

**Present:** Councillor Ric Metcalfe (*in the Chair*),  
Councillor Mary Green and Councillor Sally Tarry

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Sue Burke

**21. Confirmation of Minutes - 23 November 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 be confirmed.

**22. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**23. Performance Update**

Purpose of Report

To provide the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

**Decision**

That the report be noted, with an update to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 30 May 2024.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The report provided an update on Revenues and Benefits performance in respect of Quarter 3 for the financial year 2023/24.

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service had now been in operation for twelve years since 1 June 2011, and performance had largely been maintained and improved whilst continuing to provide value for money. Continual improvement and success was being achieved in both statistical and financial performance, as well as positive outcomes for customers of the partner local authorities. However, the Covid-19 global pandemic and then cost of living challenges had understandably impacted on some areas of performance and these impacts were likely to continue for many more months.

In respect of Council Tax, up to the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, in-year collection for Lincoln was down by 1.47% and North Kesteven was up by 1.05% respectively. Figures for the end of January 2024 were similar again.

Council Tax Support caseloads had recently been falling following a sharp rise during Covid-19, however, with ongoing cost of living pressures on residents there was potential this fall in caseloads may not continue. Officers were also

looking into CTS take-up activity as it was felt that this possibly was being underclaimed by residents.

In respect of Business Rates, up to the end of Quarter 3 2023/24 compared to the same point in 2022/23, in-year collection was up for Lincoln by 0.09%, North Kesteven down by 2.92% and West Lindsey down by 0.24%. As at the end of January 2024, Lincoln and West Lindsey were still up, however, North Kesteven was down by 0.02%

The number of outstanding Revenues Customers at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24 was 849 (split Lincoln 550, North Kesteven 299) This was a slight increase from the figure at end of Quarter 2 2023/24 (total 782), however with significant demands on the team plus recruitment taking place in respect of vacant positions – the team had performed well to maintain (relatively) this position. Two out of three newly recruited staff members were starting work on 18 March 2024.

As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, in period collection of Housing Benefit overpayments stood at 107.42% for City of Lincoln, and North Kesteven 103.78%. This was still the same as at the end of January 2024 and collection monies continued to reduce.

Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt also continued to decrease overall. As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24: at £2,324,486 for City of Lincoln and £1,233,565 for North Kesteven.

As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, there were 2,099 Benefits customers outstanding and awaiting assessment (split Lincoln 1,481, North Kesteven 618). This was an increase from the total outstanding (1,696) at end of Quarter 2 2023/24. However, the team were working hard to further improve the position – which was generally positive, with significant demand on the Benefits Team not just in terms of ‘core’ processing work (i.e. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support) but also in terms of cost of living support (including Household Support Fund), Universal Credit documents and Discretionary Housing Payments. We were working to a backlog within 3 weeks for the oldest benefit claims outstanding at the current time, although we were approaching a very busy time of year.

Despite the significant demands on the Benefits Team, officers continued to turn around claims and reported changes of circumstance promptly, and accurately. As at the end of January 2024, Lincoln was processing new claims in an average of 14.92 days and North Kesteven in 18.48 days. For changes of circumstance as at the end of January 2024, Lincoln was processing claims at an average of 5 days and North Kesteven at 3.5 days

The latest national data available showed that in Quarter 2 2023/24 New Claims were processed in an average of 20 days by Councils, with Changes of Circumstance being processed in an average of 9 calendar days. Although, these national figures were for a specific quarter only (i.e., Quarter 2 2023/24) and not cumulative over the financial year – which was how officers reported these areas of performance for our shared service.

As at the end of Quarter 3 , in terms of processing times for new benefit claims, City of Lincoln took an average of 15.24 days and North Kesteven 18.81 days respectively.

In terms of the claims checked that were 'correct, first time' (with even £0.01p 'out' being classified as an incorrect assessment), at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24:

- City of Lincoln: 92.29% (1,641 out of 1,778 checked),
- North Kesteven: 98.26% (678 out of 690 checked).

