

COUNCIL MEETING - 16 DECEMBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL - RESOURCES

1 PROCUREMENT

The corporate procurement unit has been working on the new standing orders, which will allow us to improve the way we buy the goods and services we require. The impact of the National Procurement Strategy and the way it can best be implemented locally are also being assessed. Local processes e.g. invoice payment, are being re-engineered to reduce the level of administration required. The unit has also been heavily involved in the Housing Stock Options work and Housing Best Value Review also with the Deane Building Design Group in the design of an action plan for the Rethinking Construction Agenda. Bar-coding of all DLO stores is almost completed which will improve stock management.

2 MEMBER'S SERVICES

The independent Member's Allowance Panel have completed its consideration of allowances for 2004/5. Its recommendations have been submitted to the Resources Review Panel (RRP) for its views and details advertised in the local press (as required by legislation). The independent Panel's recommendations, together with the views of the RRP, will be submitted to the next meeting of Council for a decision to be made in parallel with the budget setting process.

The RRP have also considered and made recommendations on a report, which sought to improve services to Councillors, particularly those that work full time. Its recommendations included a slightly later start time (6.15pm) for most meetings, improvements to some existing services and a menu of options being offered to each Councillor so they can receive communications in a manner that best suits their particular circumstances.

3 FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit have been spending much of their time dealing with the forthcoming budget proposals for 2004/5 and investigating requests from Executive members for information concerning closure of the budget gap. They have also been closely involved with the other key corporate projects including the Leisure Trust and implementation of the new Personnel and Payroll package. The impact of many recent legislative changes is being assessed, including the Prudential Code, of which members will be hearing much more shortly.

4 REVENUE SERVICES

A review of our cashiering services has been conducted and a report outlining the options for change will be made to the Executive meeting on 10th December.

The instalment dates for payment of Council Tax will be brought forward in 2004. Work has commenced on advertising and introducing the change, which will have significant benefits for the Council and help to keep increases in council tax as low as possible.

The in year collection rates for Council Tax and NNDR continue to exceed targets and the level of unpaid debt owed to the Council continues to be reduced.

An IT Development Plan has been agreed and finalised for all the revenue systems, this will result in windows based systems, document imaging and work flow being introduced within two years.

5 PERSONNEL

Contracts were recently signed with Northgate to provide the Council with a new integrated personnel and payroll software system, to replace the existing 15 years old pay roll system. Work is currently progressing on installing and setting it up prior to a duplicate run of payroll in February to test the accuracy of the new system with, if all goes well, a go live date in April.

One of the most significant advantages of the Northgate system is its ability to easily produce management information which until now has been either impossible or extremely difficult and time consuming to produce. For example much more detailed and useful information on staff absence will be available.

6 BENEFITS

Disappointingly the first two months of the second quarter have seen deterioration in the speed of processing of claims. This results from a severe attack of maternity in the benefit unit together with mass recalculation of benefit entitlement resulting from introduction of the Pension Credit system. These changes in entitlement have in turn resulted in large increase in enquiries from claimants.

Initial results from the statutory survey show increased satisfaction with the unit's telephone service and the understand ability of our documents. However there has been a reduction in satisfaction in other areas such as the facilities at enquiry points and the speed with which claims are assessed

7 RECEPTION AND SOMERSET DIRECT

Refurbishment of the Reception area has been put on hold for the time being while a review is undertaken of how the Council can best deliver its services in the future. The review will take into account the impacts of the Housing Stock Options process together with the anticipated growth in delivery by e means. This review is expected to take 6 months to complete.

Consequently the Somerset Direct service will open in April 2004 in its original concept as a virtual contact centre using the telephone service only. The Reception area will continue to operate as it does now apart from removal of the 356356-telephone switchboard.

Terry Hall