

Report of	Meeting	Date
Cabinet Member (Finance, Assets and Public Protection)	Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee	Monday, 19 February 2024

## Finance and Public Protection Portfolio Update

Is this report confidential?	No
Is this decision key?	Not applicable
Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards

### Purpose of the Report

- To provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee on the work and performance of the Finance and Public Protection portfolio.

### Recommendations

- That the report be noted.

### Reasons for recommendations

- The report provides an opportunity for the committee to scrutinise the performance of the portfolio.

### Other options considered and rejected

- To not present the report, which would not support robust scrutiny.

### Corporate priorities

- The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (Please bold one)

<b>An exemplary council</b>	Healthy and happy communities
Opportunities for everyone	Green and clean neighbourhoods

### Background to the report

- This report sets out an update on the corporate strategy key projects, business plan actions and key performance indicators for the portfolio.
- The information is provided based on the composition of the portfolio as at 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024. It should be noted that with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024, the portfolio has

widened it's brief to encompass Finance, Assets and Public Protection and will cover the following areas of responsibility:

- Budget
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Licensing
- Environmental Health
- Public Safety
- Community centres
- Parks and play space.
- Car Parking
- Worden Hall

## Finance

8. The work of the Shared Services Finance Team is intrinsically linked to the successful delivery of Council services working in partnership with, and in providing support to, other directorates and teams across both councils.

The key services provided include;

- Corporate financial, management and technical accounting, including financial advice, budget preparation and consolidation, corporate revenue and capital monitoring, statement of accounts, external funding support and capital accounting;
- Treasury management and VAT services;
- Financial systems support;
- Exchequer – payment for all goods and services received across both South Ribble and Chorley councils and their respective leisure centres, and cash management;
- Advice to Members, Directors and budget holders in each department, assisting all directorates to balance their budgets and developing savings and scheme options to close the budget gap.

9. The service has a business plan in place for 2023/24 which sets out the key actions it will deliver over the year. The table below provides an update on those key actions:

Key actions	Update at the end of Qtr 3 23/24
<p><b>Finance system</b> – development of system specification, and progression of a tender exercise to move towards contract award and implementation for a target date of Go-Live on 1st April 2025.</p>	<p>Clarification now obtained from colleagues in IT and Customer Services regarding their future intentions regarding Civica Pay (which administers all of the income received by the council), i.e. that they will be working to extend the current contract. This now provides some stability for the Finance Team to consider options for progressing the replacement of the current Finance System. A site visit has been arranged to a neighbouring council in March to explore an alternative system and</p>

	<p>opportunities for collaboration and external hosting options. It is unlikely that this will be delivered by April 2025 but the option to extend our contract with the existing provider is in place.</p>
<p><b>Embed new team structure</b> – almost half the team are new in role/new to the organisation, so training and development are a priority e.g. NNDR, Collection Fund Accounting, VAT, preparation of consolidated accounts, Corporation for subsidiary companies, whole of government accounts</p>	<p>A couple of vacancies have arisen within the team which are currently being recruited to; it is hoped that there will be some opportunity for career development from within the team. We have continued our emphasis on training and development, and an additional member of the team is due to commence her studies for the CIPFA professional accounting qualification which will build technical strength across the team. We have now received unqualified audited opinions for the 2022/23 accounts for both councils; given these are the first sets of accounts produced by the new team, this is a huge achievement.</p>
<p><b>Treasury and Cash Management</b> – improve cashflow forecasting, review processes and procedures to improve investment returns and to minimise borrowing and treasury costs across both councils.</p>	<p>At Qtr 3 at SRBC, following improvements to our treasury management processes, and the development of the cash flow forecasting model, the council expects to receive £1.327mill in interest receivable, compared to the budget for the year of £0.772mill – i.e. on over-recovery of £0.555mill against the budget.</p>
<p><b>Review of Financial Standing Orders and Financial Procedures across both councils</b> – secure approval of the proposed amendments at Council</p>	<p>Review started and proposed financial standing orders to be presented to the respective Governance Committees in March 2024.</p>
<p><b>Review of financial processes and procedures</b> across all areas of the team, to streamline and improve efficiency, effectiveness, levels of internal control and to maximise the use of the resources available. The review will seek to share knowledge to build resilience and capacity within the team and require training as necessary. This will include, but is not limited, to reviews in respect of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bank reconciliations and account maintenance (continued from 22/23)</li> <li>• Balance Sheet Reconciliations</li> <li>• VAT</li> <li>• NNDR and Council Tax forecasting</li> <li>• Charities and Trust Accounts</li> <li>• Purchase Ordering and Creditor processing</li> <li>• Payroll reporting</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing, with monthly meetings in place to confirm balance sheet reconciliations are completed. A year-end timetable and activity schedule has been issued for the 23/24 accounts with assigned tasks to individual members of the team – the improvements in the processes should be seen in a much smoother year end closure and preparation of the 23/24 statutory accounts, which are expected to be completed one month earlier than last year. The 24/25 budget setting process has also gone much better this year following improvements in associated processes in this area.</p>

