

Maidstone Borough Council

Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 1 November 2011

Revenues and Benefits Update

Report of: Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its Meeting on 6 September 2011, the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Quarter 1 Performance Report and the Quarter 1 Complaints Report as part of its role within the scrutiny terms of reference.
- 1.2 Whilst considering the Quarter 1 Performance Report, the Committee agreed :“That Steve McGinnes, Head of Benefits and Council Tax should be invited to the next available meeting to discuss Performance Indicator R&B 007 – value of fraud identified by the fraud partnership,” furthermore, within the Quarter 1 Complaints Report the Committee highlighted Revenues and Benefits, making and recommended: “That Steve McGinnes, Head of Benefits and Council Tax should be invited to discuss the accessibility of Council Tax and Benefits letters to residents.”
- 1.3 The Chairman felt it appropriate to receive a presentation on Welfare Reform at this meeting to help inform the discussion.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to consider its concerns in relation to the value of fraud identified by the fraud partnership and the accessibility of Council Tax and Benefits correspondence to residents as highlighted in the Quarter 1 Performance Report and the Quarter 1 Complaints Report (**Appendix A**).
- 2.2 Members are also recommended to consider the presentation given by Steve McGinnes, Head of Revenues and Benefits, on Welfare Reform and ask questions as they feel appropriate. Potential areas for discussion could include, but are not limited to:
 - The financial implications for Maidstone Borough Council;
 - The financial implications for the residents of Maidstone;
 - The effect on the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells back office partnership;
 - The effect on the staffing structure in place;
 - The impact on staff performance; and
 - The impact on customer care and complaints handling.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee have an overarching role within the scrutiny structure. Their priority area, Corporate and Customer Excellence, encompasses Performance Management and Customer Care and Complaints. These two areas of responsibility have a shared interest in all service deliver within the authority.
- 3.2 The Committee's interest in Revenue and Benefits from a Performance Management and Customer Care Complaints perspective could impact on other areas with their remit including Budget Scrutiny.
- 3.3 As a Committee with an overarching scrutiny outlook Members have the opportunity to voice their current concerns with regard to Revenues and Benefits as part of a bigger picture. The amendments to the Housing Benefit Scheme to be phased in from April 2011-13; the creation of New Universal Credit; and the New Local Scheme for Council Tax are all areas the Committee may wish to gain an informed understanding of to assist them in their ongoing role.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 4.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priorities:
 - 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'.
- 4.2 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's priorities. The Committee's work will contribute to the delivery of these key objectives over the next year.