

ROSC – Scrutiny sub-committee

17 October 2016

In Attendance:

A Chesterman
G Michaelides
N Pace
S Roberts

S Hulks
T Neill
F Cantel

TN expressed some concern that the sub-committee had moved away from the original scope of the review.

The Chairman replied that the original request for the review had been raised following an Audit meeting where questions had been posed as to how often Enforcement Agents were used and requesting some information on the debt collection process. The response had been reported at the meeting of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it had suggested that there were few instances of Enforcement Agents being used.

GM commented that the sub-committee was looking at the process as they wished to ensure that the system was fair, ethical and showed sensitivity whilst maintaining a high collection rate.

NP commented that Members had felt concerned when the instances of the use of Enforcement Agents had been initially reported as very low but had actually been shown to be in excess of 7000 times.

SR commented that the draft recommendation in the report was that consideration should be given to the possibility of bringing the service in-house.

TN asked whether answers had been provided to Members' questions. Members replied that they had hoped to be able to drill down on the totals provided so that they could see what the impact could be on an individual and how many individuals might owe a small amount of arrears but end up with a big debt due to charges and fees being added to the arrears. FC said that it was difficult to provide information for individuals.

FC pointed out that the Enforcement Agent Industry had become regulated two years ago at which time fixed fees were introduced and many of the issues regarding the use of Enforcement Agents had been addressed.

Occasionally fees were waived if an individual responded to contact and made efforts to pay their arrears.

Members requested additional information for the next meeting, as follows:

- Number of cases
- Overall debt
- Total fees charged
- Amount collected
- Amount owed

- Was the current system ethical/fair?
- Could consideration be given to the use of another system?

It was noted that efforts were made not to send arrears of less than £50 for enforcement.

It was also noted that there was no cost to the Council for the use of Enforcement Agents if a debtor absconded and the debt wasn't collected.

Members were advised that the issue of a Liability Order was not reported anywhere and did not therefore show in the client's records.

Sometimes an Attachment of Earnings Order would be issued with which an employer was obliged to comply. This would instruct the employer to deduct a sum from the employee's wages. A £1 admin fee could be levied on the employee by the employer for this.