As at the end of January 2024, accuracy figures stood at 92.58% for Lincoln and 98.5%

City of Lincoln's reduced level of performance in quarter 1 was due to 200 more checks during the quarter than in the same quarter last year, including due to less experienced officers being part of the team. 100% of claims were being checked, which could mean more (small) errors being identified- and then corrected. Performance had improved by 4.44% from end of Quarter 1 to Quarter 3, demonstrating a positive direction of travel.

The table at paragraph 6.1 of the officer's report showed the invaluable support provided by the Welfare Team to the residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven in Quarter 3 2023/24.

There were a number of key reasons why the levels of Welfare/Money advice in Lincoln was higher than in North Kesteven, including:

- Differences in demographics;
- 'Customer journey' different at each Council;
- Significant number of foodbank vouchers issued at Lincoln) compared to North Kesteven)

Demands and processes for the Welfare Team continued to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Both City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council residents were affected either directly or indirectly by Storm Babet in October 2023, and/or by Storm Henk in January 2024 .

Three departments of the Government announced 5 separate schemes to help with flood victims:

1. Council Tax relief for a minimum of 3 months
2. Business Rates relief for a minimum of 3 months
3. Council Tax Community Support Grant of £500
4. Business Recovery Grant of £2,500
5. Flood resilience Grants of £5,000 – to future proof flooded properties.

Schemes 1-4 were administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service and scheme 5 was administered by the Lead Flood Authority, Lincolnshire County Council.

The statistics for grants awarded by the Revenues and Benefits Service, were shown in the table at paragraph 7.2 of the report.

The District authorities would be repaid for any of the Grants that they provided and for Council Tax and/or Business rate relief. The end date for the Council Tax Relief and the Business rate relief was when the customer returned to their

property, or 31 March 2025. The Revenues and Benefits Service was tasked with continuing to monitor these properties until all residents had returned to their properties.

*(Personal thanks were given to Tracey Parker, Revenues and Benefits Manager, for all her hard work during the recent storm damage).*

## **24. Revenues and Benefits - Financial Monitoring Quarter 3 2023/24**

### **Purpose of Report**

To provide the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with the third quarter's (ending 31 December 2023) performance for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2023/24, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

### **Decision**

That the actual position at Quarter 3 as detailed within the report be noted.

### **Alternation Options Considered and Rejected**

None.

### **Reason for Decision**

The forecast outturn for 2023/24 predicted there would be an underspend against the approved budget of £34,940, which included the newly confirmed 2023/24 pay award, which was paid in December 2023.

The approved budget for 2023/24 was agreed by the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee on 23 February 2023, which set a budget of £2,878,930 for the service.

At Quarter 1 the budget was increased to reflect New Burdens grants totalling £61,950, giving a revised budget of £2,940,890, there were no further changes as at Quarter 2. At quarter 3 further new burdens received totalled £13,300.

Financial performance for the third quarter of 2023/24 as detailed at Appendix 1 of the officer's report resulted in an underspend against the approved budget of £9,000.

The forecast outturn for 2023/24 predicted that there would be an underspend against the approved budget of £34,940, which included the impact of the National Pay Awards paid in December 2023, which reflected an improvement of £35,250 from quarter 2.

The main forecast year-end variations against the approved budget for 2023/24 were noted within the table at paragraph 4.3 of the officer's report.

A Job Evaluation Panel held on 11 July 2023 had evaluated and approved the Benefits Appeal Officer role at Grade 6 (previously Grade 5). This was now reflected in the current forecast outturn position. The impact of this job evaluation totalled £1,485.88, which had been split as follows: City of Lincoln £861.81 and North Kesteven £624.07

Each Council had received a new burdens grant from Central Government to administer the Energy Support Scheme to the value of £14,950 for City of Lincoln Council and £21,790 for North Kesteven. By agreement these grants sat outside of the shared service budget.

