

EXECUTIVE

DATE: 9TH MARCH 2009

SUBJECT: REFERENCE FROM PERFORMANCE, RESOURCES AND ASSETS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – MAKING IT EASIER TO PAY LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE (HEAD OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY)

CONTACT OFFICER: DEBORAH GARNER 546669

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	✓	STAFFING
EQUALITIES	✓	COMMUNITY SAFETY
FINANCIAL	✓	RISKS

OTHER

CONSULTATIONS:

COUNCILLORS CONSULTED	SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ✓ CONSULTED
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STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED	OTHER
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WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

LEAD EXECUTIVE MEMBER(S): COUNCILLOR HARRIS

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee advises the Executive that with regard to Making It Easier To Pay Luton Borough Council:
 - It welcomed the availability of a wider range of places and methods for people to pay their Council bills.
 - That people most at risk would not be put off using their credit card by the introduction of the proposed charge.
 - Their concerns that the charge for using credit cards to pay council bills is likely to affect those not able to pay by any other method.
 - Council literature and advice should be clear and honest, with any charges being clearly identified to the customer

- That some people were struggling to pay their council tax in the current credit climate, imposing a charge for paying by credit card was not going to help them.

REPORT

2. At their meeting held on the 26th February the Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Luton Excellence - Change Leader on Making it Easier to Pay Luton Borough Council.
3. Members of the Committee expressed the following comments and concerns:
 - Welcome availability of a wider range of places and methods for people to pay their Council bills.
 - People most at risk will not be put off using their credit card by the introduction of the proposed charge.
 - Concerned that the charge for using credit cards to pay council bills is likely to affect those not able to pay by any other method.
 - Council literature and advice should be clear and honest, with any charges being clearly identified to the customer
 - Some people area struggling to pay their council tax in the current credit climate, imposing a charge for paying by credit card is not going to help them.
4. The Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee then resolved:

"That Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee advises the Executive that with regard to Making It Easier To Pay Luton Borough Council:

 - It welcomed the availability of a wider range of places and methods for people to pay their Council bills.
 - That people most at risk would not be put off using their credit card by the introduction of the proposed charge.
 - Their concerns that the charge for using credit cards to pay council bills is likely to affect those not able to pay by any other method.
 - Council literature and advice should be clear and honest, with any charges being clearly identified to the customer
 - That some people were struggling to pay their council tax in the current credit climate, imposing a charge for paying by credit card was not going to help them."

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no Legal implications to this report.

EQUALITIES COHESION AND INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

6. An initial Equalities Impact Analysis (EIA) has been undertaken, although some further activities relating to the Disability Advisory & Access Forum (DAAF) has been re-scheduled following the snow that caused the DAAF meeting to be cancelled and a final EIA will be produced. The current EIA

methodology includes consideration of cohesion and inclusion implications. The initial EIA concluded that no group will be negatively affected by the full implementation of the proposed changes.

7. The project recognises the concerns expressed by Scrutiny Committee but also identifies actions to be taken to mitigate the effects, for example the project has, in conjunction with the social inclusion team, produced a new debt advice leaflet to assist citizens in accessing free and impartial debt advice. The project intends to take further steps to ensure, particularly in the light of the current recession, that there are no adverse effects, in particular to those with lower incomes and/or on benefits and the proposal includes actions to do so. These include but are not limited to; more opening hours to pay and more locations, greater channels to pay for services across the council, and additional floorwalkers in the cash desk area to explain and help customers to gain advice around making payments. These implications have been agreed with the Performance Review Manager (CCS) on 5th March 2009.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. The Council at its meeting on 18th February 2009 approved, as part of its overall Budget for 2009/10 a savings proposal of £60,000 in relation to this project, which included an estimate of the amount derived from the charge for the use of credit cards. Any reversal of policy in this respect would affect the achievability of that saving. These implications were agreed by the Finance and Airport Client Manager on 4th March 2009.

OPTIONS

9. The Executive can choose to accept, note or modify the recommendations of the Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

Committee Report Ref: PR&AS/2B/09/9
Minute No: PR&AS/9/09