<p><b>Data Review and Cleanse</b> - exercises across Civica Financials and the Shared Drive, in readiness for migration to a new finance system and to SharePoint respectively</p>	<p>The majority of the shared folders and files have been reviewed and those requiring use in the future, are being moved over into the new Teams file depository on Sharepoint. Data on Civica Financials is being cleansed, and old data is being deleted in line with the Data Retention Policy and GDPR.</p>
<p><b>Development and support for the delivery of the Savings Programme</b> - these are required across both councils to close the budget gaps identified for 2024/25 and 2025/26</p>	<p>24/25 Budget setting process well underway, with a balanced budget produced for 24/25 but budget gaps identified for 25/26 and beyond. Meetings are scheduled in Qtr 4 to develop savings options for subsequent consideration by Members to address this – the group leading on this comprises of the Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Change and Delivery, Director of Finance, and Head of Finance</p>

10. The team also monitors performance indicators to assess service performance. The latest position is set out below for those indicators that are reported on a monthly or quarterly basis:

Key Indicator and Performance as at Qtr 3 23/24	Target	Latest Performance
Statutory Grant Claims and Returns to be submitted on time	100%	100%
Supplier Payment within 30 days (cumulative) – (this is also a Corporate Performance Target)	95%	93.3%
Supplier Payment within 30 days (in month)	95%	92.78%

11. Supplier payments remain below target but have seen consistent improvement from last year (91.61%). The majority of payments exceeding the payment term timescale is due to teams not goods receiving and authorising in a timely manner. Where teams are late with Goods Received Note (GRN) and authorisations, they are being proactively contacted by the Accounts Payable Team to encourage more timely action. Any teams that are repeatedly late without explanation are raised as an issue with the Director of Finance (S151 Officer).

### Licensing

12. The Licensing department continues to develop and refine Licensing to ensure residents remain safe and secure when accessing regulated services.

### Taxi Licensing Policy Changes

13. Officers and members have continued to review the Taxi Licensing Policy over the last 12 months.

14. A new vehicle age policy has been implemented that gives enthesis to the emission ratings of our licenced vehicles. This is the first time the authority has taken steps to limit higher polluting licenced vehicles by giving drivers an incentive to licence vehicles, up to 4 years longer if the vehicle is euro 6 rated for its level of emissions.
15. This policy has been a huge success which has seen vehicle proprietors start to replace their old vehicles with hybrid low polluting vehicles, 29 being added to the fleet already.
16. Additionally, The CCTV policy has been reviewed for the possibility of mandating CCTV within our licenced vehicles. Officers reported back from trade responses/ crime statistic and a public consultation, that there were no evidence bases to mandate CCTV at this moment within licenced vehicles as per the guidance of the ICO. A new policy has been created to allow for drivers to voluntarily have CCTV installed, with a new criterion for permitted system types, complaint with data protection requirements.
17. Our Taxi Licensing Policy is robust and up to date, with all the requirements set out by the Department for Transport (DFT) statutory standards, in place within our policy.
18. Officers hold quarterly "Taxi Trade Forums", potential changes to policy are discussed and trade representatives bring issues to discuss. These forums are officer lead, but also allow for members to attend and engage with the trade representatives.

