

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**20 MAY 2015****COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES****New auditor for 2015/16**

KPMG have been appointed as the County Council's new External Auditor from the current financial year 2015/16 and also for 2016/17. The appointment was made by the Audit Commission before they closed down at the end of March and the Government have said that they will make a decision this summer about whether to extend the contracts from 2017 to 2020. Arrangements for local authorities to appoint their own auditor will be announced by the Government once the audit contracts have ended. Deloitte, our previous Auditor will be auditing the County Council's accounts for 2014/15 and have already commenced the early part of this process.

Implementation of new financial systems

On 7 April 2015 the Council implemented an update of its Oracle financial system. This new system includes much greater functionality which will, in time, provide greater support to the range of budget managers. The work to date has taken place over the last 2 years but staff from Finance, Technology & Change and Business Support have worked particularly hard over the last few months (including the Easter bank holiday weekend) to prepare the way for the new system. Much more work is required to resolve some technical issues and to prepare the way for changes to ways of working in line with the 2020 Finance Programme.

Budget Outturn for 2014/15

Work is currently underway to pull together the financial outturn for 2014/15. It has been reported throughout the year that the Council was on track to deliver some savings ahead of schedule and that is still expected to be the case. The final position will be reported to the Executive on 16 June as part of the quarterly performance report. Though it is not expected to be much different to the Q3 position reported to Executive in February.

Better Together Finance Approach

I am pleased that our work 'Better Together' collaboration with Selby District Council is picking up pace with the recent secondment of Selby's finance team over to North Yorkshire. The trial that is currently underway will provide the opportunity to consider how staff, system and information resources can be shared across the two organisations for the benefit of our customers. Over the coming year we will work closely to explore integrated financial services, to create resilience and capacity and to deliver sustainable savings for both Councils.

Community covenant grants

The County Council is the accountable body for organisations in North Yorkshire applying to the Military of Defence community covenant grants programme. This programme aims to support projects that strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the armed forces community (serving personnel, veterans and their families) and the wider community in which they live.

Over £1.75m was awarded by the MoD to projects in North Yorkshire during 2012/15 through 53 grants ranging in size from £1k to £169k, out of the national budget of £30m.

Recipients included playgroups, family support, schools, sports clubs, village halls, arts projects, youth groups and an oral history project. A full list of grants is online at www.nypartnerships.org.uk/ccgrant.

The current grants programme has now ended. A new programme is expected to be launched later in 2015 and information about how to apply will be circulated when it is available.

Property

As Members will be aware the Council's current contract with Jacobs will end on 31 March 2016. The Executive approved a revised strategy for the future arrangements for the management of property in July 2015 since when work has been undertaken on the procurement of consultancy support for estates and project management. It is intended that invitations to tender will be issued in early June to those who were successful in the recent pre-qualification exercise, that their tender submissions will be evaluated over the course of the summer period and those successful announced during October. Executive Members continue to receive regular updates in respect of the progress that is being made with the exercise.

Work continues to be undertaken in respect of the rationalisation of the County Council's property portfolio as part of the 2020 North Yorkshire Programme. It is intended that this programme will result in a reduction in the Council's property related expenditure through a reduction in the amount of property utilised in service delivery and the implementation of new management arrangements.

CARL LES