

7 March 2016

Audit, Scrutiny & Transformation Committee

Transformation of the Revenues & Benefits Service - Update

Report of: *Helen Gregory, Acting Head of Housing & Benefits*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council, faced with financial pressures to cut costs whilst continuing to transform and improve services agreed to undertake a full service review of the Revenues & Benefits Service in September 2014.
- 1.2 The first stage of 'Phase 1' of the Revenues & Benefits service review was the introduction of a partnership arrangement with Basildon Borough Council. This was approved by the Finance & Resources Committee on the 11th February 2015. This included a recommendation that a review of the Revenues & Benefits Partnership be undertaken by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee 12 months after the agreement came into effect.
- 1.3 The aim of the partnership was to provide a number of benefits including a single joint management structure, sharing of specialist/support staff, aligning of contracts and joint procurement and share a single hosted, resilient, IT Platform.
- 1.4 The second stage of 'Phase 1' of the service review was a complete restructure of the Revenues & Benefits service. This was approved by the Policy, Finance & Resources Committee on the 30th June 2015 with the view of providing a flatter, leaner structure, with less top tier management but greater numbers of officers who are empowered to fulfil their roles to enhance the service we provide to customers.
- 1.5 Details of the progress of the Partnership arrangement are set out in 4.1 to 4.5 of this report.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Members note the progress of the Revenues and Benefits Partnership arrangement between Brentwood and Basildon as set out in 4.1 to 4.5 of this report.**

3. Introduction and Background

3.1 March 2015 - Brentwood Borough Council and Basildon Borough Council entered into a Partnership Agreement. Directives of the agreement were to;

- To provide a Shared Management Programme for Strategic and Operational Management of Brentwood's Revenues and Benefits service and IT Software Systems
- To convert to a single hosted Revenues & Benefits platform
- To share specialist and support staff
- To align contracts and joint procurement to the benefit of the Partnership

3.2 April 2015 – Shared Strategic and Operational Management of Brentwood's Revenues & Benefits service and IT Software Systems was put in place.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

4.1 A shared Revenues & Benefits Manager was introduced in April 2015.

4.2 A full restructure of Brentwood's Revenues & Benefits service has been undertaken and was completed in January 2016. The resulting structure is flatter and leaner, has fewer managers, and allows for greater numbers of officers who are empowered to fulfil their roles. The teams are working generically; staff are more efficient and are providing an enhanced service to our customers.

4.3 The restructure has laid the foundations needed to take the service forward, both in line with the new Revenues & Benefits system and aligning working practices with staff at Basildon enabling greater resilience and stability. We now are able to share specialist and support staff, such as a shared Systems & Technical Officer, Training Officer and Subsidy Income Officer. We have also been able to align a number of contracts as well as joint procurement opportunities to the benefit of the partnership.

4.4 After scoping sessions and discussions with both Revenues & Benefits Software providers, it was agreed to fully convert Brentwood from its current Northgate system onto the Civica Open Revenues system. Full system conversion would take an estimated 10 months.

4.5 Conversion of the system started late April 2015 and was successfully fully converted from Northgate to the Civica Open Revenues system on the 31st January 2016. The service has been fully operational in using the new system since 1st February 2016. As part of the conversion £11.38m of collectable debt was balanced and accounted for 32,800 Council tax properties, 2,300 National Non Domestic Rates properties, 3,000 Housing Benefit claims and 3,500 Council Tax Support claims.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

5.1 To enable the Council to deliver effective and efficient Revenues and Benefits Services for the benefit of the Council and its customers.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Formal consultation took place in line with statutory obligations and the Council's Organisational Change Policy.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Delivering an effective and efficient Revenue & Benefit Services will help meet the Modern Council key priority.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 Under s102 of the Local Government Act 1972, and the Localism Act 2011, the Council has powers to collaborate with other Local Authorities in order to share the management of services.

Depending on the structure of the proposed partnering agreement, certain duties may arise under the Public Contract Regulations 2006 for the Council to procure and commission services, and the proposed partnership agreement must take this into account in order to comply with those regulations.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.3 None

9 Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 None

10 Appendices to this report

None

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