### **Taxi Licensing Hearings**

19. The General Licensing Sub Committee have determined, 6 new driver applications over the last 12 months, where the applicants have either had relevant convictions, driving offences or licensing offences that trigger the Taxi Licensing Policy. The committee have determined each application on their own merits and determined the "fit and proper status" of the applicants before them.

### **Premises Licensing**

20. Officers conduct a regular regime of premises licence inspections, often conducted with various agencies including Police, Trading Standards and Environmental Health Officers.

### **Premises Licence Reviews**

21. Test purchase exercises are regularly performed jointly with the police and trading standards for underage sales of alcohol.
22. These joint visits have resulted in a review of a premises licence in July 2023, following alcohol being sold to a 16 and 17-year-old and Knives sold to a 13-year-old. These failed test purchases were in addition to noncompliance of licensing conditions observed during follow up visits by our officers. This resulted in the licence being reviewed, a suspension for 2 months imposed by members of the licensing panel with strict stringent conditions added to the licence.
23. Officers often perform multiple joint premises visits with the Immigration Service. Again, these visits have resulted in a review of a premises licence in January 2024, where a premises had been caught with illegal workers, in additional the premises had also sold a knife to an underage test purchase volunteer. This resulted in the licence being suspended for 28 days with stringent conditions added to the licence.

## Premises Licence Hearing (new applications and variations).

24. The Licensing Panel have determined 3 new premises licence applications where relevant objections have been received from members of the public.
25. All 3 licences were granted with conditions imposed by members of the licensing panel.

## Scrap Metal licensing

26. Officers took part in a multi-agency operation called Operation vertebrae during the week 17-21 July 2023, which included the Police, DVSA, Environment Agency, Immigration Enforcement and Border Force.
27. Operation Vertebrae aimed to disrupt organised crime by targeting drivers of various illegal commercial vehicles. Our officer's inclusion was to aid the police, to seek potential illegal scrap metal dealers and unsafe taxis, both out in the borough with the police and to complete multi-agency roadside enforcement checks at Lancashire DVSA Tier 1 check site, at the M65 Bamber bridge junction.
28. The service has in place a business plan to set out the key actions it will deliver of the year. The table below provides an update on those key actions:

Key actions	Update
<p>Deliver additional mandatory face to face tutor led, training package for all licensed drivers, incorporating CSE, CCE, County Lines.</p> <p>Licensed Taxi and Private Hire Drivers form a crucial part in safeguarding vulnerable people, by being the eyes and ears of the community, providing potentially important information to authorities.</p>	<p>from April to June 2023, all licenced drivers were put through a face-to-face mandatory Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Exploitation (CE) and County Lines training package provided by a qualified external safeguarding training provider.</p> <p>The training focused on identifying and correctly reporting safeguarding issues. With clear guidance on whistle blowing, for drivers to safely report any issues they may encounter.</p>
<p>Implementation and delivery of the new in-house driver qualification. Making a more convenient cost-effective alternative for the trade whilst looking to increase revenue for the department.</p> <p>The Taxi Licensing Policy requires all new applicants to either obtain a level 2 qualification or sit an in-house qualification before a license can be issued.</p> <p>Operators and new applicants report that externally provided courses are hard to obtain and are often cancelled at the last minute if the numbers of participants are low.</p>	<p>A new course has been created by officers. The course has been tailored to our requirements for new drivers licenced by this authority. The course includes an exam at the end of a full day's training. Officers give real life examples and feedback from applicants is extremely positive.</p> <p>New drivers are able to obtain their badges quicker as they are not waiting for the availability of external course providers. These applicants are often unemployed and need to obtain a licence as urgently as possible.</p> <p>The course is delivered once a month and has been successfully run for 3 months so far.</p>
<p>Taxi CCTV Policy Review – A report to be delivered to members of the Licensing and Public Safety Committee, outlining feedback of the recently conducted consultation of the</p>	<p>Completed and as mentioned previously within the report.</p>

