

## **COUNCIL**

**15<sup>th</sup> JULY 2013**

### **CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT**

<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR ADRIAN JONES</b>
<b>CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR</b>	<b>CENTRAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES</b>
<b>CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER</b>	<b>JOE BLOTT</b>

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to his portfolio.

### **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES**

#### **1. IT SHARED SERVICES**

Wirral IT is working with Cheshire West and Cheshire with a view to introducing shared services. This will facilitate improved efficiency and lower costs in DASS, CYPD and Finance & HR systems. Further reports will follow as progress is made.

#### **2. PC REFRESH**

About two thirds of the 3500 or so devices currently in use are in good condition and can be updated; the remainder need to be replaced. Windows 7 will shortly replace Windows XP. Measures for the improvement are well under way.

#### **3. IT SECURITY**

IT is doing its part of the work to be ready for a major review of all the Council security provisions to be inspected on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013. A Security Access Group of access devices is being checked for all those PCs and Laptops which access critical Government information, from the DWP, for example. A penetration test took place last week to check the robustness of all our devices to resist external and internal attacks. The results are expected shortly and any faults will be corrected. Encryption of PCs and memory sticks is being completed, and advice as to our readiness is being sought from experts in government security

## **HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY**

Interviews took place on 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> June for 8 Apprentice posts in Parks & Countryside. The apprentices will be appointed on 18 month contracts leading to a qualification in horticulture studies. They will move around the service spending time in different teams to build up their experience, with a start date planned for beginning of July 2013.

### **5. CHANGES TO PAYROLL REAL TIME INFORMATION (RTI)**

HMRC introduced the RTI process in April 2013. It is the biggest change in the operation of PAYE in 60 years. Wirral's first alignment was transmitted successfully on 6th of June 2013.

### **6. REDUNDANCY AND REDEPLOYMENT**

As a consequence primarily of the government's funding reductions Wirral Council has had to make savings including £5m from management costs. Following negotiations with the trade unions this resulted in 196 employees leaving voluntarily. As of 26<sup>th</sup> June a total of 50 employees were issued with notice following service restructuring. Of those, 21 are seeking redeployment and 17 have already been re-deployed.

### **7. TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT**

The Council signed a Collective Agreement with the trade unions on 23 May 2013 to change the terms and conditions of employees to save £3.7m per year. This is a significant change and the trade unions will be working closely with the Council to identify future savings and to review changes to working practices.

## **BUSINESS PROCESSES**

### **8. WELFARE REFORM**

The government's Welfare Reform programme has seen a number of significant changes that have impacted on our residents and ensured that many of our services have had to respond on the impact of these on our residents. In particular the 'Under Occupation Regulations' (known as 'Bedroom Tax') has affected well over 4,000 of our residents. This has put a severe strain on the Council's 'discretionary housing payment fund'. A number of residents will also be affected by the 'Benefit Cap', which begins this month,

In April the authority took over responsibility for emergency payments called '*Local Welfare Assistance*'. In the first two months of the scheme 1017 claims had been received, with 594 receiving assistance by way of financial help for food and fuel and some claimants who had experienced either a crisis affecting well being to health and welfare or were establishing themselves into the community with virtually no personal

possessions and household items also received white goods to assist in relieving their difficult family circumstances.

## **9. (A) IMPROVING COLLECTION**

In response to the recent report on debts by Eugene Sullivan work is underway on improving collection of all debts as well as addressing old and largely uncollectable debt. The recovery journey that used to take 70 days has been reduced to 42 days. Discussions are ongoing with issuing departments to change the culture of sending invoices to obtain payment to now asking for payment first and then delivering the service.

## **(B) COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME COLLECTION**

There are 15,700 working age claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) who have to pay 22% of their Council Tax for the first time or substantially more than they paid in 2012-13 due directly to cuts in government grants. Officers have been working to ensure those claimants who should be in another category and protected from this reduction have been successful in identifying over 350 cases that qualify as vulnerable and do not face a cut in support of around £220 per annum. However the authority must look to collect from those who are due to pay.

## **10. CALL CENTRE HELPING EXPAND FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT**

In recent years the Council has had success in the area of foster carer recruitment. Part of this success has been based upon the use of the Council Call Centre in taking initial enquiries.