

## **CABINET MEMBER (STRATEGIC FINANCE AND RESOURCES)**

1<sup>st</sup> August, 2012

Cabinet Member

Present: - Councillor Duggins

Shadow Cabinet Member

Present: - Councillor Blundell

Employees Present: -

J. Evans (Finance & Legal Services Directorate)  
H. Harding (Finance & Legal Services Directorate)  
S. Iannantuoni (Customer & Workforce Services Directorate)  
S. Symonds (Customer & Workforce Services Directorate)

### **Public Business**

#### **9. Apologies**

There were no apologies

#### **10. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **11. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2012 were signed as a true record.

#### **12. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

#### **13. Performance within the Revenues Section for the Period April 2011-March 2012**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance and Legal Services which updated the position on performance and developments within the revenues service during the financial year 2011/12.

It was noted that the annual target for the council tax collection was only a few points from being achieved at year end. A significant collection had been realised, representing the highest in-year collection rate to date. Council tax arrears outstanding reduced from £12.3m as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 to £7.5m at 31 March 2012. Overall, the position had significantly improved, but officers would continue to exercise constant vigilance and report the ongoing position to Cabinet Member at his meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012, when giving the half year update.

Cabinet Member extended congratulations and thanks to all officers in the

service.

**RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the report and matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member:-**

- 1) Notes the performance of the revenues service for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012.**
- 2) Agrees to receive a further report at the meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012 to provide an update for the period April to September 2012.**

**14. Performance within the Benefits Service for the Period April 2011-March 2012**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director Finance and Legal Services which updated the position on performance and developments within the benefits service during the financial year 2011/12.

It was noted that although the outturn of 26.1 days for processing new claims was higher than the target of 23 days, a reduction had been achieved during the second half of the year to bring the figure down to 24.8 days. There was a similar situation with the outturn for change of circumstance targets, which had exceeded the 10 day target by 7.7 days, although the figure for the second half of the year had reduced to 16.8 days. There was concern about the ability to achieve targets due to the increase in volume of data transfer from Atlas, which has had a huge resource impact. However, officers are cautiously optimistic of achieving next year's target of 23 days, in the light of recent new recruitment and ICT enhancements.

Cabinet Member was advised that the issues relating the impact of welfare reform were due to be considered by Health, Social Care and Welfare Reform Scrutiny Board (5).

The half year update on the service would come to Cabinet Member at his meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

**RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the report and matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member:-**

- 1) Notes the performance of the benefits service for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**
- 2) Agrees to receive a further report at the meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012 to provide an update for the period April to September 2012**

**15. The Exercise of Delegated Authority in the Write-Off of Debt Owing to the Authority in 2011/12**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance and Legal Services in respect of the write-off of debts owing to the authority in the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. A range of measures were employed to ensure that every effort was made to maximise the collection of all income and

debt owed to the Council. In certain circumstances it was appropriate and necessary to write off debts owing to the Council. Robust processes were in place within the Revenues and Benefits Service to ensure that debt was written off and authorised in accordance with the Council's rules of delegated authority. In 2011/12 £3.36m was written off, compared with £3.1m in 2010/11.

Concern was expressed at the level of business rates write-offs. This was mainly due to bankruptcies and insolvencies in the difficult economic climate.

**RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the report and matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member:-**

- 1) Reviews the level of write-offs authorised under delegated authority.**
- 2) Delegates authority to officers in the service areas to write off total debts up to and including £5.00 in value as "de-minimis" as part of service collection and enforcement processes.**
- 3) Agrees to receive a further report at the first meeting of the new municipal year 2013/14 to provide an update for the period April 2012 to March 2013**

#### **16. Council Tax Payment Profiles**

Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance and Legal Services which updated on progress made within the revenues service to increase the proportion of council tax payment profiles which have a first of each month payment date and to increase the number of people paying by direct debit. There were currently 135,061 live council tax accounts and of those 102,380 are liable to make payments. Of the 102,380 accounts which require payments to be made, 62,875 (61.4%) are paid by direct debit. Of the 37,418 accounts paid by a method other than direct debit, 30,078 (80.4%) are paid on the first of the month. The service continued to be proactive in encouraging direct debit take-up and promote first of the month payment dates for cash payers.

Cabinet Member thanked officers for the level of detail in the report and agreed that this should be incorporated into the annual report of the revenues service in the future.

**RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the report and matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member:-**

- 1) Acknowledges the work undertaken in 2011/12 to increase the number of direct debit payers and to increase the number of cash payers paying on the first of each month.**
- 2) Agrees that future updates in respect of direct debit take-up and payment dates be included in the annual report on performance within the revenues service.**

#### **17. Early Release of Deferred Pension Benefits**

Cabinet Member considered together the public and private reports of the Director of Customer and Workforce Services in respect of a request to release deferred (preserved) pension benefits under the Discretions Policy.

**RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the report and matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member approves the early release of preserved pension benefits in this case on the grounds of compassion and in accordance with the City Council's Pensions Discretion Policy.**

18. **Outstanding Issues**

The Cabinet Member considered and noted a report of the outstanding issues relevant to his portfolio. All items had been scheduled for that day's meeting and were discharged from the list in the report.

The meeting closed at 2.25pm