trade and members of the public. To investigate the possibility of mandating CCTV for all licensed vehicles. Ensuring the authority is compliant with the requirements of the ICO regarding an evidence base for the requirement to mandate CCTV in all vehicles and the system requirements regarding DPA implications.	
Training and development of newly elected Members of The Council to The Licensing and Public Safety Committee following the local election in June.	Completed July/August
Review of the Caravan Site Licensing Fees policy	On going due to a current case.

## **Public Protection Overview**

### **Service Summary**

29. The success, achievements and pressures of the Environmental Health Team throughout 2023 are detailed below. The wider Environmental Health Team is inclusive of Community Safety and Climate Emergency. However, the report is not inclusive of these updates, to avoid duplication. The work undertaken relating to Community Safety is provided in an overview of the Community Safety Partnership, Crime and Disorder. The work related to the Climate Emergency, Biodiversity and Air Quality is delivered through quarterly member updates, annual reports to full council.
30. Some comparisons have been made to the service data; these comparisons have been made from 2018/19 – 2022/23. This comparison is made as a more accurate comparison of business-as-usual excluding the period when service delivery was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Housing**

31. The team respond to housing disrepair complaints within the private sector rental market, social housing sector. As well as the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, Homes for Ukraine and asylum seekers (SERCO) immigration inspections.
32. The cost-of-living crisis, particularly the rise in energy costs, has led to an increase in the prevalence of mould, which has had a negative impact on the health of occupants. The increase in rental costs has also resulted in a significant demand for social housing applications, with occupants making complaints about their existing properties in the hope of improving their banding position.
33. Therefore, there has been a 52% increase since 18/19 in housing disrepair complaints, and also the complexity of a number of these complaints due to the conflicting damp and cost a fuel situation.
34. The commitments of the home office in support of supporting asylum seekers have seen an exceptional rise in the number of houses of multiple occupations with an increased demand for single occupancy homes and lower cost homes. Since 2018/19 the borough has seen a 128% increase in HMO's.
35. The above increased demands are ongoing and therefore there remains significant pressure on the services' resources. In some cases, the timescales in reaching resolutions are therefore extended.

## **Environmental Protection**

36. The team provides advice, education, encouragement, and where required enforcement of a significant range of legislation, including Statutory nuisance, including noise, lighting and accumulations. Private matters relating to waste management and fly tipping, public health funerals, exhumations and filthy & verminous properties, properties open to access, burning and smoke complaints including dark smoke legislation, smoke control area advice, drainage complaints and land drainage complaints.
37. Since covid-19 there has been an overall increase in demand relating to some of the above categories. Notably – Filthy and Verminous complaints have risen by 250% since 2018/19. It is assumed this increase follows on from the impacts of Covid-19 followed by the cost-of-living crisis. This has impacted people's mental health and affordability to maintain the homes condition.
38. Furthermore, another notable key increase in service demand relates to noise complaints (total of all noise categories) have increased 39% since 2018/19. Again, these increases appear to be impacted by the pandemic, with changes of use of the home, changes of behaviours of pets specifically dogs.
39. The team have resolved a serious noise complaint which required two prosecutions and the Council's first use of a Criminal Behaviour Order.
40. The team issue and inspect compliance with Environmental Permits in connection industrial and waste installations undertaking activities that have the potential to cause harm to human health or the environment. There are currently 40 permitted processes within the borough.

