



Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor Michael Vincent, Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	7 July 2022

Executive Report: Resources Portfolio Holder

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 pre-audit final accounts for 2021/22 are on schedule to be signed off by the Audit Committee at their meeting on 26 July. Post-audit sign off is expected to be before the end of the financial year. It should be noted that the 2020/21 post-audit accounts are not yet signed off (expected in late 2022) owing to a lack of resources at our External Auditors (Deloitte) and a national issue affecting the valuation of infrastructure assets. Many local authorities across Lancashire and the country as a whole are in the same situation. This means that we are in the unprecedented position of preparing our 2021/22 accounts without knowing our audited opening balances. We are not expecting any significant changes to the 2020/21 draft accounts but it all adds to the uncertainty in our forecasts.
- 2.2 Despite the pandemic an underspend for 2021/22 is expected to be reported again at outturn. However, the emerging cost of living crisis is having an impact on the council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the next update to Cabinet in October is likely to show a worsening position owing to the inflationary increases on key contracts and advice that councils should be budgeting for at least a 4% pay award in 2022/23 whereas our MTFP currently assumes 3% in 2022/23 and ongoing.
- 2.3 Whilst the Covid-19 business grants have now ceased, the assurance stage continues for the various schemes and finance continue to play a key role in the developing central government response to the conflict in the Ukraine and the cost of living crisis.

3. Human Resources

- 3.1** As yet the 2022/23 pay award has not been agreed. The Unions have submitted a pay claim to the National Employers looking for a substantial increase with a minimum of £2,000 or the current rate of RPI, whichever is the greater, on all spinal column points. Other requests are also being considered and the consultation with local authorities commenced on 13 June, following which a response will be submitted to the Unions, which is not expected before the end of July.
- 3.2** Work has commenced on reviewing the council's strategic narrative and values. Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service will work with North West Employers in the first instance with the aim of aligning any changes with the review of the Business Plan in 2023.
- 3.3** Following the successful recruitment of two corporate apprentices in September 2021, a further recruitment exercise has taken place and another three apprentices will commence employment with the council from August 2022. The apprentices will undertake a Business Management Degree through Lancaster University and will rotate around the council's core services.
- 3.4** Similar to other councils, recruitment and retention continues to be problematic. Work is on-going to improve our approach to recruitment which has involved reviewing the application process and the online portal used for advertising positions. Proactive work is also being carried out by HR to 'talent spot' using LinkedIn to encourage more quality applications.

4. Democratic Services

- 4.1** Councillors are currently testing the new councillor portal which went live on 16 May 2022. The portal is primarily a landing page which aims to pull together all the necessary information required to assist councillors in their roles. Feedback over a 12 month period will be collated through the Councillor Development Group regarding its usage and its usefulness with a view to rolling it out fully following the election in May 2023.

5. Contact Centre

- 5.1** In excess of 39,000 of our residents with homes in council tax bands A – D have now received their £150 energy rebate payment. This leaves just over 4,000 council tax payers who still need to make contact with us to provide their bank details before we can pay them. Reminder letters have been sent to these payers advising them that if they do not contact us by 10 June 2022, we will credit the £150 payment to their council tax account. Before we take that course of action however, we will make further enquiries to ensure that the person registered as the council tax payer is still living at the address concerned.

- 5.2** We have been allocated an additional £430,000 from the Government (via LCC) for a second round of Household Support Funding. This money is to be used to provide financial assistance to those on the lowest incomes and most badly affected by the cost of living increases. The money from this fund is to be pooled with some of the £266,000 also provided by the Government, to fund a discretionary energy rebate scheme to help those on low incomes struggling to pay their household fuel bills. The pooled funding will be distributed over the coming weeks to approximately 9,000 households who claim localised council tax support from the council.
- 5.3** Almost 25,000 residents have now signed-up for a “myWyre” account. The account allows residents to see their council tax, benefits and waste management records and to make an application, request a service or report an issue online at a time that suits them without the assistance of a council officer.

6. Comments and questions

- 6.1** In accordance with procedure rule 10.3 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 10.5.