

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council 22 July 2015

Councillor Michael Wilson: Cabinet Lead for Governance, Logistics and HR

Democratic Services and Councillor Support

Since the elections and the start of the new municipal year, the Democratic Services Team has been working with the new Committee Chairmen to provide support in their new roles.

Councillor Training (supported by Councillor Branson)

A series of induction sessions have been held for new members of the Council that included an opportunity to meet informally with the Leader and the Chief Executive, key briefings on Code of Conduct, Planning, Environmental Health and Finance, and a visit to the Customer Contact Centre to observe the team working at first hand. Specialist training for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Planning and Licensing Committees has also been held. New Councillors have also been trained on how to use the Council's Committee Management System; this will allow them to review reports and minutes, submit deputation requests and maintain their register of interest online. Forthcoming training planned as part of the Councillor Training and Development programme will include an IT workshop, a seminar on the Budget and training in Chairing Skills and Emergency Planning/Business Continuity. Based on feedback from Councillors following the initial Licensing training, officers will be running a further in-house session in early September, focusing on Licensing functions and processes.

Representation on Outside Bodies (supported by Councillor G Shimbart)

The Cabinet recently approved recommendations from the Scrutiny Board seeking to ensure that all appointments to outside organisations are of real value to both the Council and the organisation concerned. To this end, Democratic Services are working with Councillor Gerald Shimbart to put in place a mechanism for monitoring the Council's representation on external organisations, to gather feedback from appointed member representatives so as to better inform next year's appointments. The Guidelines on outside appointments have been circulated to all member representatives and members are asked to complete a short report following each meeting they attend.

Councillors Data Registrations

The Council has registered all new Councillors on the Data Protection Register which will enable them to timetable surgery appointments or take forward complaints made by local residents by using the Council's email system.

Independent Remuneration Panel

The Independent Remuneration Panel have commenced their review of councillors' allowances and to date have agreed a programme of work, interviewed the Leader and compiled and circulated a questionnaire to all councillors. The replies to this questionnaire are in the process of being collated and discussions with a selection of councillors are being arranged.

Elections

Following on from the successfully run Elections in May, the focus of the team is now firmly on the first canvas under Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

The old system required a 'head of household' to submit an application on behalf of all those resident at an address – an outdated concept not recognised by many in today's world. In 2014 IER was introduced, to improve the accuracy of the register and to make registration easier and more secure.

Extra levels of verification have been added and additional forms will need to be completed as part of IER.

Revenue and Benefits

Universal Credit

The national roll-out of Universal Credit is underway. The roll-out has been split into 4 tranches and commenced in February 2015. Councils involved in tranches 1 and 2 are now "live", Southampton from March 2015 and Eastleigh from May 2015. Tranche 3 commences in December 2015 and tranche 4 from February 2016.

Havant Borough will be in tranche 4 commencing in March 2016 although the exact date will not be confirmed until later this year.

At this stage the national roll-out is limited to new claims from single claimants who would previously have claimed Jobseekers Allowance so the number of cases is expected to be low.

Currently, there are no further details on the next stages of the roll-out.

Welfare Reform

The Chancellor announced a raft of further welfare reforms in the budget on July 8th. Those relating directly to the Housing Benefit are as follows;

- The annual uprating of working-age benefits will be frozen for four years – this applies to a range of benefits including housing benefit and the local housing allowance
- Child allowances will no longer be included in the housing benefit calculation for the third and subsequent children born after 6 April 2017. This means that housing benefit entitlement will not automatically increase following the birth of a third or subsequent child (this will also apply to claims for child tax credit and universal credit).

- From April 2016 backdating of housing benefit claims will be limited to a maximum of four weeks.
- From April 2017, 18-21 year olds will not be entitled to claim housing benefit (or the housing element of universal credit) automatically.
- The overall household annual benefit cap will be reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 (£23,000 in London). This will have a significant impact on households with three or more children.

There will also be a range of other measures including significant changes to tax credits which will see a steeper withdrawal of tax credit as earnings rise and the introduction of a national living wage for employees over 25 years old from April 2016 which will be compulsory for most employers. Full details of the impact of the changes will emerge over the coming months.

To help mitigate the impact of the changes, the government will provide £800m of funding to local authorities for discretionary housing payments (dhp's) over the next five years. From April 2016 the national dhp budget will be £150m rising to £185m from April 2017 (the current 2015/16 budget is £125m of which Havant Borough Council's allocation is £151,713). Details of future allocations to individual councils are not yet known.

Facilities Management (including the Cafe)

Conference Suite

Room bookings within the Conference Centre at the Plaza have continued to be high and have generated approx. £13,000 of revenue in the first three months of the financial year (2015/16). A further £2,000 revenue has been received from catering provided to external users for meetings held at the Plaza.

Events

On the 22nd June Havant Borough Council held our annual Armed Forces Day Flag Raising ceremony at the Plaza. This year the occasion was combined with an event to mark the 200th Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo and a Veterans Reception.

The event was organised by the Facilities Team and the Mayor's Secretary who worked industriously with the Mayor to ensure the day was a success. Early planning and several meetings with 47 and 16 Regiment resulted in the Army successfully securing the Band of the Queen's Division. On the day, soldiers from 47 Regiment and 16 Regiment Royal Artillery marched to the grounds of The Plaza behind the band of the Queen's Division.

As part of the ceremony the Mayor and Deputy Lieutenant of Hampshire inspected the troops and the morning culminated in a reception where local

veterans were given the opportunity to mingle with serving soldiers and veteran Councillors.

A really high profile occasion which was well received by all in attendance.