



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

to
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 APRIL 2021

UPDATE ON AGREED SCRUTINY ITEMS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Committee on the approach to agreed scrutiny items.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Committee reviews the initial update on the Transformation Learning item at **APPENDIX 1** and considers the date delay for final report set out at paragraph 3.3.3 below;
- (ii) That the Committee notes the initial response and information provided on the Debt Recovery Process and considers a deferment of the review for 6 months and whether it wishes to redefine the scrutiny item in light of the interim report at **APPENDIX 2**.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 On 21 January 2021 the Committee considered a report of its Working Group having reviewed Member requests / suggestions for areas of scrutiny and agreed to the inclusion of two items in its workplan.

3.2 The Lead Officers in both cases have started the necessary information gathering and report preparation to assist the Committee as follows:

3.3 Transformation – Learning from what we have done (estimated timescale 12 weeks - 19 April 2021)

3.3.1 The original blueprint document for the Council's Organisational Transformation identified an overall savings target for the Future Model, and also seven work packages with expected outcomes. The work being conducted is reviewing the outcomes identified, and to what extent relevant officers feel they were achieved and when, and also any relevant customer and cost implications that have been seen.

3.3.2 To date, relevant officers have largely fed back on progress against the original objectives, and there are emerging points of learning, for example where some items were more complicated or took longer than expected and then couldn't underpin the new structure.

3.3.3 The finance team are conducting a wider piece of reconciliation of the structure and budgets, which will review the financial delivery of Transformation. They expect this

work to be completed in May 2021 - as this will inform the final version of the report and findings, we expect completion of the full report to be delayed to 31 May 2021.

3.4 A review of the debt collection process and policy and the impact on residents (estimated timescale 16 weeks - 17 May 2021)

3.4.1 As part of the scoping of this scrutiny item the Committee agreed some detailed questions requiring to be explored. It follows that detailed information will need to be researched and provided to assist the Committee with this review. For the purposes of preparing the Committee for its further work on this item however, the assumption has been made that the scrutiny will be confined to debts occurring in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates.

3.4.2 The Lead Officer's initial response to the agreed brief is attached at **APPENDIX 1**. This largely deals with context and the relevant provisions of the Council's Strategy on this subject, and also describes the Recovery Process together with the tools available to the Council.

3.4.3 The Committee may wish to assess whether and how it wishes to proceed with more detailed scrutiny of this area of work in the light of the information provided, and plan accordingly. At this point however, the service area has been unable to provide a detailed response to the specific scoping questions. This is due to the current demands and pressures on the service, including administering of the Business Grants schemes, annual billing, processing increased benefit applications and Covid Track and Trace applications which is being undertaken in addition all other core work of the team. Re-allocating resources to this review would result in significant risks and impacts to customers such as the inability to assess and pay Business Grants, benefit payments.

3.4.4 The review to date has established that a robust Corporate Debt Policy is in place which is primarily rooted in a legislative background and provides a clear and detailed framework for how Council Tax and Business Rate debts are dealt with.

3.4.5 In terms of debt recovery work, there has been a significant reduction in proactive enforcement, including Enforcement Agents (Bailiff) action due to impact of, and in response to Covid. The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and the service managers have requested that the Committee gives recognition to this and considers the postponement of the review for six months and if required redefinition of this scrutiny item.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The updates are provided on the agreed Committee workplan items for Member review and discussion.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

5.1 Thorough scrutiny processes underpin the Performance and Efficiency Corporate Goal.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Both workplan items will review the impact of our programme work and policies on our customers once finalised.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Equalities are considered as part of the reporting officer review work.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Reviewing these items will help to identify potential Corporate Risks and their mitigation.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Within the Transformation review we will assess the financial impact to the organisation.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Within the Transformation review we will assess the resource impact to the organisation.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – None.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to: