

4 Year Financial Strategy- Customer and Business Support Services

Introduction

1. The Directorate delivers a range of professional support (finance, legal, HR), the Councils ICT infrastructure, a wide range of customer services (customer centre, benefits,) collects income (council tax, NNDR, service related issues e.g. adult care) and manages a range of assets/facilities management.
2. The majority of services are non statutory, though there are some functions such as production of the accounts, production of a budget which are statutory responsibilities. In addition both the Chief finance officer, and the monitoring officer have statutory roles, and both require adequate resources to conduct those roles. The Chief Finance officer role has statutory powers to ask Council to provide resources sufficient to deliver the role. There are clearly also functions such as benefits, collection of council tax/NNDR which are also statutory activities.

Approach to Protecting Priority Areas

3. All areas of the Directorate have been reviewed, and all areas will contribute to savings. Certain areas have been protected wherever possible and this includes;
 - In legal services, work relating to childcare will be protected from any significant savings
 - In financial procedures work relating to financial assessments in relation to vulnerable adults will be protected
 - Core statutory services such a financial accounts, and general legal work will be protected, though there will be efficiencies in these areas over the next four years
 - Information Governance e.g. FOI's, Data Management, has been protected recognising the need for this work to be maintained across the whole Council

- In Customer services, whilst there are significant savings the service has achieved in recent years. Savings going forward will be deferred to later years, with the expectation that work around the new website, and customer system will allow for efficiencies without impacting on service levels.

Medium Term Efficiencies and Savings

4. As the main cost within the Directorate is staffing, a large proportion of savings will be delivered through restructures within services. This applies across most areas of activity of the Directorate. This will have varying issues and implications, but will inevitably result in fewer staff being employed and a need to consider how service delivery can be prioritised with a view to managing staffing reductions. Clearly in many respects the need for support services is actually increased during a period of significant change/transformation. There may be a need to consider the provision of specialist support work on major projects purely on a chargeable basis.
5. As the Council over the next four years will change in terms of shape and size, there will be opportunities to generate additional income through West Offices, renting space out to further external organisations. There may also be a need to push further on flexible/home working across all areas to release office space which can also contribute to income targets.
6. Maximising our total Asset Portfolio – opportunities will be reviewed over the 4 years to rationalise assets, generate additional income, and achieve additional capital receipts (which could in turn reduce debt). This will require quite a radical review of assets, and consideration of opportunities to work with the private sector, and/or to establish a wholly owned development company.

Decisions Required

7. The decisions that are set out in the 16/17 savings provide the basis for moving forward over the next four years. There will be a need to consider some specific reports over the coming months, for example around the potential to establish a Development company.

Risks and Impact Assessment

8. Impact on support services (finance, legal, ICT HR) during a period of significant transformation and change when Council services will need high degree of support staff – this is an inevitable risk in terms of being able to support the range of projects the Council may embark upon. A flexible approach to resourcing may be needed, with additional resource (financed by the specific project) being brought in at appropriate times.
9. Release of West offices space does not happen as required – this will require careful monitoring, and the release of space not just from general reductions in staffing, but through more radical approaches to flexible working.
10. Asset Portfolio does not release revenue/capital receipts – early consideration of a development company is required, and some additional external resource may be needed to achieve radical review of commercial portfolio.