

Cabinet – 14 July 2016

Written Responses to Councillor Questions not Reached at Cabinet

12.

Questioner:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Asked of:	Councillor Adam Swersky, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Commercialisation
Question:	“Following the re-structure in Finance, is the new staffing structure sufficient and appropriate to meet the demands placed upon it?”
Written Response:	<p>It is accepted that the Harrow Finance team is very small, the smallest across London. It would be ideal to have additional resources but the Council is committed to protecting frontline services for residents, which inevitably means being as lean and efficient as possible in the back office functions. To do this, there is a focus on the prioritisation of work to ensure that resources are focused on areas of risk, volatility, development of business cases, legislative changes and minimising the resources allocated to routine transactional work.</p> <p>A small finance team does increase the lack of resilience within the team and leave us susceptible when staff leave and to managing future developments and demands and this is constantly monitored.</p>

13.

Questioner:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Asked of:	Councillor Adam Swersky, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Commercialisation
Question:	“Will the staffing reduction in Audit and Fraud have any negative impact on the Council’s ability to detect and investigate corporate fraud?”
Written Response:	<p>The Council has to deliver £83m of savings over the course of this administration. There are multiple competing priorities on the Council’s Budget, including our ambitions to keep the Borough clean and safe, and to look after the most vulnerable to build a better Harrow.</p> <p>Our priority is to protect frontline services for our residents, which inevitably means being as lean and efficient as possible in our support functions. The resourcing of our Audit and Fraud teams has been reduced in this context and I know that you keep a close eye on the adequacy of this at the GARMS Committee. During 2015/16 the two teams joined forces to provide a more resilient service by working</p>

	<p>closer together.</p> <p>We will review whether extra investment in our Fraud team would yield sufficient savings to pay for extra staffing and if we believed there is a strong case we would consider it.</p> <p>The overall control environment remains 'good' according to the Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion and we continue to fight fraud very successfully.</p>
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14.

Questioner:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Asked of:	Councillor Adam Swersky, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Commercialisation
Question:	"What is the reason for the "amber" rating for BSS01 on the MTFS Savings Tracker?"
Written Response:	<p>Savings were put in the MTFS for the Business Support service in 2015 which represented a very significant proportion of the service. The service was overspending at the end of last financial year. The service was merged with Access Harrow as a result of the senior management restructure.</p> <p>A full review of the service was immediately undertaken towards the end of 2015. It should be noted that the largest proportion of staff in Business Support are working in Children's Services providing essential services to front line staff.</p> <p>Plans were immediately put in place to start addressing the overspend.</p> <p>The savings that were in the budget for last year have now been delivered however it is not expected that the full savings for this year will be achieved. The ongoing pressures for next year will be addressed through the budget setting process in 2017.</p>

16.

Questioner:	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Asked of:	Councillor Adam Swersky, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Commercialisation
Question:	"Can you provide details of how many households in receipt of council tax support were served with a court summons for late payment, for the financial years 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16?"

Written Response:	<p>In 2013/14, the first year of Council Tax Support localisation, 3705 summonses were issued against recipients of support from a total of 11,849 summonses issued in the financial year.</p> <p>Whilst officers were provided with additional budget to monitor and deal with those cases manually at the time, in subsequent years this was not possible and the systems reverted to the automated processes. As such action is taken against a mix of non CTS and CTS cases meaning that no separate figures exist for summonses issued only against CTS recipients.</p> <p>However as the caseload has significantly dropped (from 11,034 in 2013/14 to 7,483 currently), and in year collection rates for CTS recipients has increased from 88.71% in 2013/14 to 91.75% in 2015/16, it is assumed that the number of summonses issued against such households is far lower now that in the first year of localisation.</p>
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