

Scrutiny Committee - 31st October 2017

Finance Portfolio Holder Report

Cllr John Scholey

Update of Services within the Finance Portfolio

Finance

- Delivered a balanced 10 year budget including financial self-sufficiency from direct central government funding for 2017/18. The process is progressing for 2018/19 with the same aims.
- Annual accounts 2016/17 were completed on time and have been subject to external audit. A clean audit report has been issued by Grant Thornton UK LLP, SDC's appointed auditor.
- The internal target of "Debts outstanding for more than 61 days" has remained challenging. Within this group are debts relating to advances made to homeless people to enable them to take up privately rented accommodation where customers have not kept up arrangements to repay. Finance and Housing staff is actively chasing these and this additional activity appears to be effective.
- Head of Finance retires on October 17th. A replacement has been appointed and has accepted the post subject to satisfactory references. During the three month period before he can join SDC, Veronica Wilson is acting up into the role and a temporary replacement has been recruited to carry out Veronica's duties.
- Property Investment - The existing properties were subject to a recent detailed investigation by Scrutiny Working Group. Council approved a further £25m tranche for future investments, but properties which meet SDC criteria have not been identified to date.
- Municipal Bonds Agency - as a shareholding council we will be invited to participate in the first bond issue which is now expected to take place shortly.

Internal Audit

- The Internal Audit completed their programme of work for 2016-17 on time and their reports have been received positively by auditees.

Revenues and Benefits

- The new Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) was introduced on 1st April 2017 and Council Tax collection rates for CTRS have held up. A minor revision to the scheme for introduction on 1st April 2018 is being consulted on.

- Universal Credit, which was introduced in the District in October 2015, has had a small impact on the department as it still only applies to a few residents.
- The three new Discretionary Business Rates Reliefs included in the Government's budget have been implemented.
- Council Tax and Business Rates collection is on target.
- The average time to process new Housing Benefit claims continues to reduce.

Facilities Management

- Continued to ensure key operational assets are maintained as required within budgetary constraints. Energy saving lighting has been installed throughout Argyle Road office space.
- Swanley Leisure Centre - extra costs will continue to be incurred to keep the centre safe and operating prior to a decision on future leisure provision in Swanley.
- Otford Palace Tower has been stabilised and a report on the options for the future use of the asset is due shortly.
- Scanning and removal of historical paper documentation has continued.