



# RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**BURNLEY TOWN HALL**

**DATE: 06/08/2013**

## **PRESENT**

### **MEMBERS**

Councillor Margaret Lishman in the Chair

Councillors Margaret Brindle, Saeed Chaudhary, David Heginbotham, Marcus Johnstone, Anne Kelly, Stephen Large, Andy Tatchell and Lian Pate.

## **OFFICERS**

Steve Rumbelow - Chief Executive  
Tom Forshaw - Head of Chief Executive's Office  
Caroline Lee - Head of Revenues and Benefits  
Phil Moore - Head of Finance and Property Management  
Heather Brennan - People and Development Manager  
Eric Dickinson - Democracy Officer

## **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillor Mark Townsend - Executive Member for Resources and Performance Management

<b>11. Apologies</b>
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Apologies for absence were received from Helen Seechurn.

<b>12. Minutes of Last Meeting</b>
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The Minutes of the last meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

<b>13. The Executive's Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings</b>
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Members considered the Executive Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings from 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013, as it related to the remit of the Committee.

Members asked generally about the regularisation of land ownership in Burnley Wood and South West Burnley.

**IT WAS  
AGREED** That the report be noted.

#### **14. Heads of Service Presentations**

Caroline Lee reported on the current work taking place in the Revenues and Benefits Service Unit, and emphasised the implementation and management of the impact of key changes in 2013/14 relating to the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme, Council Tax on empty properties, and preparation for Universal Credit.

She circulated a leaflet called 'Take Control of Your Finances' which set out Burnley's essential welfare reform toolkit, emphasised financial health matters and allowing access to computers, and which was produced by a multi partner group including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Union, Calico, Burnley College, Job Centre + and Burnley Borough Council.

She stated that consideration of future bailiff provision would take place during 2013/14 with the focus on reputational issues as well as potential savings, but that before this work could be looked at there would need to be certainty about the charging mechanism.

Members made the following points;

- Has there been an effect on Housing Benefit claims due to a rise in Benefit sanctions?  
Caroline Lee stated that a fast track service was in place for new claims

**IT WAS  
AGREED** That the presentation be noted, and that Officers be requested to liaise regarding the appropriate timetable for scrutiny of bailiff provision..

#### **15. Council Tax Collection Rates 2013/14**

Caroline Lee reported on the Council Tax collection rates so far for 2013/14.

She highlighted recent changes to Council Tax Support and empty properties and gave quarter one statistics on in year collection, council tax reminders and summonses, and the number of accounts and payment methods. She also stated that the majority of the extra yield expected during 2013/14 should come from landlords.

Members made the following points;

- How does the Council collect for vacant properties if ownership changed hands?  
Caroline Lee referred to procedures for tracing owners, charging orders and occasionally forced orders for sale, and said that costs needed to be taken into account when determining the best approach to enforcement in these cases
- How does the Council balance recovery methods and costs with the amount of money owed?  
Caroline Lee indicated that an upgrade for IT was being considered to analyse recovery of Council Tax Support accounts in more detail, whilst recovery of charges for empty properties would require manual analysis to determine the collection rate for these properties
- How many of the empty properties identified as 3.72 % of the total included those for demolition?  
Caroline Lee indicated that demolition identified properties had a separate exemption
- What were the rules regarding exemptions for empty properties following death?  
Caroline Lee indicated she would respond in detail to the Member directly
- Extra detail was needed regarding the rate of recovery for small amounts within the Council Tax Support recovery scheme, and was there a minimum bill which was not recovered?  
Caroline Lee indicated she would respond in detail to the Member directly
- Liability on bills relating to long term empty properties after 2 years was discussed , including awareness raising for purchasers of those empty properties  
Caroline Lee said that she would check locally with solicitors on whether there were any current issues with empty properties ,and include any response in future collection rates reports

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted, and that quarterly reports be brought to future Meetings of the Committee.

<b>16.      Sickness Absence</b>
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Heather Brennan reported on the sickness absence statistics from April to June 2013, compliance with the Managing Attendance Policy and health and well being initiatives.

She stated that generally low levels of sickness absence had been maintained, and that the well being strategy had an ongoing role in achieving that outcome.

Members made the following points;

- Was any work being done on stress spotting as a preventative action?  
Heather Brennan outlined a number of policies designed to deal with stress, such as training for Managers, 1;1 with staff, PDR, discussing stress issues with Wider Management Group, coaching, supportive friends, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and other well being initiatives available to staff e.g mental health promotion
- Were the Sickness Absence Reviews and the outstanding Sickness spread amongst Directorates?  
Heather Brennan indicated a general spread within Directorates

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted, and that quarterly reports be brought to future Meetings of the Committee.

<b>17. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14</b>
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Phil Moore reported on the forecast outturn position for the year as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 based upon actual spending and income to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Members made the following points;

- Due to changes to Business Rates, this area required monitoring.  
Phil Moore highlighted the risk in the system of appeals and refunds.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted.

<b>18. Capital Budget Monitoring 3013/14 Cycle 1 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013</b>
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Phil Moore provided an update on the capital expenditure and resources position for cycle 1 up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Members made the following points;

- What was the current state of acquisitions for clearance?  
Steve Rumbelow indicated that CPO activity was ongoing at different stages of progress in South West Burnley, Burnley Wood and Daneshouse, that residual properties were being removed and that individual demolitions were looked at using a risk based approach
- What would happen to the funding earmarked for wakeboarding at Rowley Lake?  
Phil Moore stated that the 112k grant monies had to be returned

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted.

**19. Work Programme 2013/14**

**IT WAS** That the draft Work Programme of Resources Scrutiny Committee for  
**AGREED** 2013/14 be as set out below;

<u>DATE OF MEETING</u>	<u>AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED</u>
Joint Services Legal Services Working Group	Scope and progress the Review of Legal Services Joint Working
8 <sup>th</sup> October 2013	Treasury Management- 2013/14 Mid- Year position Technical Changes to Council Tax Update Council Tax Support Scheme Update Council Tax Collection Rate (Q2) OCL Shared Services Agreement (or at a Special Meeting as appropriate)
<u>For Information Only</u>  BSP 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2013	Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14(Q2) Capital Budget Monitoring 2013/14 (Q2)
3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2013	Mid-Year Performance Q2 Sickness Absence - Half Yearly Fees and Charges 2013/14 Joint Services Legal Services Working Group Update
28 <sup>th</sup> January 2014	Council's Property Portfolio Update Impact of Localism Agenda on Asset Management Draft Strategic Plan 2013/14 Sickness absence 9Q3) Council Tax Collection Rate (Q3)

<u>For Information Only</u>	
BSP 4 <sup>th</sup> February 2014	Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14 Cycle 3 Capital Budget Monitoring 2013/14 Cycle 3
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014	Apprentices Update
6 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14(Q4) Capital Budget Monitoring 2013/14 (Q4) Treasury Management- 2013/14 Sickness absence Council Tax Collection Rate (Q4)

## 20. Exclusion of the Public

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the public be excluded from the meeting before discussion takes place on the item relating to Minute 21, since in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, if the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of Part VA of the Local Government Act 1972.

## 21. One Connect Limited (OCL) Shared Services Agreement

Steve Rumbelow reported on a proposal submitted by One Connect Limited (OCL) regarding a Shared Services Agreement, and staff secondment model.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted, and that a further report be brought to the Committee, if necessary at a Special meeting, prior to the relevant future Executive.