

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 25 September 2018

Subject: Finance

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G. Mohindra

Recommending: That the report of the Finance Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

At the last Council meeting the accounts were approved but subject to any last minute adjustments required to satisfy the audit. There were not any further adjustments requested however due to an outstanding query the opinion on the accounts was not issued until 1st August a day after the deadline. It has since come to light that a number of authorities across the country did not meet the deadline for various reasons and I think this does demonstrate how tight this deadline is and my concern going forward remains that the process could compromise accuracy as a result of rushing the accounts to meet the deadline.

The new eight directorate structure is now in place and the 2018/19 General Fund budget will need to be restructured into this new format which will require some initial set up work. It will be inevitable that some assumptions will need to be made about where some budgets ultimately reside but clearly this won't affect the totality of the budget.

Benefits

The last couple of months have been a quiet period for welfare reform so I can take this opportunity to remind Members of the forthcoming changes. From 5 December 2018, the whole of the District will be in what is known as a 'Full Service Universal Credit' area. This means that anyone of working age needing help with their rent and who is not already receiving Housing Benefit, will need to apply for Universal Credit instead of Housing Benefit. There are a few exceptions who will still claim Housing Benefit and of course, it is important not to forget that all people of pension age will still claim Housing Benefit. However, everyone of working age and pension age will still need to apply to the Council for help with their Council Tax payments.

Revenues

The authorities within Essex are currently negotiating a bid for a pilot for 75% Local Business Rates Retention for 2019/20. This would be a one year pilot ahead of the formal introduction of 75% local retention in 2020/21. The bid if successful could provide £19m extra funding for projects across the County in 2019/20. The terms of the distribution of the funds and projects that are included would form part of subsequent negotiations through the joint Council Leader/Chief Executive forum.