

Blackpool and Fylde Joint Committee

Date	1 October 2009
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Roger Small (Fylde) (Chairman) Ian Fowler (Blackpool) (Vice-Chairman) Albert Pounder (Fylde), Tony Williams (Blackpool).
Officers	Blackpool: Julian Kearsley, Marie McRoberts, Ann Bodis Fylde: Tracy Scholes, Allan Oldfield, Ian Curtis, Adrian Roberts

1. Appointment of chairman

Councillor Roger Small was elected as chairman of the committee.

2. Appointment of vice-chairman

Councillor Ian Fowler was elected as vice-chairman of the committee.

3. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

4. Overview of shared arrangements between Blackpool Council and Fylde Borough Council

Tracy Scholes (Director of Governance and Partnerships, Fylde BC) and Marie McRoberts (Head of the Shared Service) presented a report setting out the background to the joint revenues and benefits service and other services shared by Blackpool and Fylde. The report also contained detailed performance information for the joint service.

According to the report, Fylde revenues staff had co located at Westgate House October 2007 and transferred to Blackpool in April 2008. The restructure was completed August 2008 and would realise savings approximately £168,500 over 5yrs (after redundancy costs & pension strain).

Fylde benefits staff co located to Blackpool in August 2008 and transferred to Blackpool in October 2008. Although the service had been reorganised in April

2009, full and formal restructure was to be deferred until after new IT systems had been implemented.

The shared approach had resulted in a number of service improvements, including the following:

- Processes have been aligned between the two councils whilst still allowing for variances in policies. Best of both approach was used.
- Customer Services staff at Fylde can now input some council tax changes directly into Pericles whilst with the customer in the same way that Blackpool Customer First staff can.
- Post Office payment fees have been re-negotiated to bring Fylde charges into line with Blackpool. This should result in an annual saving of approximately £2,000 to Fylde.
- A benefits specialist is now based at Fylde Direct.
- Payments of benefit by BACS has been introduced for Fylde customers. This has resulted in a considerable reduction in administration for Fylde post staff.

The committee RESOLVED to note the range and scope of the joint arrangement between both councils to administer the revenues and benefits service.

5. Delegated powers previously held by Executive Manager (Finance)

Adrian Robinson (client officer, Fylde BC) presented a report which sought the delegation of a number of administrative functions presently exercised by the Chief Finance Officer of Fylde Borough Council to the Head of the Shared Service.

The committee RESOLVED to delegate the following Fylde Borough Council functions to the Head of Shared Service:

1. The determination and administration of applications in relation to council tax, covering discounts and exemptions (including discretionary decisions), together with disabled persons allowance and housing and council tax benefit
2. The agreement of rating assessments of property not owned or occupied by the council
3. The recovery of council tax and business rates
4. Refunds of overpayments
5. The write-off of debts up to £5,000 (council tax) and £10,000 (business rates) including cumulative debts for individual debtors
6. The determination of applications for discretionary housing payments in line with agreed budget limits

7. The determination of applications for mandatory rate relief in relation to business rates

8. Replacement of IT system for revenues and benefits

Julian Kearsley (Executive Director of Business Services, Blackpool Council) reported on the work presently being done to procure an IT system for revenues and benefits administration to replace the present Pericles system, which was being desupported by its providers.

Blackpool and Fylde were seeking to procure a replacement system using the accelerated restricted procedure under the relevant EU regulations. The licence to use the new system would be for seven years. The procurement was being run jointly with Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The joint procurement exercise would ensure that all the councils involved received the best value for money from the project. So far as Blackpool and Fylde were concerned, the system would be jointly licensed, but Fylde would be given the right to continue to use the system beyond the lifetime of the current joint arrangement if it was terminated before the end of the licence period.

Tender invitations would go out to the three suppliers who had responded to the prior information notice within the next week. Mr Kearsley expected that the contract would be awarded by 11 December. Implementation could be expected to be begun in May, with Fylde being first.

Mr Kearsley explained that some downtime and consequent disruption to the joint service would be inevitable as a result of the implementation of the new system. Careful project planning and management would keep this to a minimum.

After detailed discussion of the implications and practicalities of the tendering exercise and implementation of the new system, member RESOLVED to note the progress being made on the replacement of the IT system and to seek an update report at the next meeting of the Joint Committee, which it was agreed would be held in January, at Blackpool Council.