

FINANCE PORTFOLIO HOLDER REPORTS TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

March 2014

In March/April/ June, a report on the previous twelve months, highlighting successes and failures and anticipating the major events and improvements over the forthcoming twelve months.

2013/14 Service Plan Progress

The Appendix considers all the 2013/14 Service Plan projects. Snapshots of the current position for some of these projects are discussed in more detail below:-

1. Welfare Reforms

- Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Progress – on time, scheme approved by Council December 2013.

Preparation currently underway to issue 2014/15 council tax bills and benefits assessments. Claimants have been sent letters telling them of the changes and the likely amounts they will have to pay.

Recruitment to the new post of Council Tax Reduction Claimant Support Officer to help claimants. This is a new post out of implementation funding from central government.

Scheme includes a £20,000 hardship fund for those suffering as a result of these changes to be administered similarly to the Discretionary Housing Payments.

- Benefits Cap and Under Occupation

Implemented. In January all local authorities were advised that anyone who has lived in their property since before 1996 and been in continuous receipt of HB since 1996, should not be affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy. The Government took steps to amend the legislation from 3 March. It was identified that there were approximately 50 cases where the spare room subsidy should have not been implemented. The benefit for these cases has subsequently been corrected.

- Universal Credit

Rollout delayed with no details of when Housing Benefits will be included. DWP have issued an updated Local Support Services Framework, with the intention of more details to come in autumn 2014.

2. On-Line Returns

The Council's Income Management System has now been upgraded. This upgrade was delayed due to the supplier not being able to support the upgrade until January. The system is now in the position for the introduction of the On-Line Returns Module. This module will help to dis-integrate income postings to the general ledger from the various sites across the district (mostly leisure centres) and ensure VAT is correctly accounted for without manual intervention. This module is now planned to go live in 2014/15.

3. Transactions Review

- Detailed report to January SMT to remind officers across the organisation of the correct procedures and processes to be followed in ordering goods and services, and the need to adhere to proper procurement practices.
- Updated "Order training" being prepared with ICT Trainer for rollout March/April.
- Invoices and petty cash for Housing and Property Services now managed within FSTeam along with rest of Council's.

4. Non-Service Plan work

Finance has continued to support corporate projects and the work of other departments. Much of this work was not envisaged when the Service Plan was agreed. In addition, the Internal Auditors have been involved in special investigations including members' expenses and Housing & Property Services procurement. This work has had knock on effect on other planned work.

2014/15 Service Plan Issues

The 2014/15 Service Plan is still being formulated. Issues likely to be included are detailed below:-

1. Procurement

Assess Training needs across the Council and arrange appropriate training
Review and update Code of Procurement Practice and all associated procurement documentation in line with new EU Regs, the Social Value Act and the Council's business requirements.

2. Bank Tender

Tender for the Council's main banking services and implement change to new provider if necessary.

3. Fees and Charges Review

A recent analysis of discretionary fees and charges of local district councils was undertaken, partly funded by the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency

Partnership. During 2014/15 this work will be considered in more detail with a view to it feeding in to the fees and charges setting for 2015.

4. Concurrent Services

It is intended to review the current scheme. This will involve consulting with parish and town councils.

5. Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Continue to support claimants and implementation, review scheme ahead of 2015/16 and consideration of a banded scheme.

6. Risk Based Benefits/Council Tax Reduction

Feasibility work on carrying out Risk Based assessments, using appropriate software/system.

7. Transactions Review

Further work to reduce and streamline transaction processing. The feasibility of auto-scanning/processing creditor invoices will be undertaken.

8. Investigation Procedures/Manual

To be developed by Audit & Risk Manager to aid future investigations.

9. Risk Management Intranet Page

To be developed.

10. Continuation of any Service Plan projects carried over from 2013/14, including:-

On-Line returns
Code of Financial Practice Training
Review of Housing & Property Services support

11. Project Support, including:-

Riverside House Relocation
Leisure Options review
Crematorium works
Local Plan – CIL, infrastructure costing
Lillington Regeneration
Clarendon Arcade

Appendix

Progress against 2013/14 Finance Service Plan

Project Name	Progress
Council Tax Reduction – amend scheme for 2014/15	Scheme agreed and implemented.
Welfare Reforms – manage impact and prepare for Universal Credit	Work in-going. No details of when housing benefit to transfer over available.
Business Rates Retention – monitor and ensure all businesses are being correctly rated	Detailed monitoring on-going throughout year
Budget Review – continue review, review process in light of 2012/13 outturn	Review on-going, findings currently being pulled together.
Implementation of Income Management “On Line Returns” module	Likely to slip to 2014/15 due to delays with supplier in supporting upgrade.
Council Tax Penalty – introduction following April 2013 Executive approval	Introduced and implemented.
Transactional Review – continue to seek to reduce transaction numbers and increase overall efficiency	Much on-going work throughout year.
Risk Management Strategy – continue to promote good risk management in line with Strategy and Action Plan	Work on-going. March Senior Officers’ meeting on Risk Management.
Code of Financial Practice – officer training	On-line training being prepared to rollout early in 2014/15.

Project Name	Progress
Review Housing & Property Accountancy support	Absence of key managers in H&PS are prevented this work from progressing as far as intended.
Review Discretionary Budget and implement reductions from 2014/15	2.5% reduction in discretionary budgets included within 2014/15. Support on-going from Accountancy and Procurement with budget managers to accommodate spend within budgets.
Sign up to new Procurement Card and associated support system	New cards applied for.
Consider impact of Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	Report issued to Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee December 2013
Assist local suppliers to tender for Council contracts.	New Procurement system implemented. All procurement activity now accessed by potential tenders via a common portal also accessing Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull's tender activity. Further work to help local companies access our contracts will continue in 2014/15.