

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Deputy Leader's Meeting
2.	Date:	Monday 14 th April 2014
3.	Title:	Deputy Leaders Report – Resources Activity
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods & Adult Services

5. Summary

This report provides the Deputy Leader with a current position statement on the activity of Services that fit within the remit of the portfolio (previously part of the Resources Directorate).

Activity reported is for the period ending 28th February and provides both achievements and any risks and issues.

6. Recommendations

That the report is received and activity noted.

7. Proposals and Details

Many of the services featured in this report have been involved in providing support to the council's Operational Services around the efficiency agenda to generate the required council savings. It is also clear that the reduction in resources across the services continues to be a concern which could potentially impact upon delivering services at the same level as before

7.1 Procurement

Highlights / Achievements

- Procurement savings year to date (January 2014) are £4.428M, this is above target against the 2013/14 forecast.
- The Procurement Service has successfully trained in excess of 70 users across the authority, including cabinet members, on how to use the YORtender system. This is Rotherham MBC's e-tendering portal where all tender opportunities are now advertised. The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Authorities often host YORtender training and User Group meetings at Riverside House as a preferred venue.
- The Procurement Service has recently put in place new telecommunication agreements across the authority that is delivering large cost reductions. Over a 3 year period cashable Procurement savings of ~£390K will be achieved for Rotherham MBC.

7.2 Commissioning

Highlights / Achievements

- Contract negotiations commenced on the final year of the Domiciliary Care Framework. Development of the new specification prioritises quality issues: worker pay & conditions as well as choice & quality for service users, driving forward person-centred services.
- The CYPS Report card was published on the website in December 2013.
- The Advice and information services review was completed and procurement commenced in January 2014.
- Final consultation on Market Position Statement for Older People is complete and due for launch in March 2014.

Issues / Risks

- The Advice Review tender is live with a closing date of April 7th with new service due to commence delivery from 1st September. There has been a challenge to the process from existing providers. To mitigate impact on customers, the existing SLA with CAB has been extended to the end of August to ensure no gaps in delivery.
- The Better Care Fund submission has been scrutinised by NHS England and a first response to the Action Plan was received w/c 3rd March. The Action Plan has been refreshed – and there remains a need to consider the role for joint commissioning, pooled budgets, and formal partnership agreements to maximise quality and efficiency.
- Risk for CYPS and NAS in not achieving appropriate level of Continuing Healthcare Funding and s117 funding.

7.3 Performance and Quality

Highlights / Achievements

- The service is working with the Police and other partners to improve reporting and supporting pathways between Roma women and statutory partners. An initial domestic abuse Roma, Slovakian event was held on the 27th March which was opened by the Leader.
- Mystery Shopping on access to adult social care services was undertaken in late August / early September 2013 as part of the regional Sector Led Improvement independent peer assessment three part process. The assessment was conducted by real customer inspectors testing access to services over the telephone (including out of hours), face to face, and on the internet. The customer inspectors have provided a rating based on their experience (Excellent, Good, Fair and Unsatisfactory). Rotherham rated Excellent for Telephone access and Good in five other areas, improving Face 2 Face; Reception and Out of Hours access from Fair in 2012.
- P&Q are currently working with colleagues to establish a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which aims to co-locate a number of key professional from partner agencies including children's social care, South Yorkshire Police, Health and Probation to provide a central point of contact for all safeguarding and domestic abuse concerns.
- Work is currently underway to develop performance management arrangements for the revised Corporate Plan and its associated priorities and outcomes. It is hoped that monitoring will begin early in the new financial year with the first report due to Self-Reg Select Commission during September 14.
- Following the CQC inspection of the Councils Enabling service on June 25th 2013 and a resulting non-compliance rating, the service has been re-inspected on 20th February 2014 and received full compliance. This concludes the 2013/14 round of CQC inspections and all 8 RMBC registered services are currently fully compliant.

Issues / Risks

- The changes to school meals at Brinsworth Manor Infant and Junior Schools have generated a large number of enquiries to the Council's complaint team. Almost all have been automatically generated by a website, this site has a pre written complaint with a form to complete which e-mails the Council's complaint e-mail address. A decision was made to provide a generic standard response to all enquiries received. As at Friday 21st March 2014 2,986 enquiries had been received and were responded to.

