

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

MONITORING AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 6th April 2017

Present: Councillor Jonathan West (Chair)
Councillors June Derbyshire, Jenny Henson, Anne Lee and Mike Tebbutt

Also Present: Guy Holloway (Head of Corporate Development)
Mark Dickenson (Head of Resources)
Rob Thompson (Benefits Manager)
David Pope (Committee Administrator)
Mark Watkins (CW Audit Services)

16.MA.37 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Greg Titcombe and Lisa Hyde.

16.MA.38 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Monitoring and Audit Committee held on 8th February 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16.MA.39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

16.MA.40 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2017 - 2020 (A1)

A report was submitted requesting the Monitoring and Audit Committee consider and approve the Internal Audit Plan for the period April 2017 to March 2020.

Mark Watkins from CW Audit Services attended the meeting to provide members with an outline of the services carried out by

internal audit on behalf of KBC.

Members noted that a rolling strategic audit plan was provided annually and by the end of the three year audit cycle covered all the key systems and processes the council had involvement in delivering, with a particular focus on areas of risk.

It was further noted that each year had sufficient coverage to enable the provision of accurate opinions on systems and controls examined to support the Annual Governance Statement.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions on a number of areas covered by the audit plan.

RESOLVED that the committee agreed the Strategic Audit Plan for April 2017 to March 2020 as detailed at Appendix A to the officer report

16.MA.41 KEY UPDATES (A2)

Welfare Reform

It was noted that the revised benefit cap had come into force in November 2016, significantly later than the anticipated introduction. Under the previous cap rate, only 15 KBC customers had been affected, however the new rate saw approximately 100 claimants affected, of whom 17 had had their housing benefit reduced to 50p per week. A holistic approach was required to support these customers affected by the lower rate, as each customer's circumstances were different.

The meeting heard that the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund had been increased by the government to assist in mitigating the effects of the lower benefit cap. The DHP budget was currently £139k and would rise to £193k in 2017/18, with certain customers requiring substantial assistance to maintain their tenancies. The Social Inclusion Team would be proactively working with DHP customers to provide advice and guidance and to understand customer needs so longer-term DHP awards could be made if required.

In relation to Council Tax Support, the scheme remained in place with a 45% taper rate. Additional reminders had been introduced to the collections process to assist those customers who had previously never paid Council Tax. A 12 month payment option had also been introduced. It was noted that a large percentage of customers receiving budgetary support had issues relating to Council Tax arrears.

Universal Credit (UC) would see a full roll-out locally by June 2018;

currently there were very few claimants in the borough. UC would impact the benefit cap, with certain claimants potentially losing £200-£300 of benefits per week. The meeting heard that UC claimants aged between 18 and 21 would not receive any housing support as part of their claim, although there were some exceptions to this rule such as care leavers. In addition there would be a two child premium restriction put in place, although existing claimants would be protected unless they had additional children.

The meeting heard that there were homelessness concerns surrounding the rollout of UC, with payments made a minimum of five weeks in arrears and the demand for support services was anticipated to increase significantly.

The Social Inclusion Team was introduced to the meeting as part of the presentation, with the four officers that comprised the team having a wealth of experience in relation to benefits, Council Tax and budget management. It was noted that space was being sought within customer services to allow for customer appointments and drop-in sessions. There was an intention to involve partner organisations through Kettering Futures Partnership to deliver support work outside the council's remit. Members were requested to consider any community based events the team could attend

Members asked questions in relation to DHP, Universal Credit and the removal of benefits for those aged between 18 and 21. It was noted that figures relating to the number of court summons issued for non-payment of Council Tax could be supplied to the next meeting of the committee.

16.MA.42 KEY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION BOOKLET (A3)

Members received the Key Performance Information Booklet.

The Committee asked questions in relation to the following aspects of the information provided:-

- An update on Internal Audit reports would be provided throughout the year as part of the Key Performance Information Booklet
- Members of the Planning Committee may find information on planning appeals and their outcomes to be beneficial
- Recovery of overpaid housing benefit was discussed
- The inclusion of a performance indicator for fly-tipping would be welcomed.

16.MA.43 WORK PROGRAMME (A4)

The work programme was submitted to the Committee for consideration. The following reports would be brought to the next Committee:-

- Internal Audit Annual Report 2016/17
- Annual Governance Statement 2016/17
- Monitoring of Service Level Agreements
- Welfare Reform
- Food Safety Audit

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 8.05pm)

Signed:

(Chair)

DJP