

Finance Portfolio Update

PFI

Outline business case

The PFI team at ODPM has now approved a final version of our business case. We are expecting it to be signed off by the Housing Minister in the next few days.

Once this happens the business case will be forwarded to Partnerships UK, who will evaluate it on behalf of the Treasury's Project Review Group (PRG).

We are still on track for the PRG meeting on Tuesday 21 March, so we should have a decision by the end of March. We are only allowed to have one representative, and the project board agreed that this should be Chris Trowell.

I will keep Cabinet informed about progress. Chris will update all Council members through the MIS.

Technical advisors

At the last project board meeting, we agreed to appoint two technical advisors. All the lead consultants are now in place.

Mott MacDonald will be our lead technical advisor. They will be responsible for developing the specification and evaluating the technical aspects of bids.

Quattro Design Architects will be our design advisor. They will be responsible for submitting planning applications for the Council's sites and evaluating the design aspects of bids.

Council owned sites

Cabinet members should be aware that a special Council meeting has been arranged for Wednesday 22 March to consider the proposed list of Council owned development sites.

All Council members will be consulted about the sites at the end of this month (February).

Further information

For any further information about the scheme, please contact Chris Trowell, who is the Council's project manager.

Revenues and Benefits

Bailiff Services

WWDC has been working in partnership with Kennet DC for the collection of unpaid Council tax and Non Domestic Rates. Since the partnership started in January 2005 £270,000 unpaid Council tax and NNDR has been collected.

WWDC and Kennet DC have jointly completed the tendering for a new bailiff service contract. Ross and Roberts were successful in winning the contract that will run for 3 years from 1 April 2006. Work on the contract has started and legal services will be invited to formalise that at the earliest date.

The tendering has highlighted some additional work that Ross and Roberts can deliver in partnership with the Council's, such as recovery of overpaid Housing and Council Tax benefit and sending text messages to customers to remind them that payment is due.

Modernising payments

WWDC is now operating paperless DD. That means when a customer telephones to ask if they can pay by DD the details can be taken over the telephone rather than posting out a DD mandate and asking the customer to complete and return that.

Members, Town and Parish Council's, The Library Service and various other partner organisations have received DD take-up posters for placing on notice boards in the district. We take you for you help with that.

The next stage of 'moderising payments' is to reduce the costly and wasteful production of voucher books. Many of our customers get booklets when pay by standing order or some other method that does not require a voucher.

We have reviewed the way the billing system is set up to include some additional payment codes, that will not result in automatic production of vouchers for Council Tax and NNDR customers. The new payment codes are effective from 1 April 2006 and following the issue of the initial annual bills for the year 2006/07 we will be promoting the use of Direct Debit and actively moving customers from the voucher payment code to the non voucher payment code.

Initial indications strongly suggest that NNDR customers have bank accounts so we will not be issuing vouchers to NNDR customers after the initail billing run for 2006/07.

During 2006/07 Council Tax customers will be moved to the new payment code where ever possible. It is thought that by February 2007 (billing time for the year 2007/08) there will be many fewer customers requiring voucher books. The production and posting costs saved will help with the budget setting processing in future years.

Server failure.

On Thursday 2 February 2006 the server supporting the Academy applications for Council tax, NNDR and Benefits failed. This major failure of hardware resulted in the loss of two full days lost processing. Vivista instigated the Disaster Recovery Plan on Thursday and by late Friday we were able to start balancing the system controls. Revenues and Benefits staff worked on Saturday to ensure cash was posted and we could regain some of the time lost on Thursday and Friday. However the BVPI and Performance Measures profiles for Council tax and NNDR collection and Benefits work all now reflect a shortfall against target. Staff will do their best to recover the lost time. The IT service Manager is looking at ways to ensure that potential systems failures are known at the earliest possible time so that total failure can be avoided.

Further information on any the above - please contact Shirley Sanchez.

Asset Management: Following the meeting of the Asset Management Group on 1 February 2006 a draft procedure for assessing sales and/or purchases of assets is to be drawn up. Asset condition surveys and maintenance requirements is to be commissioned.

Capital Programme:

The tenders for Kingsbury Square Hostel refurbishment have been returned and an order will be placed imminently. This is a large part of the 2005/6 capital programme and important to its successful delivery.

Costs for the extension of drainage and paths in Trowbridge cemetery have been received and the work will go ahead as soon as the capital is approved. Hopefully this will be at the February Council meeting as it is a variation to the current year capital programme.

Tenders are due back next week for car park resurfacing works. Work has been identified in King Street Melksham, Church Street Melksham and Church Street Trowbridge. The extent of the works will be tailored to the £30,000 budget.

Business Units:

Semington Turnpike has suffered an accumulation of old tyres, used oil and general waste. Kavanagh's have attempted to get the tenants to clear the debris but unsuccessfully. They have now written giving the tenants 14 days to clear up otherwise a contractor will be employed and the tenants recharged for the work.

Some leases, particularly at Ascot Court, have expired and the units re-let on increased rents