7.4 Communications and Marketing

Highlights / Achievements

- RMBC hosted the media launch of a new South Yorkshire-wide CSE campaign, gaining local and regional coverage.
- Green deal campaign to reduce fuel poverty and improve private rented housing stock.
- Council Tenants' Spring Conference – engagement with customers on a range of hot topics such as: access to the internet, downsizing advice and information, concerns about rent and how to get involved
- The website has been fully migrated to the new server. A new design and content strategy is in place allowing a much more customer focused website. All 27,000 pieces of content have been analysed and reworked for a better and quicker customer

experience (now 5000 pieces of content or pages). The website is now a 'responsive' site, meaning it works particularly well on mobile devices, which more than half of all visitors are now using when visiting the website.

- A new 'stay alerted' system has been implemented to allow services to communicate with customers much quicker (e.g., missed bins, school closures, etc.); over 40,000 targeted emails have already been sent out to customers.
- The 'Your Account' ebilling and transactional system is seeing good take-up, with much more anticipated over the coming weeks as Council Tax bills encourage more take up. 3689 register users, resulting in 6581 logins by customers so far and over 250 eform transactions completed in Jan/Feb 14 within 'Your Account' which would have otherwise have needed staff interaction.
- Website visitors are up by nearly 20,000 per month from the previous year.

Issues / Risks

- The Green Deal campaign is dependent upon adequate government funding to make the scheme viable. This campaign may also incur additional resource requirements from Creative services and Housing marketing to ensure successful delivery of the campaign.
- Creative and Marketing Service Review is currently in the consultation period on the proposed structure which ends on 21st March. At the end of the consultation period, consideration will be given to all feedback and a final structure will be presented week commencing 24th March. A job matching exercise will be carried out and further information will be made available on the vacant posts and the recruitment process.
- The Online Services Team is almost fully resourced in line with SLT agreement earlier last year, with only one remaining role to fill, Marketing and Data Analyst Officer. Due to resourcing issues, some areas of the new website are still being worked on - mainly the 'nicer' areas such as culture and leisure which will be enhanced in the coming weeks to be more engaging and pleasing to look at and browse.

7.5 Policy and Partnerships

Highlights / Achievements

- We have continued to provide advice; update and co-ordination of welfare reform with seminars and presentations together with facilitation of working groups.
- The contract for crisis loan support with LASER credit union has been extended to March 2015 and LASER will now provide advice to those borrowing as part of the contract.
- The contract with FareShare Yorkshire is in place until end of October 2014. The depot in Rotherham opened in December 2014. Twelve local food banks are receiving food from the depot. The capacity to supply local food banks has now increased to twenty. We are now looking into the potential for the provision of opportunities to volunteering and provide accredited training in warehouse skills and forklift truck driving.
- Direct support is being provided to the Strategic Lead for the Better Care Fund a detailed plan will be submitted to NHS England by 4th April.

Issues / Risks

- Welfare reform continues to present a number of significant corporate risks:
 - The estimated loss of income to the local economy estimated at £91 million per year (by 2015/16). Poverty is increasing, especially in the most deprived areas, and becoming more severe with more people getting into debt and turning to food banks.

- The loss of £91 million per year was estimated by CRESR at Sheffield Hallam University for 2015/16.
- A briefing has been prepared by the research team based on the CRESR study which breaks down the information to demonstrate the impact at ward level.
- Local services and agencies are struggling to meet rising demand for advice and support, but face a continued squeeze on resources to respond adequately.
- Repeated delays to roll out of welfare reform add significant uncertainty to planning for future actions locally.

7.6 Financial Services

Highlights / Achievements

- Despite massively increased demand on service due to the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction scheme and changes to Council Tax empty property discounts, as at the end of February the service had collected an additional £4.7million Council Tax income compared with the time last year.
- As at the end of February the service had collected an additional £900k Non Domestic Rates income compared with the time last year, which is vital for the Councils finances now the risk of non-collection is shared 50/50 with government.
- Again despite massively increased demand on the service, as at the end of February an additional £201k income on Housing Benefit Overpayment income had been collected compared with the time last year.

