

**Committee:** Council

**Date:**

**Title:** Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

Tuesday, 9 October 2018

**Report Author:** Councillor Simon Howell

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## Summary

1. This report summarises key activity in the finance and administration for this financial year to date and includes a brief forward look.

## Recommendations

2. None, this report is to note only

## Financial Implications

3. None

## Background Papers

4. None

## Situation

### Statement of Accounts 2017/18

5. The council achieved submission of the draft accounts ahead of the new statutory deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> May, it should be noted that this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year the council has achieved this date. This year was the first that included the Aspire group accounts
6. The final audited Accounts were submitted to Governance, Audit and Performance Committee (GAP) on the 26<sup>th</sup> July and received an unqualified audit for the 10<sup>th</sup> year and maintained our status as a value for money council.

### Council Tax and Business Rates

7. Uttlesford has the highest collection rate in Essex for Council Tax and 2<sup>nd</sup> highest for Business Rates collection in 2017/18. The quarter one KPI's show that we are on target to maintain collection rate in excess of 99% for 2018/19.
8. Uttlesford has been included in a joint Essex bid to be a pilot area for 75% Business Rates and we will be notified later in the year of whether we have been successful. This will generate in the region of an additional £17m to invest in Essex.

9. The Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) has been subject to a consultation process, this included consulting on the empty homes premium.

### **Aspire (CRP) Ltd**

10. The first annual accounts for Aspire (CRP) Ltd were prepared on time, audited by BDO and submitted to Companies House by the 7 September deadline. The Directors of Aspire (CRP) Ltd presented a report to GAP Committee on 27 September, setting out the performance during the year compared to the expectations prepared during the purchase process.
11. Q1 income for 2018/19 is slightly up on the same period last year. The refurbishment of Building 60 continues, with a number of prospective tenants identified.

### **Housing Benefits**

12. The rollout of Universal Credit is continuing at a steady pace; by December 2018 all new claims will be processed via the Universal Credit scheme and it is expected that all claims will be migrated onto the new system by 2022. The council has two dedicated officers who provide direct support to claimants on managing the transition; this includes budgeting, navigating the new process and liaising with landlords if required.
13. Pensioners are excluded from this and will continue to be supported via the current Housing Benefit system.

### **Income generation**

14. All empty rooms in the Saffron Walden office have now been let to an external company, a Charity and the Police.
15. Weddings are continuing on weekdays only.

### **Other**

16. The Saffron Walden Castle is now in the final phase of restoration and we are looking forward to opening the inside of the building to the public next spring.

### **Looking Forward**

17. The council is now working on setting its budget for 2019/20; a consultation has been carried out asking residents and businesses to rank their priorities on the council's services and what they would like them to focus on in the medium term.
18. The funding of Local Authorities has been going through significant changes over the last few years and this is set to continue for the next few years, with changes to Business Rates Retention, New Homes Bonus being replaced and the fair funding review. The fair funding review is looking at the way funding is

allocated and what the key drivers are, as the current system of calculation uses historical and outdated information as key drivers.

19. The Budget and the LCTS consultations will be submitted to the November Cabinet meetings to support and inform the budget preparation process for 2019/20.