

Committee: Council

Date:

Title: Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

9 April 2019

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Howell,
Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

Summary

1. This report summarises the key activities for the financial year 2018/19 in the Finance and Administration Portfolio.

Recommendations

2. None, this report is to note only

Financial Implications

3. None

Background Papers

4. None

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	N/A
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

The 2018/19 financial year has shown the council delivering on its corporate priority of maintaining a financially sound and effective council.

The following are the key items I would like to draw your attention to;

Finance

6. The Statement of Accounts for 2017/18 received an unqualified audit opinion and this means that our accounts have received unqualified opinions for the tenth consecutive year. A positive statement was also received from the External Auditors relating to the council's use of resources and value for money for the eighth consecutive year.
7. The Council has the lowest council tax in Essex and this remains the case for 2019/20.
8. The Local Council Tax Support Scheme contribution rate of 12.5% has been frozen for 5 years and remains at 12.5% in 2019/20; this is also the lowest in Essex.

Revenues and Benefits

9. The Benefits Subsidy Audit has seen significant improvements over the last 4 years, which has shown the error rate reduced from a position where the council was repaying £192,000 to the Department of Works and Pensions to being able to claim an additional £55,000 in subsidy where the error rate was 0.01%.

Aspire (CRP) Ltd

10. The success of the Council's wholly owned company; Aspire (CRP) Ltd continues in its second year generating an expected net income of £1.6m, this follows net income to the Council of £1.5m in 2017/18 from Chesterford Research Park. Further investments into the Park are seeing the refurbishment of building 60, which will further increase the revenue from the Park in 2019/20.

Saffron Walden Castle

11. A request for planning permission was submitted and approved for further works to the ruins of Saffron Walden Castle to allow for public access. This is the final stage in the long term project to protect and enhance a key historic monument.
12. The work will comprise of a new internal floor to the castle, new security gates and fence and an external lighting scheme. Work is expected to commence around May 2019 and this is in line with the council's corporate priority of protecting and enhancing the character and heritage of the district. This is supported by Historic England who has provided guidance, support and financial contributions for the life of this restoration project.

Digital Services

13. The council made a significant investment in its online service delivery in 2018/19. The new council core website launched on schedule in September and was followed shortly after by a new business focussed site to support the local economy. A third website targeting people considering a career at the council is due to go live later in the spring.
14. Work is also proceeding well on the Citizens' Access project which will introduce a range of online services for residents and businesses to communicate with the council.

Performance

15. Performance on collection rates are consistent with outturn expectations, Council Tax, Business rates and Housing rents income collected, based on current information will exceed 98% of total owed.
16. The high level of accuracy continues in the administration of Housing Benefits again with an expectation based on previous quarters to exceed 98%.
17. We have achieved 98.90% of our suppliers being paid within 30 days in quarter 1 and quarter 3 achieved 100%, with an overall average of payments within 7 days.