

**Subject: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE**

**Meeting: Individual Cabinet Member decision**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

**Divisions/Wards Affected: All**

**1. PURPOSE:**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Request to increase the core establishment of the Revenues Shared Service by 2 FTE officers to address workload issues.
- Request to increase the establishment of the Revenues Shared Service by 2 FTE officers to administer council tax premiums.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To agree to increase the core establishment of the Revenues Shared Service by 2 full time posts. The cost of which will initially be funded from reserves held by the Shared Service (TCBC). From 2025/26 onwards funding will be managed as part of the overall funding envelope for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.
- 2.2 To agree to increase the establishment of the Revenues Shared Service by 2 full time posts to administer council tax premiums for the County. The cost of which will be funded from the Shared Service Reserve (TCBC) and the Council Tax Premium Reserve (MCC)

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

**3.1 Background**

- 3.1 The Shared Revenues Service was established in December 2019 following the successful move to a Shared Benefits Service in 2012. Resources that moved across at the time reflected established caseloads and working patterns. Recent pressures resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis have identified the need for additional resources to ensure the service maintains acceptable response times and completes key tasks, such as the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), which the service currently struggle to resource.
- 3.2 Council also decided on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to introduce council tax premiums for both long term empty properties and second homes in the County from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. This brings with it extra workload, with the service already seeing an increase in contacts and

requests for discretion due to personal circumstances. This reflects evidence provided by other councils that have already introduced council tax premiums, all of which have needed to employ additional resources to administer the premiums and to deal with queries and appeals.

- 3.3 The request for extra resources comes at a time when Monmouthshire County Council have a vacancy freeze in place. The request has therefore been considered against the criteria the council has set for recruiting to vacant posts. The service is categorised as a priority 2 service and generates significant income to the council by way of council tax collection. It is therefore considered appropriate to proceed with the request for additional resources for the Shared Service.

## **8. OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

- 8.1 The following options were considered:

1. Do nothing and continue with the current level of resources. Customers would continue to see a slow response time to queries, which potentially leads to arrears building up, ultimately affecting the cashflow of the authority. The current position is having a negative impact on the workforce, with officers regularly working overtime and failing to meet targets. There is also a level of concern from Monmouthshire ratepayers around the introduction of council tax premiums, which is likely to be exasperated by slow response times.
2. Allocate additional resources to the Shared Service to address both the current demand issues and the specific additional demand expected from the introduction of council tax premiums. This is the preferred option.

## **9. EVALUATION CRITERIA**

- Comparison to other comparable Welsh Councils revenues teams identified that the current shared service arrangement is under resourced (see Appendix One for details).
- Evidence from councils in Wales that have already introduced council tax premiums.

## **10. REASONS**

- 10.1 To request additional resources for the Shared Service to help address current and future demand pressures.

## **11. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The proposal is to introduce 4 new full time posts to the Shared Service at a grade 5, SCP 15. Each post will cost £38,922 a year inclusive of oncosts, giving a total cost for the 4 posts of £155,688 per annum. The intention is to recruit to these posts as soon as possible. Therefore estimated costs for the remainder of 2023/24 (February 2024 to March 2024) are £24,368.

- 11.2 It is proposed that the posts are funded as follows:

- **2 posts to address current workload pressures - £12,184 in 2023/24 and £77,844 in 2024/25.** The Shared Service currently hold reserves of £106,065. It is proposed that these reserves are used to fund costs incurred for the remainder of 2023/24 and for the 2024/25 financial year. Thereafter, costs will be managed as part of the wider funding envelope of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service.

Benefits demand and caseload is falling as the roll out of Universal Credit continues. Therefore any Benefit posts that become vacant will be reviewed and where appropriate resources will be redeployed to Revenues. Torfaen CBC, as host authority, do not expect to request an increase in Monmouthshire's overall contribution to the Shared Service because of these new posts.

- **2 posts to manage council tax premiums - £12,184 in 2023/24 and £77,844 in 2024/25.** It is proposed that these posts are funded from revenue generated from the premiums, with expenditure built into the 2024/25 budget. Any costs incurred in 2023/24 ahead of the introduction of premiums will initially be funded from the Shared Service reserve, which will then be replenished in 2024/25 from council tax premium income collected.

**12. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)**

- 12.1 The proposal ensures that this statutory service continues to operate as effectively as possible. There are no corporate parenting or safeguarding implications associated with the proposal.

**13. CONSULTEES:**

- Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer for Resources
- Head of Finance
- Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Board
- Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnership

**14. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Appendix One: Report from the Head of the Shared Revenues & Benefits Service

**15. AUTHORS:**

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**16. CONTACT DETAILS:**

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