

30th November 2023

REPORT TO THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE (RESOURCES)

STAFFING REPORT – REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE

Report Submitted and Written by: Deb Smith, Head of Revenues & Benefits

Key messages

To report on the changes to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service establishment as follows:

- Increase the establishment by 2 grade 5 officers, to allow for the administration of Premiums in Monmouthshire County Council (MCC). To be funded initially from the Shared Service reserve. This will be replenished in 2024/2025 from premiums income. From 2024/25 MCC will pay for the 2 officers through an uplift in core funding.
- Increase the core establishment by 2 grade 5 officers, to address the increase in workload and contacts as a result of returning to more regular recovery following the covid pandemic and the implications of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Funding to be initially from the Shared Service reserve and into the medium term through a review of existing establishment and natural wastage.

1. Area Affected

1.1 County Borough Wide.

2. Purpose of Report

2.1 To report on the proposed increase in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Services establishment, to allow for the administration of Premiums for Monmouthshire County Council, and a return to regular recovery of outstanding debts following the covid pandemic.

3 Background

3.1 In March 2023 Monmouthshire County Council made a determination to introduce a premium charge from 1 April 2024. The premium charge was in relation to Second Homes and Long-Term Empty Properties.

3.2 There are approximately 200 second homes and 485 long term empty properties, that will be subject to a premium charge in April 2024. In preparation for the implementation of premiums, work has commenced on notifying those that appear to be subject to the charge and complete a housekeeping exercise. This exercise is already seeing an increase in contact and the commencement of appeals asking for discretion to be exercised. This is an additional and unanticipated burden on the Shared Revenues Team. This will impact on the current resources, which are already stretched.

3.3 During the covid pandemic recovery was held. There was only one court hearing in 2020/2021 and that court was subject to a maximum number of cases of 1000 or less. The number of hearings in previous years had been in the region of 10 to 11

courts and there was no case limitation. In the years following the pandemic the hearings remained under some restrictions as detailed below:

- 2020/2021 – 1 hearing limited to 1000 cases per hearing
- 2021/2022 – 4 hearings limited to 1000 cases per hearing
- 2022/2023 – 2 hearings limited to 1000 cases per hearing
- 2023/2024 – 4 hearings to date, limited to 2000 cases per hearing

The return to more regular recovery in the current climate has seen an increase in contacts and the need for more detailed assistance and negotiation with residents. We have also seen an increase in avoidance.

4. Issues / findings

- 4.1 Monmouthshire County Council acknowledges the need for additional resources to administer premiums. From discussions with other authorities who have already implemented premiums, it appears appropriate to employ 2 additional members of staff. One officer to assist with the increased administrative work in the team and a visiting officer to allow for additional visits.
- 4.2 Coming out of the pandemic, the holding of recovery and now the cost of living crisis, has resulted in more people/business struggling to make payment and manage their accounts.

Customer contacts and consequent workloads have increased and the contact is more difficult. Vulnerability and Freedom Fighters are becoming more prevalent in both authorities.

Despite utilisation of overtime we have been struggling to reduce the outstanding work in the trays. The backlog has been consistently at approx. 7-8 week, which is not acceptable. Completion of reviews and individualised recovery has also been held to allow for concentration of work in the daily trays.

Holding reviews and individual recovery can result in a loss of income and result in complaints.

4.3

In order to consider the appropriateness of our current establishment 2 other authorities have been contacted to allow for us to benchmark against them.

Authority A was of similar demographics and deprivation as Torfaen. Authority B is classed as an optimum authority. The result of the benchmark is detailed below:

Authority	Current FTE	CTAX Props	NDR Props	Total Props	Props to FTE	Empty	SH
Auth A	16.85	33,035	2350	35,385	2100.00	745	0
Auth B	20.01	71015	5674	76,689	3832.53	866	269
TCBC		43783	3091			340	8
MCC	19.72	43183	3505	93562	4744.52	608	184
Using Auth B FTE to props the shared service needs					24.41		

This supports the need for a total of 4 extra officers as follows.

- Increase the establishment by 2 grade 5 officers, to allow for the administration of Premiums in Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) to be funded initially from the Shared Service reserve. This will be replenished in 2024/2025 from premiums income. From 2024/25 MCC will pay for the 2 officers through an uplift in core funding.
- Increase the core establishment by 2 grade 5 officers, to address the increase in workload and contacts as a result of returning to more regular recovery following the covid pandemic and the implications of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Funding to be initially from the Shared Service reserve and into the medium term through a review of existing establishment and natural wastage, particularly as the continued move to Universal Credit will impact on demand.

A detailed outline of how the changes will be addressed and the financial implications is given below.

- 4.4 Alongside of the above proposed changes a fundamental review of work processes is taking place with the support of the Digital Team to identify the opportunity for efficiencies and changes.

5 **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The Shared Services is currently carrying reserves of £106,065 which will be used to fund the appointments in the first instance as follows:

	Grade from 1.02.24	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total
Revenues Officer	Grade 5 SCP 15	£6,092.17	£38,922	£45,014.17
Revenues Officer	Grade 5 SCP 15	£6,092.17	£38,922	£45,014.17
Revenues Officer	Grade 5 SCP 15	£6,092.17	MCC to fund	£6,092.17
Visiting Officer	Grade 5 SCP 15	£6,092.17	MCC to fund	£6,092.17
				£102,212.68

If the financial position of the shared service allows the opportunity will be taken to increase the level of reserve at the year end.

- 5.2 Monmouthshire County Council will fund 2 officers from 2024/2025 to allow for the administration of premium's going forward.
- 5.3 The cost of the 2 additional core revenues officers from 2025/2026 will be funded going forward through a review of existing establishment and natural wastage, particularly as the continued move to Universal Credit will impact on demand.

6 Actions to be taken following decision

6.1 Job Evaluation of the posts are not necessary as we already have Revenues Officers and Visiting Officers posts in place.

6.2 The jobs will be advertised to allow for shortlists and interviews to commence.

7. Recommendations

7.1 To approve the changes to the establishment and funding as outlined in this report.

7.2 Any in year underspend will be used to top up the Shared Services Reserves at end of year

Appendices	Revenues & Benefits Structure
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Background Papers	None
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For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone: <i>Deb Smith, Head of Revenues &, Benefits Shared Service 01495 742359</i>
