their blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol checked and got their body stats assessed. Information on a wide range of health issues was also given out. Further Member health initiatives will take place later in the year.

### **Member/Officer Forum**

A Member/Officer Forum is taking place on 5 November 2013 in Flensburg from 12.00pm to 2.00pm and 4.30pm to 6.00pm. Carlisle City Council staff from Digital & Information Services; the Home Improvement Agency; Economic Development; Environmental Health and Contract & Community Services, as well as staff from Cumbria CVS will be on hand to update Members about their work.

### **Apprenticeships**

The City Council is recruiting a 4<sup>th</sup> apprentice who will be joining the Home Improvement Agency and they will be working on the range of services to improve homes and help people remain independent at home.

### **Corporate Training and Ethical Governance Programme**

The Corporate Training and Ethical Governance Programmes for November 2013 to March 2014 are now available on the intranet. Courses which may be of interest to Members include project management, emotional intelligence, health & safety for Members, corporate risk management, ICT security and grant & external funding guidance for Members. For more information on any of the courses please contact the Organisational Development Team.