The key factor behind the improved position as at quarter three was the ongoing staffing vacancies which, as at quarter two, were expected to be recruited to during the second half of the year but were now expected to remain vacant until the end of the financial year. These savings were partly offset by the National Pay Award, which was significantly higher than the budgeted pay award estimate of 3% assumed within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), alongside overtime costs which had been incurred due to the volume of vacancies that remained within the teams.

## **25. Revenues and Benefits - Base Budget Forecast 2024/25**

### Purpose of Report

To present the Base Budget Forecast for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2024/25.

### **Decision**

1. That the Base Budget Forecast for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2024/25 be approved.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement required the Base Budget Forecast for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service to be reported to members; this report met this requirement.

The Base Budget Forecast for 2024/25 was included at Appendix 1 to the report, including a full reconciliation to the previous Base Budget Forecast outlined in Appendix 2.

As a result of inflationary pressures there had been a significant increase in the base budget from last year, in the main, due to the significantly higher than anticipated pay award in 2023/24. As agreed nationally, the pay award reflected the higher of either, a flat rate increase of £1,925, or 3.5-3.8% to all employees, equivalent to a 9.4% increase for the lowest paid members of staff and with the majority of officers receiving pay rises above 5% for the second consecutive year, in comparison to the original budgeted estimate of 3%.

A minor numerical typographical error was noted within the appendices which would be corrected.

## **26. Business Rates Update**

### Purpose of Report

To provide the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update on current issues within non-domestic rates, related to City of Lincoln Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council. The report was not intended to include non-domestic rate performance matters, as this was covered within the Performance Update reported to Joint Committee today.

## **Decision**

That the content of the report be noted.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The report included some of the changes announced as a result of the Government's financial support provided to businesses in the form of business rates relief. The report also focused on the financial impact of recent appeals and reductions to rateable values.

The following updates were noted:

### *NDR Changes and Significant Reliefs/Discounts*

At the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, the Chancellor announced that the Government would continue to provide a package of business rates measures to support businesses in England.

- The retail, hospitality and leisure relief would continue for 2024/2025 at 75% up to £110,000 per business
- A freezing of the small multipliers for a further year at 49.9p and an increase in the standard multiplier from 51.2p to 54.6p

### *Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023-24*

Eligibility criteria for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief was set out by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and issued to Local Authorities on 20 December 2021, with no changes to the qualifying criteria for the year 2023/24. The table at paragraph 5.5 of the officer's report reflected the significant reduction in the amounts awarded in the last three years (previously known as the Expanded Retail Discount (ERD) scheme), with an estimate on the award to be granted in 2023/24.

Potential reductions to rateable values were contained within paragraph 6, which included fire stations, hospitals, museums and hotels occupied by asylum seekers.

### *Business Rates Review*

The final report for a Business Rates Review was also published at the Budget. The Budget and the Review committed in the longer term to improvements to the Business Rates system – which included;

- More frequent revaluations, moving to a revaluation every three years starting from the next revaluation which came into force on 1 April 2023, the next being 1 April 2026 and so on.
- The process of revaluation started approximately 2 years before the new valuations came into force. For the revaluation due on 1 April 2023, the rateable value would be assessed based on the rental evidence on 1 April 2021. There would be a new duty on the ratepayer to provide the Valuation Office with the information

For each revaluation, the Government introduced a Transitional Relief scheme. Transitional relief limited how much a bill could change each year. As the NDR system was self-financing, historically these limits had limited both large increases and large decreases. In the Budget, the government announced a change to the Transitional relief scheme so that only increases were limited. For any reduction in the rateable value, a ratepayer would receive the full benefit of the reduction immediately.

### *Heat Network Rate Relief Scheme*

The Government had published the guidance for Local Authorities on the operation of the Heat Network Rate Relief Scheme for 2023/24, substantially unchanged from 2022/23. Local Authorities were to continue to deliver the discretionary relief using their discretionary powers for 2023-24 until the relief was made mandatory through the Non-Domestic Rating Bill. The relief was targeted at hereditaments used wholly or mainly as heat networks with its own rating assessment, to provide relief for those networks generating from a low carbon source to ensure the policy supported decarbonisation.

