

# Briefing Note



Subject: **Corporate Services and Governance Director's Quarter 3 report**

Submitted to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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Quarter 3 is a key quarter for performance and organisational processes. The outcome of the significant all-council corporate and financial planning work completed in quarter 3 informs the draft budget and corporate plan.

Where performance is not meeting expectations by the end of this quarter, remedial action needs to be decided. I am pleased to report that performance on key indicators across the services have improved this quarter, and the majority are now on target for year end. Other issues and successes are also included below.

## Performance Exceptions

### Revenues and Benefits

1. The only indicator identified as Not Met this quarter is:

#### **6.1 Increase the % of Council Tax collected in year to 96.3%**

Quarter two performance was **88.7%** compared to profile target of **Q3 – 90.2%**

The Revenues Manager is still confident that this target will be met by year-end. Our approach to pursuing debt has been refined, we are working differently with customers, having more telephone contact and accepting payments at time of the call. This has the benefit of avoiding court attendance and less use of bailiffs, thereby freeing up time for officers to chase up customers and avoids customers building up further debts. Performance in recovering debt after year-end is also improving – this therefore leads to a higher collection rate overall.

2. Other issues for the team are:

- a. The software and processes for issuing bills for the Town Centre Bid levy have been implemented in time for annual billing; there was a very short

turnaround time for this work as it obviously could not be started prior to the outcome of the BID election.

- b. The benefit grant subsidy claim has been submitted but is still awaiting sign off by external auditors.
- c. The roll out of Universal Credit for working age new claimants has been underway since December. Although numbers to date have been not significant, there are some teething problems and some issues with communications with DWP are emerging. As we no longer deliver housing benefits to these residents, our housing colleagues do not have a direct channel for communications with DWP over individual case issues which is challenging for us and our residents.

### **Revenues and Community Contact Centre**

- d. Planning for annual billing is underway with CCC colleagues – the aim is to mitigate the expected spike in customer contact by clarity of communications, promotion of Myhastings to encourage self-reporting and self-service and forward planning with services to avoid other significant contact at this time.

### **Organisational staffing issues**

3. The People and Business Support team are working with South Coast College Hastings prior to implementation of the new apprenticeship levy from April. Together they are understanding the apprenticeships standards and how we can use them to address our organisational skills needs/gaps which have been identified in our strategic workforce planning.
4. I am pleased to report that sickness performance is on target for quarter 3, however there are some areas where long term sickness is impacting in very small teams – Audit being but one example – additional resources will be needed to complete the audit plan for this year, these are being sourced currently.
5. There are a number of internal staffing moves across the council where colleagues have applied for new roles which, whilst positive in the longer term, cause short term issues for service delivery. These gaps are being addressed initially by offering additional hours for colleagues across HBC and have the additional benefit of people learning new skills in another area.

### **Transformation Programme**

6. The priority for resources in quarter three has been business process mapping to contribute to the service reviews and budget discussions. Capacity of service managers, their teams and colleagues supporting the transformation programme determines the speed at which progress can be made. The 'as is' position is completed for the priority service review areas, work is on-going to develop the 'ideal' and then to agree and resource implementation plans.

7. Further priority customer transaction processes have been launched on My Hastings including complaints and FOI.
8. Significant work was undertaken in qtr 3 to develop the business case for the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system which Cabinet approved in early January.
9. Members requested at the last meeting more details about channel shift and a presentation will therefore be given to the performance review meeting and O & S.

### **Continuous Improvement**

10. Significant work has been undertaken with members and senior managers to design a new style corporate plan and streamlined supporting processes. These are being piloted over the next few months and members views will be very welcome to ensure they meet all needs and are fit for purpose.

### **Financial Services and Internal Audit**

11. The revised budget process and development of 2017/18 budget has again been a challenging time for finance colleagues as well as service managers. The vacancy of the senior accountant post has been an additional strain this year.

### **Legal Service and Elections**

12. The Pier arbitration process has required a significant input from the Legal team as well as the Chief Legal Officer who has been needed at the arbitration for 8 working days to date.
13. The elections team have two vacant posts following the departure of two administration officers. The experience in the team is now limited to that of the Elections Manager. Additional support has been identified to assist the team from March – end May with the ESCC election, in the form of a very experienced retired ex-employee. This post holder will provide some resilience and support for the manager and will assist in the training and development of the new post holders once recruitment has taken place.

Jane Hartnell, January 2017