

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 21 February 2022

Reporting officer: Sarah Parfitt, Director (Corporate Services)

Subject: Cessation of the Revenues & Benefits Shared Management Arrangements

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide Members with information on the cessation of the Shared Management Arrangement with Medway Council for the Revenues & Benefits service.

Recommendations:

This report is for information only.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since October 2019 Gravesham Borough Council and Medway Council have operated a shared management arrangement in relation to the Revenues and Benefits services at both authorities.
- 1.2 In practice, this has taken the form of a shared Head of Revenues and Benefits and a shared Revenues Manager, both employed by Medway Council and shared 50:50 between the two authorities.

2. Cessation of the shared management arrangements

- 2.1 Since the shared management arrangement commenced in 2019 the service has seen significant changes and challenges. The prolonged introduction of Universal Credit and the need to administer government initiatives to support residents and businesses in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic has put the service under a considerable amount of pressure both in terms of staffing and financial resources.
- 2.2 Moving forwards, there is a desire for both authorities to develop their Revenues and Benefits services further. At Gravesham, this is focused around:
 - The proposed implementation of a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1 April 2022 and the associated adjustments required to review council tax accounts in a holistic way, checking discounts, exemptions, entitlement and supporting vulnerable people.

- Expanding the use of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) as a means of proactively supporting those close to, or experiencing, financial crisis by signposting them to financial support that they may be entitled to.
 - Progressing implementation of Citizens Access, the online portal which can be used by residents and businesses to manage their council tax and business rates accounts and benefit claims.
 - Ensuring the Revenues & Benefits function continue to deploy the resource it has available to it to deliver efficient and effective services to its customers and maintain strong levels of performance.
- 2.3 The implementation of the shared management arrangement was always intended to be the pre-cursor to determining whether a fully shared service between the two authorities where this was considered to be in the best interests of both authorities.
- 2.4 In conducting the annual review of the shared management arrangement in December 2021 there was consensus of opinion from senior management at both authorities that a fully shared service was not considered to be an option either authority was keen to progress at this time. In respect of the shared management arrangement, the requirements of each council have been, and will continue to be, simply too great to be effectively supported and delivered through a shared management arrangement. This, combined with differences in the size, diverse nature and culture of the two authorities meant that it was highly unlikely that this model could be sustainable over the long term.
- 2.5 As a consequence of these discussions and in accordance with the Shared Management Agreement, on 18 January 2022 Medway Council formally served notice to cease the shared management arrangement. Having previously discussed the outcome of the annual review with the Portfolio Holder and Leader of the Council, the notice served was acknowledged by this council and an effective date of 1 April 2022 to cease the shared management arrangement has been agreed between the two authorities.
- 2.6 It is therefore intended to put in place a new management structure for Revenues & Benefits at Gravesham from 1 April 2022. The proposed arrangements are set out below:
- 2.6.1 Re-introduction of a **Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits)** to manage the Revenues and Benefits Service.
 - 2.6.2 Re-evaluation of the **Assistant Manager (Revenues and Benefits)** post to take into account the responsibilities of the post holder in respect of the Revenues Team.
- 2.7 Responsibilities carried out by the shared management posts will be revoked as part of the cessation of the shared management arrangements and re-designated to the new management structure set out above.
- 2.8 The management structure proposed is intended to provide the focus on delivery of the service developments set out at paragraph 2.2 of this report.
- 2.9 The financial implications of the new arrangements from 1 April 2022 are set out in appendix one.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 In terms of next steps, the focus will be on ensuring a smooth exit from the shared management arrangement for the staff currently managing the service and also the teams involved.
- 3.2 The process to recruit to the Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) position and reevaluate the Assistant Manager (Revenues and Benefits) job role has commenced. The new role of Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) will be subject to an internal recruitment process.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 Background papers pertaining to this report are held by the Director (Corporate Services). Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	Local authorities have a statutory requirement to collect council tax and business rates as required in the borough and provide a housing benefit service.
Finance and Value for Money	<p>The revised management arrangements for the Revenues & Benefits Service will continue to deliver a continued reduction in cost to the council of £50,420 when compared to the current day cost of the management structure in place prior to the shared management arrangements commencing.</p> <p>Prior to the arrangement, the service management consisted of three full-time positions which, based on current pay scales, would have resulted in a total annual cost to the council of £203,230.</p> <p>The shared management arrangement with Medway Council reduced the annual current cost of the management structure to £138,770.</p> <p>The management arrangements from 1 April 2022 would result in an annual cost to the council, based on current pay scales, of £152,810.</p>
Risk Assessment	The local authority has a statutory duty to administer Revenues & Benefits and it is felt that bringing the management of the service back in-house minimises any future risks to the service and ensures opportunities to further develop the service can be progressed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? No.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk. N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. N/A</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Corporate Plan	<p>#1 People – Put our customers first: Implement a suite of quality and effective frontline services accessible to all.</p> <p>#3 Progress – Deliver a more resilient, creative and cost effective-council: implementing a programme of continuous change, overhauling business processes and delivering new, innovative service design.</p>
Climate Change	<p>The proposal set out in this report has the potential to have a small impact on the council’s overall climate change commitments. Whist travel has been minimised in recent months due to COVID-10 restriction, the direct employment of officers will minimise the need to travel between sites and will therefore contribute to the reduction in staff emissions.</p>
Crime and Disorder	<p>There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report</p>
Digital and website implications	<p>There are no digital or website implications resulting from this report</p>
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	<p>There are no safeguarding implications resulting from this report</p>