### *Business Rates Avoidance and Evasion Consultation*

In the Spring budget on 15 March 2023, the Chancellor announced that the government would consult on measures to tackle business rates and avoidance and evasion.

A consultation paper was provided in July 2023 with a target date of 27 September 2023 for responses.

The topics that formed part of the consultation were:

1. Measures to reform rates on unoccupied properties
2. Wider business rates avoidance and evasion
3. 'Rogue' agents

The Shared Service partners would be responding to this consultation.

### *Non Domestic Rating Bill – Royal Assent 26 October 2023*

This bill would make a number of changes to Non Domestic Rating .

One of the changes removed the 6 month backdating rule for discretionary rate relief decisions in England.

The Act created section 47(6A) which said that a decision, by a billing authority in England, with regards a day was invalid if the day fell before 31 March 2023 and the decision was made more than 6 months after the end of the financial year to which it related, i.e. the backdating rule would not apply to decisions in respect of 2023-24 onwards.

This was likely to mean that with effect from 1 April 2024 decisions would be made on discretionary reliefs fully retrospectively (in respect of the financial year 2024/25 onwards...." )

The other significant change was the decoupling of the multipliers and, in effect, the abolition of the small business supplement from 1 April 2024.

This meant that Government could choose to raise the two multipliers by different amounts.

This was going to require extensive discussions between the government and the software suppliers as to how this required data could be extracted before the Local Authorities had to issue the return for the NDR1 (assessment for the rating income for 2024) which was due on 31 December 2023.

The bill also paved the way for data sharing between the VOA, HMRC and billing authorities. The authorities already had a sharing agreement with the VOA but due to the changes with what they could now share, it was expected that a new sharing agreement and protocol would be announced by the VOA.

## **27. Cost of Living Support**

### Purpose of Report

To provide Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update regarding various areas relating to the national welfare reform agenda, as well as current cost of living initiatives to support residents.

### **Decision**

That the content of the report be noted, and a further update be presented at the next meeting of this Committee.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The report provided Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update with regard to the national and local position of welfare reform/other initiatives, with a specific focus on Universal Credit, Discretionary Housing Payments, Household Support Fund, Energy Bill Support Schemes, Council Tax Support Fund and Financial Inclusion matters.



The national Welfare Reform agenda had a significant impact on residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven since 2013 when certain changes were introduced – such as Removal of Spare Room Subsidy, and Benefit Cap – and had continued as further changes had been introduced, such as the ongoing rollout of Universal Credit. These changes had resulted in major changes to the operating of our shared service, to ensure a proactive and positive response to welfare reform and the impacts on residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living related matters, had caused major challenges to households locally and nationally. The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service played a lead and key role in developing deliverable schemes to help mitigate some of the impacts of cost-of-living challenges. Some of these schemes were directly delivered by this Service, some in partnership with other teams within the Councils, also with organisations such as those in the voluntary sector.

### *Universal Credit*

The latest national figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were released on 16 January 2024, with statistics relevant to the period up to December 2023:

- 6,220,096 households receiving UC (this was an increase from 6,043,162 as reported at the last meeting of this Committee).

Local authority statistics:

- City of Lincoln – 11,878 (11,478 as at the last report).
- North Kesteven – 7,289 (6,946 as at the last report).

A letter was published by DWP and sent to local authorities on 4 December 2023, setting out managed migration plans in 2024/25, and beyond. As at the time of writing this report, further information is awaited from DWP in terms of anticipated numbers of cases anticipated as moving from a legacy benefit (for example, Housing Benefit (HB)) to UC in 2024/25, - as well as a more definitive timescale. Under current plans, our shared service would continue to be responsible for administering and processing HB claims for those of pension age, all Council Tax Support claims, and Exempt/temporary accommodation HB claims, - as well as other related work such as Discretionary Housing Payments. Revenues and Benefits management continued to keep the whole LiNK team aware of UC managed migration and the potential impacts moving forward.