Issues / Risks

The impact of welfare reform, together with the changes to Council Tax empty property discounts and the current economic climate are causing significant increases in workload across the Revenues and Benefits service which is putting severe strain on the service.

Three areas where this has particularly impacted the service have been:

- Customer telephone calls, which as at the end of February have increased overall by 26% from the same time last year while calls regarding debt repayment have increased 33%.
- A substantial increase in recovery notices for non-payment of Council Tax with reminders up 75%, summonses up 71% and Liability Orders up 57%.
- A massive increase in the number of requests for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), particularly as a result of the "Bedroom Tax" and Benefits Cap. Up to the end of February a total of 2,219 applications have been received compared with only 582 in the same period last year.

The increased customer demand does not at present show any sign of declining, and on-going this will continue to put a severe strain on the service and could result in declining performance in areas such as collection rates and time taken to assess benefit claims or issue new Council Tax bills.

** Financial performance stats can be found as an appendix at the end of the report.*

7.7 Human Resources

Highlights / Achievements

- Presented case study to APSE Service Delivery Group on Rotherham and Doncaster Shared Services
- Prepared policy and operational changes in relation to impacts of LGPS 2014 scheme
- Processed over 90 requests to leave on the grounds of voluntary severance
- Agreed final set of proposals for changes to terms and conditions as part of the budget setting process that Trade Unions were prepared to recommend as the best that can be achieved by negotiation.

Issues / Risks

- Financial pressures / resourcing issues have the possibility of effecting service provision, both for Rotherham Council and Shared Service with Doncaster Council.

7.8 Internal Audit and Asset Management (ICT)

Highlights / Achievements

- RMBC's current ICT Strategy (2011 to 2015) is nearing its successful completion and work has begun on producing RMBC's next ICT strategy (2015 to 2018). Input is being sought from all areas of the council and it is hoped that a draft of the new strategy will be complete before July 2014. Candidate projects for the new strategy include:
 - Consolidating and 'Joining Up' Public Sector IT – closer working with other Local Authorities and the NHS to reduce duplication.
 - Digital by Default/Self-service/automation/channel-shift – a continuation of the council's existing channel-shift efforts through automation of more processes.
 - Reporting/Business Intelligence/Predictive Analytics – beginning with the creation of a single customer record for RMBC by joining up all the council systems which hold information about citizens.
 - Mobility – field working, tablets, hand-held devices, in-cab computers – real time data and inputting. Reducing the need to return to base, increasing productivity and enabling reduced headcount.
 - Cloud/Software as a Service – continuing to outsource systems in a controlled, piecemeal manner, with a view to reducing the amount of internal ICT activity within the council.
 - Security Hardening – protecting our data through continuing to ensure compliance against a variety of public sector security controls.
 - Enhanced Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Planning – increasing our capacity to failover to the secondary data centre and beginning to store more back-ups of our most sensitive data at secure locations outside Rotherham (so that it is resilient to any localised incident).

The new ICT Strategy will require an associated capital budget to support its delivery – this is currently being calculated and will be brought forward for Member approval in due course.

Issues / Risks

- The deadline for the switch-off of the Digital Region Ltd (DRL) network is now just 5 months away (August 2014). Work to migrate circuits to the new suppliers BT or Virgin in most cases) is progressing well and we are comfortable that we will have removed all DRL circuits well before the deadline. On Sunday March 2nd a key milestone in the

project was reached when new networking equipment was installed in our main data centre. This work involved the full power-down of the data centre and subsequent restoration and testing of services as they came back online. The work was completed within 24 hours and without any interruption to services during office hours.

- RMBC's VOIP telephony and contact centre platform has now been in place for 5 years and is nearing the end of its life and needs upgrading. In addition RMBC needs to be able to take advantage of new contact centre technology, such as web chat, which will assist with our channel-shift programme. We are currently working with suppliers to identify the best replacement solution and a proposal will be presented to Members shortly.

