

REPORT TO: RECESS SUB COMMITTEE
REPORT ON: REVENUES DIVISION WORKLOAD
REPORT BY DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (FINANCE)
REPORT NO: 496-2003

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To set out for members approval, a proposed programme of actions in order to eliminate the current backlog of work experienced by the Finance Department Revenues Division.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Recess Sub committee are asked to approve the programme of actions as set out in paragraph 7.2 of this report.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated cost of the proposed programme of actions is a one-off total of £279,000, and this sum can be met from an underspend in the Revenues Division 2002/03 Revenue Budget, which has been carried forward as part of the Council's General Fund balances.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

None

5 EQUALITIES ACTION IMPLICATIONS

None

6 BACKGROUND

6.1 At the 30 November 2002, the Revenue Division's workload was up to date, beyond that of the current weeks incoming mail. All new Housing and Council Tax Benefits were being dealt with within the statutory deadline of 14 days.

6.2 The Council's Council Tax and Benefit systems are processed using a suite of software programmes provided and maintained by the external software provider SX3. This software is used by approximately 50% of Scottish local authorities. In the summer of 2002, SX3 advised the Council that it could not maintain their Council Tax and Housing Benefit software due to changes in the Oracle language used to write the software. From August 2002, staff resource was being utilised for both the testing of the new system and staff training on how to use it. The system went live on 13 January 2003.

6.3 It was recognised by the Revenues Division, that the period when the old system was being taken down, and the I-World system being tested and implemented would cause a great deal of disruption and would create a backlog of work. Further, it was recognised that the period immediately after I world was implemented would be a period when the productivity of the Revenues Division would be lower than normal, until the staff became proficient with the new system and that this would exacerbate the backlog of work outstanding.

6.4 As at the 30 June 2003, the level of documents still to be processed in respect of Council Tax and Benefits was 35,000, equivalent to 7 weeks incoming mail.

7 PROGRAMME OF ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE BACKLOG

7.1 The Revenues Division Management Team has fully investigated a variety of options to eliminate the current backlog by 31 January 2004, at the latest. It is imperative that the current backlog is cleared by that date, prior to the Council's planned implementation of the Verification Framework.

7.2 The planned programme of actions is as follows

- Appoint CAPITA for a period up to 31 January 2004 to provide an off-site telephone enquiry service.
- Appoint CAPITA for a period up to 31 January 2004 to provide an off-site Council Tax and Benefits processing service. CAPITA will be given cases/documents over a telephone line to process, starting with the oldest part of the current backlog.
- Establish a Communications Group which will consider all matters relating to the elimination of the current backlog, including the performance of CAPITA.
- The Communications Group to include representatives of staff, supervisors, members of the Revenues Management Team and the Depute Chief Executive (Finance).
- Accounts staff who work overtime at the weekend will be allowed to park free in the Underground Garage or Tayside House Car Park.
- The Assistant Chief Executive (Management) to re-examine the previous work which was carried out on providing a financial incentive for Accounts staff working overtime.
- Liaise with SX3 to improve the operation and effectiveness of I-World to help improve the productivity of the staff.

7.3 It is felt that the above actions will eradicate the current backlog of work within Revenues Division Accounts Team by 31 January 2004 at the latest.

8 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive (Management) and Trade Unions have been consulted on the contents of this report.

David K Dorward
Depute Chief Executive (Finance)

Date: 14 July 2003