## **Food Safety**

41. How the team intends to achieve its statutory requirements for food hygiene and safety is detailed within the food service delivery plan shown in appendix A.
42. There are currently 942 registered food businesses within the borough, requiring programmed interventions. The frequency of these interventions dependent on their risk ratings.
43. For the period of 23/24 so far, the team have undertaken 201 programmed inspections, still due by the end of the financial year:
  - 4 – Category B businesses
  - 12 – Category C businesses (5 Overdue)
  - 104 – Category D businesses (31 Overdue)
  - 57 – Category E businesses (lowest risk) (45 overdue)
44. In addition to programmed interventions the team respond to enquiries and complaints as well as outbreaks of communicable disease and investigates reports of food poisoning, when comparing 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 have increased by 30%.
45. Furthermore, the team offers educational and advice information, issue street traders consents and exportation/attestation certificates for food products being sent overseas. The team inspects and approves certain manufacturing premises. Where possible the team provides free basic hygiene training to voluntary community groups, which have received exceptional feedback.



## **Pest Control**

46. This year South Ribbles in house pest control team has expanded to a shared team, now consisting of 4 operating across Chorley and South Ribble. The service offers a valuable source of advice to residents, and a competitive treatment service to both residents and businesses within the borough. Commercial contracts are also offered helping to offset the cost of the service providing a value for money service to the public. There are currently 72 commercial contracts in place across the South Ribble Borough.

47. In addition to servicing the commercial contracts, the team receive reactive requests both domestic and commercial. Delivering free and chargeable services, South Ribble still offers an invaluable free domestic rodent treatment to its residents. Below show the numbers of service requests received by the team in the last 3 years:

- 2021: 1421
- 2022: 1375
- 2023: 1729

48. The service is continuously under review as a new and expanding service to improve and grow. There are various service level improvements that have been identified for the service to run more efficiently and effectively, which do not affect customer service. These improvements are reliant on interdependencies such as ICT improvements and therefore will be developed in line with their priorities. Until the identified improvements are made the service will be limiting further new commercial contractual agreements.

49. The service, specifically its team members, receives a lot of positive feedback for the local residents.

## **Planning**

50. The team review and respond were appropriately on planning applications with regards to Environment Health matters, objecting or requesting conditions as appropriate. These issues include noise, air quality, lighting, construction, contaminated land, pest control, waste storage. The team also reviews reports submitted to the planning department covering these areas and provides expert comments for planning decisions, committees and appeals.

51. Overall, there are no significant findings to report in this area, there have been a number of consultations where the team have made objections. The records show a 44% increase in the number of consultations responded to since 2018/19. The increase however is in connection with a change of internal process, resulting in the team reviewing a larger number of applications. The team responded to 344 applications during the period of 2022/2023.

## **Animal Licensing**

52. The team inspect, license and enforce legislation regarding the licensing of animal establishments – pet shops, kennels, catteries, riding establishments, breeders, day care and exhibiting. The total of active licenses in the borough:

- Dog breeding 10
- Animal boarding 39
- Selling pets 4

- Arranging boarding 2
- Training /exhibiting animals 5

## Health and Safety

53. The team undertake inspections, licensing, and enforcement of premises for tattooing and skin piercing. Investigate accidents in the workplace and where possible provide business operators with guidance, support and advice. In total there are 240 beauty treatment issues connected to tattooing and skin piercing. However, a review of those still active has not been conducted.

54. The team investigates accidents and near misses as required in connection with RIDDOR (reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences. Comparing the period of 2018/19 to 2022/23 there has been a 75%increase in the number of reports relating to an accident resulting in hospital treatment reported to the authority. For the period of 22/23 there were 59 RIDDORs received by the authority.

55. The team have engaged in two proactive engagement campaigns relevant to priorities set out by the Health and Safety Executive.

