

## **Performance/Administration Cabinet Committee**

**Tuesday, 27 March 2018**

**7.30 pm**

### **Present:**

Cllr Derek Shelbrooke (Chair)

Cllr John Knight (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs:           Gurjit Bains  
                  Conrad Broadley  
                  Colin Caller  
                  Brian Francis  
                  David Hurley  
                  Peter Scollard  
                  Narinder Singh Thandi

Mike Bytheway	Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
Ben Turner	Corporate Performance Manager
Jackie Baker	Assistant Manager Revenues & Benefits
Glen Pritchard	Assistant Manager Local Taxation
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

### **15. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Gary Harding; Cllr Gurjit Bains attended as his substitute.

### **16. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2017 were signed by the Chair.

### **17. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **18. Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Three 2017-18 (October to December 2017)**

The Corporate Performance Manager presented Members of the Performance and Administration Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as set out within the council's Corporate Plan 2015-19, for Quarter Three 2017-18 (October to December 2017).

The Corporate Performance Manager explained that the Performance & Administration portfolio has a successful track record in terms of its level of performance and, as a result, has overseen consistent increases to the targets associated with its performance measures. Against that background it was noted that three of the performance measures did not meet their target for Quarter Three 2017-18.

The Corporate Performance Manager highlighted the typographical error on page 16 where '30 September 2017' should be '31 December 2017'.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits), Assistant Manager Revenues & Benefits and the Corporate Performance Manager fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- Investigation activity during the quarter has produced the following results;
  - £1917.90 of additional council tax owed due to the removal of discounts or exemptions, plus an additional £2547.52 in future years where discounts no longer apply.
  - Three people have received £70 penalties for negligent failure to report changes affecting their entitlement to a council tax discount /exemption (Total £210)
  - Two council properties have been recovered as a result of investigations conducted giving a notional saving of £36,000.
  - One Right to Buy application was blocked after it was found that the tenants daughter had forged the signature of the tenant. This prevented a loss of £77,900 and the daughter received a caution as an alternative to prosecution in connection with the false statement.
- The processing time for new claims is 19.5 days which, although outside the target of 18 days, represents a significant improvement on the 20.7 days achieved in Q2. Gravesham's outturn reflects positively in comparison with the latest national average (23 days) and Kent average (22.3 days).
- The latest collection figures are – Council Tax: 96.8% and Business rates: 98.63%
- The Council Tax collection rate equates to around £50million with £1.6million remaining.
- In the past Gravesham have tried incentives to encourage people to pay their Council Tax (e.g. cash prize etc.) but it hasn't been successful; such schemes seem to work better at larger authorities.
- Gravesham is trying to encourage the wider use of direct debit; it is advertised on all communication that is circulated and more direct debit dates are currently being pursued.
- A decision has been made to cease the progression of a shared service for Revenues & Benefits with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. Other opportunities for shared services are currently being explored with further details on their status being provided to the Committee at its next meeting. Officers have noted the direction from Members that shared services should, wherever possible, be hosted at Gravesham and not just at other authorities.

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Three 2017-18 (October to December 2017).

## 19. Council Tax Recovery and Housing Benefit Overpayments

The Committee received an update on Housing Benefit Overpayments in the form of a handout which can be viewed here:

<http://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/s42694/Housing%20Benefits%20Overpayments%20Handout.pdf>

The Assistant Manager Revenues & Benefits fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- As at 28 February 2018 the total Housing Benefit debt outstanding is £5,489,694 (3285 cases)
- From 12 April the Council will be able to access HMRC data which should help to find out if someone is employed.
- If the Council are unaware that people have come into the Borough this could potentially affect the recovery of an outstanding debt that may be owed.
- It is possible for an individual to have numerous debts with different authorities.
- The data is more accurate now that real time information is being provided by HMRC which is demonstrated by overpayments created increasing to £2.5million in 2015-16.
- The Council networks with various groups including; Kent Managers Group, Overpayment Groups etc. to maximise the ways debt can be recovered.
- Gravesham has the third highest amount of outstanding Housing Benefit debt with Medway first and Thanet second. The Assistant Manager Revenues & Benefits will circulate the figures to the Committee.
- Gravesham maximises every route of Housing Benefit recovery.
- Write offs are dealt with as and when the Council has got the debt to write off. The Cabinet Member for Performance/Administration signs off debts under £15,000 and Cabinet deal with amounts of that amount.

The Committee received an update on Council Tax Recovery in the form of a handout which can be viewed here:

<http://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/s42695/Council%20Tax%20Recovery%20Handout.pdf>

The Assistant Manager Local Taxation fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- Generally GBC collect over 99.5% for both Council Tax and Business Rates using various prescribed recovery methods.
- The Council is usually at the bottom of the creditors pile and get nothing the vast majority of the time.
- The total Council Tax debt is £6million.
- In the current financial year; there has been a £1.7million reduction for Council Tax and £0.5million reduction for Business Rates.
- Court costs are £110 per case for Council Tax and Business Rates, this amount is added to the existing debt.
- The Council does still have cases where people don't pay out of protest (rather than financial issues) but they are quite rare.

- Only two 'attachments to earnings' are allowed at a time (and only 1 for benefits). If other attachments are already in place the Council must wait its turn but generally Council Tax takes priority (Housing Benefit is quite low down in the pecking order).
- The Council refer cases to Enforcement Agents / Bailiffs where there is no alternative method of recovery available. The removal of household goods is very rare; no goods were removed this year.
- In 2017/18, only 4 cases were taken to a committal hearing where the debtor could be sent to prison. Once a sentence has been served the debt cannot be collected.
- Debts do have to be written off when there is no way of recovering; e.g. a company goes bust or an individual passes away or disappears. If an individual re-appears in the Borough the debt will go back on.
- The Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) agreed to look into whether the selling on of debts to another agency would have to come back for a political decision to be made.
- The Council Tax Team consists of 3.5 staff in the Recovery Team, 3.5 staff who do the billing and 2 inspectors. The Customer services Team also provide assistance.

The Committee thanked the officers for an informative update and commended the teams on their hard work and great progress with debt recovery.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8.58 pm