

 Employment Committee 22 March 2017		Agenda Item No. 5
Title	Revenues Officer	
For further information about this report please contact	Mike Snow 01926 456800 David Leech 01926 456052	
Wards of the District directly affected	N/A	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive Budget Report 8 February 2017	
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	N/A
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	N/A

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	9/3/17	Andy Jones
Head of Service	9/3/17	Mike Snow
CMT	9/3/17	
Section 151 Officer	9/3/17	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	9/3/17	Andy Jones
Finance	9/3/17	Dave Leech
Portfolio Holder(s)	9/3/17	Peter Whiting

Consultation & Community Engagement	
Insert details of any consultation undertaken or proposed to be undertaken with regard to this report.	

Final Decision?	Yes/No
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)	

1. **Summary**

1.1 As a result of an on-going increase in council tax work (primarily relating to the increased number of properties in the District), it is proposed to increase the establishment by one Revenues Officer.

2. **Recommendation**

2.1 That the Employment Committee agree to increase the Finance establishment by one additional full time permanent Revenues Officer from 1 April 2017.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendation**

3.1 In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the volume of correspondence received by the Revenues Section within Finance in respect of Council Tax. The main reasons for this are:-

- The increased number of properties within the District. Each new property will result in increased correspondence relating to that specific property. In addition, as people move into the property there will often be a "chain" effect as other people move as a result.
- The increase in "buy to let" has increased correspondence as more people live on short term tenancies and move property more frequently than owner occupiers.
- The changes introduced in recent years to discounts and exemptions. In some cases these are now more complex and require individual applications.

3.2 The increase in correspondence is shown by the following statistics which compare the first 9 months of 2016/17 to the same period in 2015/16:-

	2015/16	2016/17	Difference
April	4,207	5,509	1,302
May	3,283	5,590	2,307
June	4,377	5,868	1,491
July	4,764	6,081	1,317
August	3,571	6,331	2,760
September	4,997	5,706	709
October	5,047	5,126	79
November	3,960	4,905	945
December	3,039	3,407	368
Totals	37,245	48,523	11,278

3.3 With this increase in correspondence, the Revenues Section has had a backlog in their workload which has been increasing in recent years. This backlog varies month on month and is closely monitored. However, as at 31 January, the oldest item in the work queue was 60 days old.

3.4 To present customers with such a long delay before their correspondence is processed is not acceptable. In addition further unnecessary demand on officer time is created by customers following up their original service request. Many initiatives have been put in place to seek to reduce the backlog. These include:-

- System re-design
- Officers within Revenues moving to generic working, i.e. working more flexibly between council tax, business rates and recovery.
- Overtime and Saturday working.
- Buying additional temporary resource.

3.5 Whilst these have impacted to help the backlog, more sustainable initiatives are required. The Executive on 8 March 2017 as part of the ICT Services Digital Work Programme agreed to progress the new "Open Channel" module to the Revenues System. This will provide customers with more "self-serve" functionality.

3.6 Looking forward, with all the increase in new properties in the District, it is apparent that the workload of the Revenues Section is going to increase. Whilst the various initiatives have helped, additional staff resources are required. It is therefore proposed that the establishment is increased by one full time permanent Revenues Officer.

4. **Policy Framework**

4.1 **Policy Framework** – Collection of Council Tax is a statutory function, with the District Council being the billing authority, collecting council tax on behalf of the County Council, the Police and town//parish councils.

4.2 **Fit for the Future** – As part of the prosperity agenda, there is substantial development within the District. This is set to continue in future years, assuming that the Local Plan is agreed. As a consequence of this, additional demands will continue to be placed upon the Revenues Section.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

5.1 Within the February 2017 Budget Report that was agreed by Members, financial resource for an additional Revenues Officer from 1 April 2017 of £30,100 in total (allowing for on-costs and eventual top of scale). Further funding was allowed for in respect of the annual costs of Open Channel.

6. **Risks**

6.1 The delay in processing council tax correspondence has the following risk implications:-

- Reputational risk – the service provided to customers is not at a suitable standard. In addition to increased service requests, there are formal complaints which need to be investigated.
- Financial risk – processing delays will result in delayed bills and collection of sums due. In addition to delays in collection, it is also likely to lead to more difficulty in terms of recovery and potentially increased write-offs.
- Staff- Facing a constant, often growing backlog, staff will invariably feel demoralised. This in turn may have implications for sickness, staff turnover and recruitment.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1 If the new post is not agreed, it is likely that the backlog in work will get worse as the number of properties in the District increase, despite the other initiatives in place and planned to help to assist the situation.