

Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor Lesley McKay, Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	25 January 2024

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** As a result of the delayed Autumn Statement, notification from Central Government of the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement did not arrive by their 6 December target deadline and no technical consultation was published in advance. This means that the timescales are extremely tight again for producing the council's annual budget. It is highly likely that the budget for 2024/25 will be based on provisional data which was released on 18 December. The Chancellor's Autumn Budget indicated that Shire Districts would be allowed to raise council tax by 2.99% (£6.57 in Wyre) or £5 on a Band D property, whichever is highest, without triggering a referendum.
- 2.2** In lieu of a technical consultation or the actual settlement details, a Local Government Finance Policy Statement for 2024/25 was shared in early December with a short briefing from the Minister and his team on 7 December. This provided some headline information including:
- Funding Guarantee – all authorities will see a 3% core spending power increase before any decision on organisational efficiencies, use of reserves and council tax levels;
 - Baseline Funding – will increase by September CPI (6.7%)
 - New Homes Bonus – the 2023/24 approach will be maintained for 2024/25
 - Services Grant – as in 2023/24, this grant will reduce and the remainder will continue to be distributed using the Settlement Funding Assessment distribution methodology.
- 2.3** It is still the intention that an updated forecast showing our projected spending levels and the recommended council tax for 2024/25 will be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 14 February. Inevitably, some information will be based on forecast assumptions but if for instance, details are confirmed around the pay award for 2024/25 and future years these will replace the estimates.

3. Contact Centre

- 3.1 Payments totalling £552,750 have been made from the Household Support Fund to 4,272 Localised Council Tax Support recipients with dependent children, or in receipt of Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance or Pension Credit Guarantee Credit. The payments were between £100 and £200 and were paid in the form of supermarket vouchers. Recipients of the vouchers can choose to use them at any one of six supermarkets. This brings the total spend to £834,650 of the £961,306 awarded for 2023/24. No announcement has been made about the future of this funding and so no allocation for 2024/25 has been confirmed.
- 3.2 There are concerns over the process for collecting unpaid council tax following the decision to close Blackpool Magistrates' Court on 1 November owing to RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) being found. Other alternative courts in Lancashire, to which we would normally be transferred, have been similarly affected. The Courts Service have not yet determined where or when future hearings will take place. It is possible that online hearings may be utilised, but we await clarification from the Courts Service.

4. ICT

- 4.1 **Telephones** - Migration of the telephone system to 8x8 was completed successfully in mid-November and this included the transfer of all lines and calls. The move was carried out with minimal impact to internal users and customers with only 45 minutes of downtime.
- 4.2 Adoption of the system has been excellent, with a high level of regular user activity across the board. Feedback has been extremely positive with users finding the system simple to adapt to and intuitive to use. Reliability and call quality has proven to be excellent so far, and any issues have been minor and quickly resolved.
- 4.3 **Disaster Recovery (DR)** - Installation and configuration of the remote DR datacentre has been completed, providing greater redundancy and resilience to service outages and Cyber Threats in relation to our server infrastructure.

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.