

COUNCIL MEETING 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL – RESOURCES

1 PERSONNEL

There are a number of key issues affecting staff being actively pursued. We are working towards the appointment of a new Chief Executive, with interviews planned for the 4th and 5th August.

A revised absence policy and procedures has been produced and will be considered by the Resources Review Panel on 24th July. I am confident that the adoption of these policies and procedures will lead to a reduction in staff absence.

Final preparations are being made for the Council's assessment in October for the Investors in People award.

2 MEMBERS SERVICES

In addition to the induction day for new councillors, training has been provided in Development Control, use of lap tops ethics and probity. A one-day workshop for newly elected councillors and training in dealing with the media (for Executive Councillors) has been provided.

A detailed report will go to the Resources Review Panel on 24th July, covering the facilities available to members and will look at how these may be improved. To make sure members are aware of the tools available to help them a booklet will be circulated shortly setting out the wide range of facilities.

Emerging technology continues to play a large part in making members more effective. I therefore intend to arrange for the Council to pay the monthly rental costs of Broadband, or suitable alternative, for all Executive members. Those Councillors themselves would meet installation costs, which is in line with the current arrangement for the installation of second telephone lines. The rental costs can be met from within existing budgets.

A report on the possible use of Broadband technology for all Councillors will go to a future meeting of the Corporate Resources Review Panel.

3 FINANCIAL SERVICES UNIT

The Financial Services Unit have been focussing on the closure of the Council's accounts for 2002/3 and with this completed the production of the Annual Statement of Accounts are before Council for approval tonight.

In addition the Unit is gearing up for the budget monitoring exercise, which is being undertaken now that we are 3 months into 2003/4. This information will be key in ascertaining our financial performance so far this year.

4 REVENUE SERVICES UNIT

The collection rates for Council Tax and NNDR are monitored monthly. To date we have been consistently ahead of target for each.

New external bailiffs have been recently appointed to recover Council Tax and NNDR arrears. Initial indications are that they are being very successful.

A new external debt collection agent has been appointed to collect some of the older sundry debt, but with limited success. This was expected because of the nature and age of the debts involved.

The Income, Rents and Control section are concentrating on improving the Direct Debit service by moving towards the implementation of 'paperless' Direct Debit. Once introduced this will enable us to take instructions over the telephone or via the Internet making the service far more accessible and flexible and lead to an increased take up of DD with beneficial effects on the Council's income.

5 INFORMATION SYSTEMS UNIT

A new performance management Intranet site will be launched on Monday. It will provide a central access point for all Performance Indicators monitored by TDBC.

We are negotiating with our telephone switch supplier to purchase outright the units at Deane House and Priory Depot. This will cost £3350 as opposed to the existing annual rental of £5600.

A new air conditioning unit is being purchased for the machine room, the current units are underpowered and we are seeing problems due to the hardware getting close to over heating in the warm weather we have experienced.

6 BENEFITS SECTION

Our first quarter performance for new and renewal claims puts us in the top quartile. Because of the transfer of change of circumstances to the Supporting People Team, our performance dipped on this BVPI. We expect to bring this back as the year progresses. Recruitment of extra staff recommended by the BV Plan is continuing. The Investigation Team is exceeding its target for sanctions under the SAFE scheme and a new anti fraud and prosecution strategy will be presented for Member approval at the RRP on 24th July, when a breakdown of targets and achievement will be given.

8 SERVICE SUPPORT GROUP

The main issues within the Service Support Unit are Somerset Direct (the impact on Reception and Switchboard), and the future of the Old Municipal Buildings, widening the use of GIS across all Units and preparation for internal restructuring.

9 SOMERSET DIRECT

By the time of this meeting members will have had an opportunity for briefing on this.

TERRY HALL