

Motherwell, 25 May 2016 at 2 pm.

**A Meeting of the POLICY AND RESOURCES (FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES)
SUB-COMMITTEE**

PRESENT

Councillor Burrows, Convener; Councillor Spowart, Vice-Convener; Councillors Baird, Brooks, J. Coyle, Fagan, Farooq, Griffin, Hume, Jones, Kelly, Lunny, McCulloch, O'Brien, G. O'Rorke, Shevlin, Stevenson and Stocks.

CHAIR

Councillor Burrows (Convener) presided.

IN ATTENDANCE

The Administrative Officer (Committee and Civic Governance Services), Head of Business for Financial Solutions and Head of Revenue and E-Government Solutions.

APOLOGIES

Councillors Bonnar, P. Hogg and McAnulty.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN TERMS OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE ETC.
(SCOTLAND) ACT 2000**

1. No declarations were noted.

**REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORTS 2015/16 - FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES
AND COUNCIL SUMMARY**

2. There were submitted reports dated 25 and 15 April 2016 by the Head of Business for Financial Solutions (1) advising of, respectively, the expenditure for the financial year 2015/16 for Finance and Customer Services (including Miscellaneous Services) and the Council Summary, which included both the General Fund Account and the Housing Revenue Account; (2) providing a comparison of actual expenditure and income against the estimated expenditure and income for the period 1 April 2015 to 4 March 2016 together with explanations for the most significant variances; (3) projecting a year end surplus of £13.959m for the Council which was due to a number of factors, details of which were contained within the report dated 15 April 2016; (4) setting out, within the Council Summary report, the consolidated budget monitoring position of all Services, with additional information contained within Appendix 1 to the report, and (5) proposing that, £2.596m of unutilised ICT investment funding, as detailed within the Council Summary report, be carried forward into 2017/18 to enable the completion of all planned projects.

Decided:

- (1) that the unused ICT investment funding of £2.596m, as detailed within the Council Summary report, be carried forward into 2017/18 to enable the completion of all planned projects, and
- (2) that the reports and consolidated budget monitoring position in relation to the Council Summary be noted.

**CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORTS 2015/16 - FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES
CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND COMPOSITE CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

3. There were submitted reports dated 25 April and 2 May 2016 by the Head of Business for Financial Solutions (1) advising of, respectively, the Finance and Customer Services Capital Programme and the Composite Capital Programme for 2015/16; (2) outlining the projected year end outturn position and resultant variances for both, and (3) providing a summary of the position of the Composite Services Capital Programme and the HRA Capital Programme as at 4 March 2016, within Appendix 1 to the report dated 2 May 2016.

Decided: that the reports be noted.

PAYMENT OF LOCAL TAXATION AND BENEFIT UPDATE

4. With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of the meeting of this Sub-Committee held on 2 March 2016, there was submitted a report dated 25 April 2016 by the Head of Revenue and E-Government Solutions (1) updating the Sub-Committee on payment performance for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates, and the administration of Housing Benefit and the Council Tax Benefit Reduction Scheme for the financial year 2015/16, together with comparable figures for the same period for the previous financial year, and details of Council Tax collection levels since 1993/94; (2) indicating that the average number of days to process new claims and changes to Council Tax and Housing Benefit was 22 days on average for new claims and six days for a change of event; (3) outlining the background to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which had replaced Council Tax Benefit on 1 April 2013, together with a comparison of the total awards on a monthly basis from 2014/15 to 2015/16; (4) informing that, in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments, the projected spend for 2015/16 was £3.663m, with £3.586m having been paid or committed from the funding received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), for all successful applications received as at 31 March 2016; (5) intimating that from November 2016, the DWP planned to introduce changes to the benefit cap, that would reduce the limit from £26,000 to £20,000 for residents of North Lanarkshire, resulting in a greater loss for existing claimants and a reduction in benefit for new applicants; (6) advising that, for the first 13 weeks of 2016/17, the Council would (a) support those continuing to be affected by the benefit cap at the same level as 2015/16 and reduce funding progressively thereafter, as outlined within the report, and (b) support new applicants at the ongoing rate of up to £7.50 for weekly losses and 10% of the loss above this, and (7) indicating that the scheme was based on estimates of the maximum number of claimants that could potentially be subject to the benefit cap provided by the DWP, and that, should the actual numbers be lower than estimated, the scheme would be reviewed to enhance the financial support available.

Decided: that the report be noted.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT – 1 JANUARY TO 31 MARCH 2016

5. There was submitted a report dated 2 May 2016 by the Head of Business for Financial Solutions (1) advising of the Council's net overall borrowing position as at 31 March 2016, as shown in Appendix 1 to the report; (2) providing information on debt restructuring, borrowing, short term investments and interest rate movements during the period 1 January to 31 March 2016; (3) outlining the position with regard to the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report, and (4) indicating that the performance against Prudential Indicators remained in accordance with those previously approved by the Sub-Committee.

Decided: that the Treasury Management activity for the period up to 31 March 2016, including the positive performance against the key Prudential Indicators, be noted.

SCOTTISH WELFARE FUND 2015/16

6. With reference to paragraph 10 of the Minute of the meeting of this Sub-Committee held on 25 November 2015, there was submitted a report dated 28 April 2016 by the Head of Revenue and E-Government Solutions (1) outlining the background to the Scottish Welfare Fund, which had been introduced on 1 April 2013 as an interim two year scheme to deliver community care grants and crisis grants, and was subsequently replaced by a statutory Welfare Fund with effect from 1 April 2016 under the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015; (2) providing a performance update for Scottish Welfare Fund activity during 2015/16; (3) indicating that, during 2015/16, the Council made 22,113 decisions on applications to the Fund with 15,150 grants being awarded, amounting to a total spend of £3.076m, monthly details of which were set out within Table 1 of the report; (4) detailing, within Table 2 of the report, the increased number of crisis and community care grant awards and the refusals for each month of 2015/16; (5) advising that, although the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman had taken over responsibility for second tier review hearings from 1 April 2016, local authorities had remained responsible for first tier reviews as well as the administration and preparation of cases for the second tier reviews, and (6) intimating (a) that on 1 April 2016 the Scottish Government had introduced changes to the methodology for calculating funding distribution of the Scottish Welfare Fund allocation for the period 2016/17 to 2018/19, and (b) that the changes to the methodology did not take account of actual demand for the service, which had resulted in a marked difference between funding and demand for comparable local authorities, as highlighted within the report.

Decided: that the report be noted.

CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

7. There was submitted a report dated 18 April 2016 by the Head of Revenue and E-Government Solutions (1) updating the Sub-Committee on the Customer Services provision through the primary customer contact channels and the ongoing development of key supporting initiatives to collect and measure customer satisfaction; (2) providing a summary of the systems in place to help the Council understand the grade of service being experienced by customers and the type of information collected; (3) detailing, within Appendix 1 to the report, a breakdown of key statistics for all primary customer contact channels for 2015/16, together with a comparison with the previous three years; (4) intimating that although overall customer contact was continuing to rise, the trend was steadily moving away from face to face and towards telephone and on-line service provision, and (5) outlining a number of key initiatives successfully completed in 2015/16, together with Programme highlights for 2016/17 in relation to First Stop Shops, the Customer Contact Centre, and Online services.

Decided: that the report be noted.