



Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor Lesley McKay, Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	26 October 2023

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 and ICT

- 2.1 Migration of the council's telephone service to 8x8's hosted service is scheduled to take place in the first week of November, subject to successful testing. The system will integrate with our existing Microsoft Teams communication platform providing enhanced connectivity and improved user experience. The overall resilience of the system will be improved as will its capacity and reliability during peak periods.
- 2.2 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan went before Cabinet on 18 October. The plan shows our financial forecast for the current year and four years ahead with a revised projected gap of just under £4m in 2027/28. This results largely from an assumed reduction in central government funding owing to the lack of a multi-year settlement, as well as unusually high inflationary pressures. All members are encouraged to watch the recorded briefing made available to them by the S.151 Officer on the Councillor Portal.
- 2.3 A technical consultation paper on the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement is expected to be produced for local authorities to consider before the provisional financial settlement is announced at the end of the year. Ultimately the full details and their impact on Wyre's finances is only expected to be known in December and as a result, the forecast will be further updated in the new year to reflect the outcome of the wider consultation process on the settlement.

3. Governance and Business Support

- 3.1 There is still no agreement on the 2023/24 Pay Award. The NJC Unions met on 19 September to discuss the employers full and final pay offer and agreed to reconvene for further discussions after GMB's strike ballots close on 24 October.

- 3.2** Equal Pay Claims within councils have received media interest recently. Birmingham City Council have issued a Section 114 Notice as part of the plans to meet the council's financial liabilities relating to Equal Pay claims and an in-year financial gap within its budget which currently stands in the region of £87m. In addition to this, an Employment Tribunal has recently ruled that the Fife Council Job Evaluation Scheme did not meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3** Whilst we can never rule out the possibility of a claim there is nothing to indicate that there is a risk at Wyre on the scale of that experienced by Birmingham. In this case bonuses paid to a group of staff were the particular issue and performance related pay doesn't apply at Wyre. In respect of the ruling at Fife the problem was not so much the scheme itself but the way Fife carried out their Job Evaluation exercise. At Wyre all job evaluation reviews for both existing and new roles are carried out in liaison with union representatives which should minimise the potential of a similar claim.
- 3.4** The Human Resources Team will be taking part in regional activities run by North West Employers to consider if there are any improvements in line with best practice that can be made to the council's job evaluation scheme.

4. Contact Centre

- 4.1** Applications for payments from the Household Support Fund (HSF) are now being accepted from single persons and couples with no dependent children. The qualification criteria for these groups to receive a payment are that their gross household earnings must be too high to claim social benefits, but under £25,000 (single person) and £30,000 (couple). Successful applicants will receive a payment of £150 in supermarket vouchers. We received 14 applications in the first seven days after applications were invited.
- 4.2** After a slow start, the volume of applications for a HSF payment being received from families and single parents with dependent children, but not in receipt of any social benefits other than child benefit is starting to increase as winter approaches. It is envisaged that some forthcoming publicity on social media, specifically Facebook, will help increase take-up further.

5. Assets and Estates

- 5.1** In September 2023 central government issued guidelines to local authorities and other public bodies to investigate the possible presence of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in their property estate. Based on those published guidelines an initial desktop review has been undertaken and following a short procurement exercise a firm of structural engineers has been appointed to carry out surveys on those buildings considered to be at some risk of having RAAC present. Priority properties will be reported on before the end of October with the rest completed by mid-November 2023.

- 5.2** The minimum energy efficiency standards regulations (MEES) for commercial property changed with effect from the 1 April 2023 making it unlawful to continue to let a commercial property with an F or G rating even if the lease was granted prior to the MEES Regulations coming into force in 2018.
- 5.3** In order to comply with the new regulations an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) surveyor has been commissioned to complete fourteen further EPC surveys within the Council's commercial estate. The results of the surveys should be available before the end of October 2023 at which time we will have confirmation of the EPC rating for each property and a summary of any works required to bring the property up to the required minimum rating of E along with an estimated cost for those works.
- 5.4** Within the new Neptune fish and food processing development at Fleetwood, lettings have now been completed over the largest Unit 1 and Units 2-8 within the terrace with each lease being for a 10 year term commencing 9 August 2023.

6. Comments and questions

- 6.1** 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.