



# RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**BURNLEY TOWN HALL**

**DATE: 03/12/2013**

## PRESENT

### MEMBERS

Councillor Margaret Lishman in the Chair

Councillors Margaret Brindle, Saeed Chaudhary, Joanne Greenwood, Anne Kelly, Stephen Large, Lian Pate and Andy Tatchell.

### OFFICERS

Helen Seechurn - Director of Resources  
Caroline Lee - Head of Revenues and Benefits  
Heather Brennan - People and Development Manager  
Chris Gay - Policy and Performance Manager  
Eric Dickinson - Democracy Officer

### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Mark Townsend - Executive Member for Resources and Performance Management

<b>32.</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
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Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Heginbotham.

<b>33.</b>	<b>Minutes of Last Meeting</b>
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The Minutes of the last meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

<b>34.</b>	<b>Additional Items of Business</b>
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It was determined that an item regarding Public Toilet Provision be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency as it was being considered by the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

<b>35.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>
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Councillors Joanne Greenwood and Lian Pate declared an interest in the item relating to Council Tax Technical Changes.

<b>36.</b>	<b>Public Question Time</b>
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Under the Council's Request To Speak policy Darren Reynolds spoke regarding the outsourcing of the Council's Revenue and Benefits function.

He stated that he ran a local business specialising in payment outsourcing and was concerned to understand the procurement process. He asked that, having regard to recent events at LCC and their ongoing review of the OCL contract (press reports were circulated), the Council review its decision to contract with OCL with a view to the current process being reversed and being run again.

He also said he was not aware of the procurement processes that a contract of this size would be required to follow, that he had not heard the term Competitive Dialogue before and had been unable to find any reference to the county council OJEU notice on the EU website.

The Chair said that the contract had yet to be awarded, the Council was undertaking due diligence and that the matter would come back to this Committee at which point the process would be looked at.

Chris Gay confirmed the information given by the Chair and explained the Competitive Dialogue process under which Lancashire County Council established the OCL contract. Burnley Borough Council was named as a beneficiary organisation within the OJEU contract notice to enable it to draw down services from that contract and at the Chair's request he agreed to supply the notice reference to Darren Reynolds.

Councillor Mark Townsend stated that a pause was in place, that due diligence was taking place, and that the matter would come back to Resources before a decision by the Executive. He also confirmed that he had he had spoken to West Lancashire about their contract with OCL on performance issues.

<b>37.</b>	<b>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 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 as it related to the remit of this Committee.

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Regarding the Organisational Development Strategy report which was being considered by the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013 Executive, Councillor Mark Townsend highlighted its links to the Council's Strategic Plan and the forthcoming changes to the Council over the next few years.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted.

<b>38.</b>	<b>Public Toilet Provision</b>
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Members considered a report on Public Toilet Provision, and indicated that they were engaged in the ongoing consultation as Parish Councillors..

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted.

<b>39.</b>	<b>Council Tax Collection Rates Q2</b>
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Caroline Lee reported on the Council Tax collection rate for 2013/14. She indicated that the changes to Council Tax for 2013/14 relating to the implementation of the Council Tax Support scheme and changes to empty properties had increased the amount to be collected by £2.3M, and that overall Council Tax collection was down by 0.93%.

She also reported on an increase this year of reminders, summonses and liability orders compared to 2012/13, with 92.5% of the increase in summonses related to accounts that had some Council Tax support allocated to them.

She further reported on an increase in payers spreading the cost of their Council Tax over longer periods, with a large increase in the number of cash transactions at the Post Office and Paypoint.

Members made the following points;

- Media reports have highlighted an increase in the number of households nationally served with liability orders, particularly in areas where there has been limited support to households previously paying no Council Tax. Caroline Lee indicated that as there were more Council Tax accounts payable in Burnley for households on lower incomes than before, it was inevitable that the number of liability orders would increase, and the increase in liability orders was being experienced nationally as a result of the change
- The increase in the number of cash transactions was highlighted, with credit acknowledged for the different options being offered by the Council to households paying their Council Tax

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

**40. Council Tax Technical Changes**

*Councillors Joanne Greenwood and Lian Pate did not take part in this item.*

Caroline Lee reported on a proposed change to Council Tax charges for empty properties so that for properties empty for less than 6 months then a 100% discount would apply for the first month followed by 50% for the remaining 5 months.