DWP had invited all local authorities to a conference on 25 March 2024 to view plans for future years.

### Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

City of Lincoln's DHP initial government grant for 2023/24 was £132,330 and North Kesteven's £86,931.

Overall DHP funding for 2022/23 was reduced nationally from £140m to £100m. Consequently, grants for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven were also reduced by more than 29% each.

On 23 February 2023, DWP announced DHP government grants for 2023/24. For City of Lincoln and North Kesteven, these were exactly the same amounts as for 2022/23; and the announcement also stated that the national DHP allocation for 2024/25 would be the same as for 2023/24 – so individual local authorities may well receive the same figures for 2024/25 – although this would be confirmed later this year.

The average award for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven had increased for 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 due to more applications being turned down this financial year because of officers now taking into account Personal Independence Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance as part of the consideration, meaning more customers had income that exceeded their outgoings. This allowed officers to award larger DHP payments to those customers living in the private sector where rents had significantly increased, whilst the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) figures had remained the same. However, it should be noted that LHA rates had recently been announced as increasing for 2024/25

As the full government grant for the City of Lincoln had been spent, an extra £10,000 had been provided out of the Homeless Prevention Fund to help support the DHP budget for Lincoln residents until the end of the current financial year.

#### *Household Support Fund*

In his Autumn statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an extension to the Household Support Fund, running from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Guidance was issued to local authorities on 20 February 2023, with allocations for this round of funding. For Lincolnshire, Household Support Fund 2023/24 funding was £10,929,370 – to cover the whole financial year.

In Quarter 1 2023/24, Lincolnshire County Council confirmed plans in respect of Household Support Fund Wave 4 2023/24 with main details contained at paragraph 6.3 of the officer's report.

For Housing Benefit recipients in Lincolnshire who were not entitled to the national Cost of Living Payment 2023/24, the payment would be replicated in three phases, the first payment of (£301) was issued in August through Post Office vouchers with a total of £184,212 awarded to 612 eligible households within the City of Lincoln and £181,804 awarded to 604 eligible households within North Kesteven. A second wave of the scheme was delivered in December 2023 with a payment of £300 to eligible households. A total of £172,500 was awarded to 575 households within the City of Lincoln and £174,300 awarded to 581 households within North Kesteven. The third wave (£299 per payment) of these payments would be made in February 2024.

In terms of District Councils' separate allocations of HSF4 to be utilised to work with partners to provide payments, including through an application-based process in part (a requirement of the national HSF4 guidance), these had now been communicated to District Councils' HSF4 lead officers, - for City of Lincoln £202,676 had been allocated, and for North Kesteven £139,340.

Officers were working in partnership with an established range of referral partners and application processes – as well as some new partners/routes – to ensure these HSF4 monies (through vouchers, food parcels, energy top-ups, etc.) were delivered to those identified as in need. A key focus would again be on reducing foodbank dependency wherever possible, working with partners to help signpost residents to other means of support (e.g., money advice), - as well as supporting a drive to further increase usage of community groceries. A strategic aim of HSF4, was also to try and leave a 'legacy' of impact – as there was no guarantee of HSF5 (or of another form of local welfare provision) from 2024/25 onwards.

#### *Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022, Central Government provided guidance to local authorities regarding a £100 million Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24, whereby awards of up to £25 were to be made to Council Taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Support, - with an element of funding also to be made for discretionary local funds in 2023/24. Funding allocations for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven were £222,303 and £142,500, respectively.

Payments of up to £50.00 (the prescribed maximum was £25.00) were made to City of Lincoln and North Kesteven taxpayers as part of the 2023/24 Council Tax annual billing process. Remaining funding would be considered for local schemes in 2023/24. These figures were £101,705 for City of Lincoln, and £38,628 for North Kesteven.

The remaining funding was to be allocated in a detailed breakdown explained at paragraph 7.2 of the officer's report.

