

**CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 14th DECEMBER 2009**

**CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Michael Lager**

**CABINET PORTFOLIO: Efficiency & Resources**

Portfolio covers:-

- Financial and Treasury Management Strategy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Exchequer (Council Tax and Benefits)
- Business Efficiency Programme
- Business Systems inc. performance
- Procurement Strategy
- Information Technology
- Risk Management/Business Continuity
- HR and Organisational Development
- Health and Safety

**REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 14<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2009 AND ENDING 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2009**

### **Financial and Treasury Management Strategy**

1. A £3m deposit with an Australian bank was repaid in full on time. The position with Icelandic bank deposits has not changed materially since the last report. A first investment with the Goldman Sachs Money Market fund of £1m has been made, to earn initially 0.46% vs 0.25% at the Bank of England DMO. The GSMM can be recalled on demand.
2. An awareness-raising briefing on the activities of “loan sharks” has been delivered by Essex CC trading standards staff to the Council, GCH and Witham Housing Association.

### **Asset Management Strategy**

1. A preferred bidder has been chosen for the site, partly in the Council's ownership, to the east of the High Street in Halstead, bringing nearer the related capital receipt.
2. The annual revision of the Asset Management Strategy is under way.

### **Exchequer (Council Tax and Benefits)**

1. The collection rates of council tax and business rates continue to hold up, being little different from a year ago. New rateable values apply to business premises from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010, following revaluation by the Valuation Office (not the Council). There is transitional relief for the hardest hit. It appears that pubs, licensed premises and large supermarkets will face the highest increases, but industrial and manufacturing premises (about 60% of businesses) may see drops of 3%. There could also be a drop in the multiplier to 41.3p (48.1p in 2009/10), which would directly reduce bills.
2. Benefits decisions and payments are being delivered to targets.

### **Business Efficiency Programme**

1. The Performance Innovation and Efficiency Programme Board oversees this work and reports to Cabinet, so that decisions can be made from a “menu” on revised service standards in a number of areas, primarily to balance the books but also to place our customers' requirements at the forefront. This echoes the Essex CC transformation project, and with other bi- and multi-lateral initiatives to share services it is becoming clear that the challenge will be to manage successfully the volume and pace of opportunities.

## **Business Systems inc. performance**

1. PIE also monitors performance against targets, with some minor slippages on project timings, but indicators in general showing that most are where we want them.
2. The Accountancy section benchmarked themselves against other district councils and compared (2008/09) favourably on cost and staffing levels, while showing very low sickness absences.

## **Procurement Strategy**

1. There have been some shifts in membership, with interest raised following publicity from the OGC.

## **Information Technology**

1. CSC call answering times rose in October with new collection and recycling measures but have since reverted to normal. Volumes have risen.
2. CCTV in Halstead in expected to begin coverage in January 2010.
3. The IT infrastructure is being developed: an example is the bringing of land charges data into line with other data when about 35% of addresses, some 21,000, had to be manually corrected.

## **Risk Management/Business Continuity**

1. An update review with Members took place on 29<sup>th</sup> October as reported to Cabinet. With the process now well embedded and understood, there is greater confidence in handling the risks we face, so that a number could be downgraded.

## **HR and Organisational Development**

1. There has been a disappointingly limited response to the offer to take on additional “modern apprentices”, an initiative to counteract the recession.
2. The staff awards event held on 27<sup>th</sup> November at Towerlands was well-attended and a chance to thank our hard-working staff for their efforts. Alongside the many success stories and instances of outstanding service or performance, it was heartening to see the depth of friendships and mutual support that make Braintree District staff such a valuable resource for the Council and local residents.

## **Health and Safety**

1. We continue working to provide opportunities for staff and public to work and relax healthily, including a walking programme, although with perhaps limited take-up

## **Improvement East**

1. I represent the Council on the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Panel, which is promoting the sharing of good practices and funding a range of programmes across the East of England. Here again shared services are high on the agenda, with emphasis also on reducing wasted effort, improving business processes, making partnerships work, transferring skills, and managing performance.

## **LGA Urban Commission**

1. Meetings in 2009 have had briefings on upcoming government plans such as Multi-Area Agreements, Economic Partnership Boards and Total Place, all aimed at joining up service providers in an area in different ways.
2. The Urban Commission's work plan covers:
  - local democracy and community cohesion (campaigning to roll back the quango state, letting local voters have more power over local decisions, and empowering councils to deliver any public service not specifically ring-fenced by central government)
  - housing and the recession (increasing council house-building and the related funding, and other issues)
  - economic regeneration (re-engaging young people, the Future Jobs Fund)
  - local transport (bus industry regulation, subsidy options, concessionary fares – funding shortfalls now and tomorrow, ticketing)

**FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:**

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