Helen Seechurn indicated that Lancashire County Council and Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service had been consulted on the proposals as preceptors and had agreed to the proposed change, whilst Lancashire Constabulary had yet to respond.

That the report be noted.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

**41. Review of Bailiff Services**

Caroline Lee reported on legal changes to how bailiff services must operate from April 2014.

She presented the following options for future delivery of enforcing local taxation debts;

Option 1 In-house modernised bailiff service-saving of £18,708 p.a.

Option 2 Outsourced bailiff service to private enforcement agents –saving of £39,799 p.a.

Members made the following points;

- Regarding Option 2 how many Council staff would face redundancy?  
Caroline Lee stated that Option 2 would incur staff redundancy subject to a future restructure.
- Regarding Option 2, would there be a tendering process and if so would TUPE apply?  
Caroline Lee stated that this would be explored with a view to calling from a larger established procurement framework, and that TUPE may not apply

- If other Local Authorities were shutting down their in-house bailiff services, could this Council provide their in-house service to other Local Authorities?

Caroline Lee stated that the majority of other Local Authorities had outsourced their bailiff services a long time ago and was not aware of any pending policy to bring them back in-house. She stated that if Members were keen to explore providing this service to local authorities, this would need to be analysed in more detail as a potential option 3.

- Bailiff services were a sensitive issue and the advantage of an in-house service was that it could be reactive to local need and Burnley people.

Caroline Lee stated that if Option 2 was chosen it would be operating with key players in the industry which were known nationally, and that any contract needed to be closely monitored to ensure that the current level of customer care standards provided by the in-house service continued in Option 2. She confirmed that any costs for this monitoring were included in the savings for Option 2 as stated in the report.

She also stated that in-house bailiffs in Option 1 could provide a wider welfare service and collect wider useful intelligence.

- Bailiff services needed to deal with people in a flexible way and with sensitive handling, and that whilst in-house services may be better placed to achieve this, caveats to ensure this should be written into any agreement..

Caroline Lee emphasised the Government's policy intention which was to encourage activity at the administration stage, such as using text, letters and telephone messaging to ensure pro-active work to encourage debt payment arrangements.

She stated that enforcement work i.e visits to debtor's property's should reduce as a result of frontloading this more pro-active work at the administration stage.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That whichever Option was chosen, frontloading of pro-active debt collection activity should be prioritised and clear standards about customer care standards agreed and that these should be key criteria in the decision making process, together with the financial issues.

**42. Scorecards Quarter 2 2013/14**

Helen Seechurn reported on Quarter 2 performance results which included strong performance on overall Council satisfaction, corporate sickness absence, legal services and Benefits Right First Time indicators.

Caroline Lee updated the Committee on the number of sanctions or prosecutions carried out by Revenues and Benefits and stated that the number was now 28 in the year to date, which compared to 24 at the end of quarter 2 last year and 8 at the end of quarter 2 this year as stated in the original report.

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

**43.      Sickness Absence**

Heather Brennan reported on the sickness absence statistics for April to September 2013, compliance with the Managing Attendance Policy and health and well being initiatives.

She highlighted that the Council were on line to meet the agreed targets, and the intended increased activity by the Council to improve the way staff manage their stress, back care and other musculo skeletal health which were the top causes of absence between April and September 2013.

Members made the following points;

- Improved effectiveness of attendance management was recognised

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

**44.      Work Programme 2013/14**

**IT WAS  
AGREED** That the draft Work Programme of Resources Scrutiny Committee for 2013/14 be as set out below, including an item on the Council's Pension Scheme at the next meeting;

<u>DATE OF MEETING</u>	<u>AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED</u>
Joint Services Legal Services Working Group - date tbc	Scope and progress the Review of Legal Services Joint Working

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 (Q3) Council Tax Collection Rate (Q3) Model of service delivery for Back Office Services Pension Scheme
<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)

#### **45. 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 46, 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.

#### **46. Burnley Leisure Casual Workers**

Heather Brennan reported on the actions taken with regard to the current casual workers within Sport & Culture as a result of the establishment of the Leisure Trust.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be noted.