

Meeting Date: 16 July 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 Asset disposal programme and the project. Several more transactions are due to complete this month. The Legal Team is also very busy generally advising on and preparing for numerous Agreements, Adjudications and Tribunals.

Licensing

Disability awareness training for taxi/private hire drivers is taking place 'in house' once a fortnight. The purpose is to raise awareness of their responsibilities under the Disability and Equalities Act 2010. Licensing staff prepared and deliver the presentation which is going out to all drivers. We are over half way through the sessions and have delivered it to approx. 230 drivers.

Cumbria Constabulary are having a drive to detect scrap metal thefts in the county which is running into £100,000's. The knock on effect is that itinerant collectors are now complying with the law and registering with their local authority. This has created additional work for which we cannot charge a fee. This will, however, be addressed later this year when the legislation is substantially overhauled with the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013. In December 2012 the law was tweaked to say that dealers must use cashless transactions to raise accountability and create an audit trail for the payment of scrap metal.

Licensing are currently working through the myriad of new legislation which relaxes the criteria for 'regulated entertainment'. Four pieces of secondary legislation have been published in the last six months, each varying the definition. This has necessitated staff

updates, application form and guidance amendments, web site changes and trade awareness.

Ongoing guidance is being given to the many groups and organisations that are holding summer events which will include alcohol and/or entertainment. Licensing staff are also members of the Council 'Event Working Group', formed to co-ordinate events where the Council have an involvement.

Electoral Services

The County Council elections for the Carlisle area on 2nd May 2013 were delivered successfully and a claim is being prepared to enable the costs of the election to be reimbursed by the County Council.

The claim in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner election has now been settled by the ECU and the balance of the outstanding monies will be received shortly.

Arrangements continue to be made in preparation for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. The Confirmation Dry Run, when the City Councils electoral register will be 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 is being carried out throughout July and August. The outcome of the dry run will be known in the next few weeks and these results will be used to inform the planning of resources and actions.

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 will be brought forward and carried out in August / September. It is estimated that just over 1000 postal vote electors will be asked to refresh their signature in this years exercise.

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 years 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.

RESOURCES

Financial Services

2012/13 Final Accounts Process

The 2012/13 outturn reports have now been considered by the Executive and the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel and are considered elsewhere on this Council

agenda for formal approval. The Executive formally recommend that Council approve carry forwards totalling £0.696m for revenue and £1.8m for capital.

Work on the 2012/13 Statement of Accounts continued through May and June and the draft accounts (subject to Audit) were signed off by the Director of Resources at the end of June. These will be considered by the Audit Committee on 22nd July. The external audit process started in early July and will continue through to the end of September. The External Auditors (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 are no significant changes for the 2012/13 Accounts.

Strategic Planning

The Medium Term Financial Plan and Corporate Charging Policy, the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan for 2014/15 onwards are currently being reviewed and updated. Draft plans will be considered by the Executive at the beginning of August before being considered by Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel later in the month. Council will formally consider the new plans at its meeting on 10th September. The 2013 Spending Review Statement of 26th June provided an analysis of the cuts agreed by government departments with HM Treasury for 2015/16, with a 10% reduction agreed for the DCLG. How this reduction is to be passed onto Local Authorities is expected later in the year but could reduce the Council's funding by approximately £260,000 per annum.

Audit Services

The next Audit Committee will meet on 22nd July when members will receive the final reports for the remaining 8 material system reviews along with other risk based audit reviews which have been finalised in the first quarter of 2013/14.

The Committee will also receive the 2012/13 Internal Audit Outturn report which includes the annual opinion on the adequacy of Internal Control and the self assessment on the effectiveness of Internal Audit.

Work on the 2013/14 Audit Plan has commenced. Reviews on Revenues Recovery, Performance Standards, Organisational Development and Procurement are ongoing.

Internal Audit is also working through the data matches produced as part of the 2013 National Fraud Initiative. The outcome of this exercise will be reported separately to the Audit Committee later in 2013.

Digital and Information Services

The new working and employment arrangements with Allerdale have been operational for 3 months with no issues arising. Staff at both sites has settled into their new structures very well.

The introduction of online self-service for council tax has been a success and will be followed by the introduction of housing benefits and NNDR.

A plan has been developed for the next phase of service channel migration. This will focus on Local Environment.

Property and Facilities

Asset Review Disposal Programme

During the period of this report there have been no further asset disposals completed. Disappointingly, two transactions, victims of the current economic and financial climate, have fallen through at the eleventh hour. These sales were worth almost £0.5m to the Council, officers will commence work again to bring them back to the marketplace in order to find alternative purchasers. Despite this setback, and the lack of sales this month, overall target receipts still remain ahead of predictions.

Preparatory work continues on a number of assets to bring them forward to an auction sale planned in October 2013. Additionally, a couple of stalled transactions on the Raffles Estate are now coming to fruition with agreed land sales in the pipeline to a Registered Provider for the provision of affordable housing to rent in conjunction with the Council's partner, Lovells.

Work is still underway to bring forward a programme for the portfolio of residential sites which are included in the Business Plan.

Building and Facilities Projects

Civic Centre

Work is being carried out to the new ground floor contact centre facility; this involves re-modelling the reception area and re-locating the Keepers desk. Deliveries now come to the rear door. Re-wiring work is continuing to the Civic Suite part of the first floor. Work has also been carried out to the paved area on the north side of the building

Female and Family Accommodation

This major new build project is now complete and the official opening will take place on 15th July.

Enterprise Centre

The stonework to the facade of the building on James Street is currently being renovated

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE

The end of year performance for the Service Standards has now been to each of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels and the new format has been well received.

Information Management

Recent counts for information requests (From 5 April 2013 to 28 June 2013):

Environmental Information Regulations requests received - 14

Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to - 22

Freedom of Information requests received – 114

Freedom of Information requests responded to - 186

Data Protection Act subject access requests received - 5

Data Protection Act subject access requests responded to – 2

Organisational Development

A wellbeing and learning day for staff and Members took place on Tuesday 14 May at the Civic Centre which was attended by over 160 people. Local chef, John Crouch, did cookery demonstrations using food supplied by Fair Food Carlisle. Hair and beauty students from Carlisle College offered manicures and makeovers which helped to develop their skills of working with different types of customers and provided evidence for the qualifications they are working towards. A range of other health, wellbeing and community organisations were also there to offer advice and support. Staff from Cumbria County Council based at the Civic Centre also came. Lancaster City Council and Richard Rose Morton Academy also sent staff to see how the City Council runs events like this.

The City Council supports several local charitable organisations and recently held a book sale in aid of Eden Valley Hospice which raised £115.13. Staff and Members have continued to support Carlisle Foodbank with donations of food. A donation box for members of the public to donate food is now located at the Civic Centre reception desk.