#### *Financial Inclusion*

Financial inclusion continued to be a key objective and factor in many areas of LiNK's work. The Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (LFIP) was currently chaired by the Assistant Director of Shared Revenues and Benefits for North Kesteven District Council and City of Lincoln Council, - which brought together organisations and partners to promote and raise the profile of financial inclusion across the county.

Two key areas of high-profile engagement by LFIP in 2023/24, were:

- Co-ordination of 'Talk Money Week' activities in Lincolnshire during the week-commencing 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- A conference to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (likely to be in Grantham), to follow-up from the highly successful conference held at the Jakemans Community Stadium in Boston, in February 2023.

As at the time of writing this report, it was unclear what cost of living support funding would be made available to local authorities during 2024/25, with Household Support Fund due to end, also no announcement on national Cost of Living Payments beyond 2023/24. The Spring Budget on 6 March 2024 could be a key date in terms of whether any future support of this type was announced, otherwise a potential 'cliff edge' of such support could occur from April 2024. City of Lincoln Council had approved funding for some cost of living projects through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, for 2024/25. Appendix 1 of the report gave some actual anonymised Lincoln and North Kesteven cases, showing how LiNK has

been able to support residents during 2023/24 through the Household Support Fund and other means.

## **28. Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2024/25**

### **Purpose of Report**

As set out in the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement, an annual Business Plan was presented to this committee each year for consideration and approval.

### **Decision**

That the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2024/25 be approved.

### **Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

None.

### **Reason for Decision**

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2024/25 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report and featured the following:

- Key Achievements in 2023/24;
- Savings in 2023/24;
- Key Activities for 2024/25;
- Strategic Priority Schemes 2024/25;
- Towards Financial Sustainability projects 2024/25;
- Key Risks;
- Performance Management;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality Actions;
- Working in Neighbourhoods;
- Workforce Development;
- Social Value;
- Data Protection and Information Governance
- Corporate Social Responsibility.

It was reported that the year 2023/24 had been another positive year for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, albeit very challenging with a whole host of post Covid-19 pandemic and Cost of living support related-initiatives. The impacts from Covid-19 had been significant and could not be underestimated, as were the ongoing impacts of rising cost of living challenges. The financial impacts on taxpayers and businesses had been substantial, which had understandably impacted on revenues collection – particularly in relation to Council Tax. The service continued to promote the ‘Get in touch, not in debt’ message – with a real focus on ‘welfare’ and income-maximisation for customers when making payment arrangements. Also, the increase in the overall Benefits workload as cost of living challenges continued to significantly impact, meant that staffing resources and priorities needed to be regularly ‘juggled.’

A number of additional demands had been placed on our Revenues and Benefits Service over the last twelve months, including;

- Household Support Fund;
- Council Tax Support Fund
- Business Rates Relief
- Increase in Benefits claims/changes/Universal Credit Changes
- Alternative Energy Support Funds
- Storm Babet Flood Support
- Pressures and impacts from temporary accommodation, and reduced Discretionary Housing Payments funding.

These additional demands should not be underestimated and understandably impacted on levels of performance in some areas. However, despite these major challenges, performance in most areas remained positive – officers were wholly committed to achieving the best possible standards of service to our customers.

The plan for 2024/25 continued to look at a range of key initiatives relating to areas including e-services, cost of living, as well as standards of performance.

It was agreed that officers would talk to our Communications team with an objective of bringing alive the business plan in order to celebrate its achievements for the wider audience to see.

## **29. Other Matters- Pending Retirement Councillor Ric Metcalfe**

Councillor Ric Metcalfe highlighted that he had been involved in the Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee and the Shared Partnership since its conception. He gave thanks to Martin, Tracey and all their staff for their extremely hard work over the years. This partnership was exemplary of benefits that could flow from working together. This was his last meeting, before he retired however, it was a superb service and he was happy to leave it in good hands and in great shape.

Councillor Sally Tarry thanked Councillor Metcalfe for all his support from the outset of the shared service and this committee over the past 13 years. She wished him a very happy retirement.