

Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor Michael Vincent, Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	16 September 2021

<b>Executive Report: Resources Portfolio Holder</b>
---

## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform Council of progress on key objectives and the current position on issues within the Resources Portfolio, as set out below.

## 2. Finance

- 2.1 The draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 (pre-audit) was approved by Audit Committee on 27 July and the audited accounts are expected to be approved later this month (subject to the audit of the Lancashire Pension Fund). Revenue slippage continues to grow year on year, despite a minimum threshold of £5,000 being introduced, and in relation to 2020/21 the value (net of reserve funding) is £1,815,040. As the slipped expenditure still needs to be incurred, the saving is returned to balances to be spent in 2021/22.
- 2.2 In summary, additional income from green waste collection, benefits and rent allowances, Covid-19 related grants (un-ring-fenced), Sales, Fees and Charges Compensation Scheme, National Leisure Recovery Fund grant, Housing Benefit Administration grants and council tax annexe grant total £1,986,324. Savings in employee costs, water charges, refuse collection contract, vehicle fuel, car allowances, tools and equipment, materials-consumables, postage, Greater Lancashire Plan and the Community Payback scheme total £567,374. These positive variances have been used to compensate for reduced income on rents and interest received totalling £84,653 and increased expenditure on business rates and bad debt provisions of £64,248. Other minor positive variances total £345,667. The net savings have been used to top up the Council Tax Base Equalisation (formerly New Homes Bonus) Reserve by £1,137,498, the Property Investment Reserve by £266,900, the Leisure Management Reserve by £250,000 and the Capital Investment Reserve by £1,096,066.
- 2.3 When you consider that our gross expenditure on services for last year was £52m, a net saving of £2,750,464 equates to 5%.

### **3. Human Resources**

- 3.1** A hybrid-working group is currently looking at how the council can build on what we have learned and achieved during the pandemic through remote working practices. The group has identified four working styles for traditional office based staff and is currently reviewing with managers where each role sits. A discussion form, which will run alongside the 1-2-1 appraisal process, will be rolled out in September to all staff and will document the arrangements to be agreed in each instance and how service levels will be maintained effectively. It is expected that the outcomes of the hybrid-working project will assist in reducing the council's carbon footprint by reducing staff travel and encouraging them to have meetings on virtual platforms rather than in person.
- 3.2** Following the procurement of an e-learning system 'Learning Pool' in March 2021, work is progressing to create a portal for officers to have access to a number of training courses. The Governance and Business Support service areas have undertaken a pilot of the system and it went live on 7 September 2021. This will improve the council's resilience and ability to deliver online training to staff on key corporate areas such as health and safety and IT security without the need to rely on face-to-face training. Following the roll-out to staff the portal will be extended to include Members.
- 3.3** To help address the recruitment and retention challenges being experienced by the council, we are in the process of recruiting up to six corporate apprentices on three year fixed-term contracts, studying towards a Chartered Management Degree. The apprentices will be given the opportunity to gain a wide variety of skills working across a number of services across the three directorates. The first apprenticeships will commence in September and it is hoped they will assist the council's succession planning going forward.

### **4. Contact Centre**

- 4.1** The formal council tax collection process has now recommenced and the recovery team successfully obtained 3,707 liability orders in June and 514 in July. These liability orders represent amounts outstanding for 2020/21 and 2021/22. The recovery team are now in the process of pursuing collection of the outstanding debts via attachments to earnings or benefits, or via referral to Enforcement Agents. This accords with our duty to pursue and collect outstanding council tax on behalf of the majority of residents who do pay in full and on time. Where eligible, residents are encouraged to apply for a hardship grant and Localised Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS). Under the council's LCTS which remains one of the most generous nationally, those with the lowest incomes are required to pay a maximum contribution of just 8.5% of their council tax bill.
- 4.2** Following the launch of the new Citizen Access Portal, more than 2,400 residents have now signed up for a "MyWyre" account. This allows residents to access their own records relating to benefits, council tax and waste management at any time without needing to speak to a council officer. The convenience offered by the "MyWyre" account also

results in efficiencies for the council and supports a reduction in footfall in the Civic Centre at a time when this is still a necessary public health measure.

## **5. Comments and questions**

- 5.1** In accordance with procedure rule 11.3 any member of Council will be able to ask me a question or make a comment on the contents of my report or on any issue, which falls within my area of responsibility. I will respond to any such questions or comments in accordance with Procedure Rule 11.5.