1 – Electrical Safety in hospitality settings with the increased concerns in connect with the cost of fuel and the number of businesses extending to outdoor areas following the pandemic. The team developed guidance and shared this with business provided self-assessment and undertaking advise visits and targeted inspections.

2- Safe use of Inflatables – with increased nationwide related accidents and increase in community events following the ease of Covid-19 restrictions. The team developed guidance and shared this with relevant business and community groups, providing self-assessments and undertaking advise visits and targeted inspections.

## Business Plan Overview

56. The Environmental Health business plan projects are developed and centred around improvements to service and identified areas where risks public health and the environment could be reduced, aside from the service statutory services. Below are the key projects agreed to be delivered throughout 23/24

Key project or programme	Update
<p><b>Pest Control</b> Undertake a Full-Service Review – Implement Common Mobile Working Platform Review of Chargeable Service including Commercial Contracts.</p>	<p>ICT have not currently been in a position to progress improvements with a common mobile working platform.</p> <p>Domestic and Chargeable Service have been reviewed and updated.</p> <p>Commercial Contract Fees will be reviewed in line with the introduction and a new management system when ICT are able to support it. New Commercial contracts are restricted until a new management system is developed to ensure an efficient and modern service is offered.</p>

<b>Housing Standards</b> Implement a Minimum Amenities Standard for Licensable Houses of Multiple Occupation	The draft standard is prepared ready for review and sign off
<b>Public Health</b> Develop local Incentives to Support Lancashire County Councils Recipe for Health	The incentives intended were to provide discounts or benefits to council services, to support uptake of the scheme. Services such as food hygiene training and reduced pest control commercial contracts.  However, due to the delay in ICT improvements to support new system management – how the scheme can be alternatively supported is in discussion.
<b>Health and Safety</b> To review the current byelaws in place for registration of beauty treatments in line with modern practices and achieve Secretary of State approval in connection with the Health and Care Act 2022	Ongoing – Staff training and Information being reviewed and accessed
<b>Community Safety</b> Review to increase the council’s accessible CCTV	A review of CCTV across South Ribble is underway, and a meeting has been held and Police Consultation - Mapping exercises completed.

### Other Service Information

57. The service has had the opportunity and pleasure through dedicated funding to support various interns across the team over the past 3 years. Which provides the authority with dedicated support in achieving aims and objectives related to proactive projects to improve public health and the environment. Whilst supporting their knowledge and experience for their personal education and career development.
58. The team have appointed a 12-month Graduate Environmental Health Practitioner, growing our own officers is imperative to help support the team to have qualified and competent staff to deliver its statutory functions effectively.
59. The advice following the pandemic was for responsible authorities to remain readily prepared. Therefore, as part of a covid recovery plan the authority agreed to the appointment of a dedicated a fixed team Public Health Practitioner position. The practitioner both supports the team’s existing functions and works collaboratively with stakeholders specifically Lancashire County Council on the delivery of proactive Public Health projects and campaigns related to identified risks and concerns.

## 2023/24 Budget

60. The budget for the portfolio for 2023/24 is £1.665mill and can be broken down as follows.

	<b>2023/24 Budget</b>	<b>Forecast Outturn Qtr 3 23/24</b>	<b>Over/(Under) spend</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Finance	725	715	(10)
Public Protection	940	932	(8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,665</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>(18)</b>

## Climate change and air quality

61. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

## Equality and diversity

62. Consideration of equality and diversity implications are given when the corporate strategy and business plans are produced.

## Risk

63. The services maintain service risk registers to manage any potential risks to the delivery of key projects and services.

## Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

64. There report is for noting and as such there are no financial implications arising.

## Comments of the Monitoring Officer

65. The report is for information and noting – there are no direct legal implications arising.

## Background documents

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer)	<a href="mailto:louise.mattinson@southribble.gov.uk">louise.mattinson@southribble.gov.uk</a>		23-Jan-2024
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