7.9 Community Engagement

Highlights / Achievements

- Launch of the "Rotherham Taxi Driver Guide to Crime and Safety Issues" (on 31/3/14) which covers a wide range of issues that taxi drivers may come into contact with through their work including road rage, vehicle theft and burglary, safe driving, identity theft, anti-social behaviour, drugs, alcohol, hate crime, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based violence, trafficking and violence. It's aimed at raising their awareness on such issues, improving their safety and that of their passengers and encouraging them to report crime.
- The Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU) have held 21 case conferences and signed up 16 Third Party Hate Crime reporting centres since going live in October 2013. Evidence to show how demand for statutory services has reduced following intervention from the VPU is available.
- The following events were supported: Golden 7 Fashion Show on 27th February 2014 with all proceeds going to Rush House; Rotherham Less Lonely Campaign and Rotherham Older Peoples Forum by hosting events in Maltby and Rawmarsh to provide information and resources for Older People to keep safe; rolling out feedback from the 2014/2015 Money Matters budget consultation event.
- The Model United Nations programme which is part of the Schools Linking initiative to promote community cohesion was held on 17th March 2014 with over 100 Young People in attendance.
- A further successful Roma Family Induction day was held at the Lifewise Centre on 10th February 2014.

7.10 Legal & Democratic Services

Highlights / Achievements

- RMBC Legal Services led successful Judicial Review proceedings on behalf of the local authorities within the South Yorkshire and Merseyside City Regions, against the Government's allocation of £10Billion of European structural funding across the United Kingdom. This allocation resulted in a 65% reduction in the regions funding compared to the previous funding period. The Judicial Review challenge was successful in relation to the Government's failure to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, and as such the allocation decisions made by the Government were quashed by the High Court and declared unlawful.

The Legal Service is now leading the South Yorkshire and Merseyside City Regions appeal in respect of other parts of the Judgment in relation to the allocation methodology used by the Government, which found against the authorities.

- The Legal Service successfully retained the Law Society's Practice Management Standard (Lexcel) after two days of inspection by an external assessor. The Service remains the only one in South Yorkshire to hold the standard.
- Elections to the council will be combined with elections to the European parliament and take place on 22 May and are the first to be affected by changes in The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Rules 2014. The new system of Individual Electoral Registration will commence on 9 June 2014. A national publicity campaign will run for 5 weeks from 1 July and will coincide with the start of the transitional canvass which will end on 1 December 2014 with publication of the first individual electoral register.
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Board have now completed a mid-way review of the complete Scrutiny work programme for 2013/14 and noted that it is well on track for delivery, including the extra items that have been added in during the year. Carers' review is now completed and with Cabinet for their response and reviews around Department of Work and Pensions Benefit Sanctions, Commissioning and Access to GPs are showing indications of also providing some very interesting and challenging findings.

Issues / Risks

- Electoral Services face intense pressure and conflicting timescales due to a delayed annual canvass, combined local and European elections and the transition to individual electoral registration.
- The continued increase in School Admissions Appeals will be closely monitored to identify potential resource implications.

8. Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

We proactively manage risks to prevent negative impacts on performance against delivery of services and any associated key performance indicators.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The services above are responsible for key areas of service delivery and therefore have a significant role in the delivery of key national and local performance indicators. These services also support all Council Directorates enabling them to deliver against Corporate Plan outcomes.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

None to consider

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Appendix A

Revenues, Benefits & Payments Performance Statistics

1. Council Tax

Council Tax Collection		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
93.98%	94.76%	0.78% down

Although the overall percentage collected has reduced, the actual amount collected as at 28/2/13 has increased from £86.2 million to £90.9 million. This means an additional £4.7 million income has been collected for the authority so far this financial year in comparison with last year.

The reduction in performance is as a result of the following which has increased the net collectable debt from £91 million to £96.7 million.

- the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) which meant 16,000 claimants having to pay Council Tax for the first time or seeing their bills increase. It was anticipated that collection rates in respect of this group would be less due to their low income levels which would have been further reduced as a result of governments welfare reform (Bedroom Tax, Benefit Cap etc.).
- changes to Council Tax empty property discounts which has substantially increased the number of Council Tax bills.

Prior to their introduction it was anticipated that these changes would reduce collection rates and as such the service is working towards achieving an overall Council Tax collection rate of 97% for 13/14.

Nationally Councils are reporting substantially reduced collection rates as a result of these changes.

Council Tax Collection – Recovery Procedures		
Documents Issued	At 28/2/14	As as 28/2/13
Reminders	61,459	35,101
Summonses	19,459	11,382
Liability Orders	12,993	8,281

As a result of the aforementioned changes there has been a substantial increase in level of default in payment of Council Tax. The Service is adopting a flexible approach to recovery, particularly for those affected by CTRS and is offering support where possible to avoid more serious recovery action.

Average no. of days taken to action a council tax change of address		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
14.4 days	5.19 days	9.21 days up

The increase in processing times in this area has been as a result of the substantial increase in additional telephone calls and processing as a result of aforementioned changes. Overall annual performance is being improved month on month with changes in February averaging 4.71 days.

No. of Council Tax Liability Orders referred to the bailiff YTD	6,455
Council Tax Direct Debit Payers (% as at February 14)	61.67%

2. NNDR

NNDR Collection		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
96.5%	96.4%	0.1% up

The net collectable debt has increased from £74.1 million to £75.1 million. The actual amount collected as at 28/2/2014 has increased from £71.5 million to £72.4 million. This means an additional £0.9 million income has been collected for the authority so far this financial year in comparison with last year.

NNDR Collection – Recovery Procedures		
Documents Issued	At 28/2/14	At 28/2/13
Reminders	3,382	3,071
Summonses	1,099	1,107
Liability Orders	613	600

No. of Business Rates Liability Orders referred to the bailiff YTD	308
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3. Revenues & Payments

Residential visits offered in 7 calendar days		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
99.6%	97%	2.6% up

Non Residential visits offered in 7 calendar days		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
99.1%	93%	6.1% up

Non Residential service user informed of charge at time of visit		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
99.1%	90%	9.1% up

An ongoing review of the work across the Revenues and Payments area has seen impressive improvements in performance achieved.

4. Benefits Assessment

Time taken to process New HB/CTB/CTRS claims		
YTD (at 28/2/14)	YTD (at 28/2/13)	Difference
23.01 days	24.09 days	0.78 days down

Time taken to process HB/CTB/CTRS changes		
YTD (at 28/2/14)	YTD (at 28/2/13)	Difference
7.24 days	10.58 days	3.34 days down

New claims decided within 14 days of receipt of all necessary information		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
92.87%	92.89%	0.02% down

Despite the substantial increase in customer calls and the complexity of processing as a result of both the introduction of CTRS and the general welfare reform programme the service has delivered improved performance in these major performance indicators. At a time when benefit claimants are finding their incomes reduced substantially, these performance improvements will have assisted many of the poorest Rotherham residents who will be having difficulty managing their finances.

Housing Benefit Overpayment Collection		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
43.92%	45.72%	1.8% down

Although the overall percentage collected has reduced, the actual amount collected as at 30/11/13 an additional £201k had been collected for the authority so far this financial year in comparison with last year.

5. Revenues and Benefits

Percentage of telephone calls abandoned		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
1.23%	1.07%	0.16% up

Percentage of telephone calls answered within 21 seconds		
YTD (% at 28/2/14)	YTD (% at 28/2/13)	Difference
91.12%	93.18%	2.06% down

The service has seen a substantial increase in the volume of calls it has received as a result of the aforementioned changes and the general economic downturn. As at 28/2/14 we had received an additional 42k calls compared to the previous year.

Despite this substantial increase performance has been excellent with abandonment levels at just 1.23%. This figure includes all abandoned calls however if we exclude calls abandoned in less than 21 seconds (the Customer Access Strategy Standard) this reduces to just 1.07%.

Maintaining such high levels of performance in call handling is essential in ensuring that collection levels are maximised and benefit is processed as quickly as possible. Each missed call reduces collection levels and increases delays in processing bills and benefits.