

Finance & Efficiency Oct 2016

Priorities of the Portfolio

- Service outcomes for the community
- Living within our means
- Working with others to achieve more

Performance

The council continues to respond to reductions in grant funding. In 2016 the Council's overall budget spending will have reduced by 15.8% since 2010 due to central government austerity measures. Over the next four years the government has indicated a level of central funding that will require a further 11.7% reduction in the budget from that in 2016.

The budget stabilisation strategy and service reviews identified are aimed at closing the remaining budget deficit over the 3 year period and form part of the council's efficiency plan required by government.

The Council is responsible for collecting over £100 million in Council Tax and £65 million in non-domestic rates. In year collection rates for council tax (98.79% at year-end) and non-domestic rates (99.26% at year-end). The council also administers Housing Benefit of over £40 million and processes new claims (14 days) and changes in circumstances (4 days) above the county and national average.

The Council continues to review its asset holdings. The former Cussens Day Centre site was sold at auction for £330,000 and work is well advanced to bring the vacant site (Unit 8) at Hardley Industrial Estate back into occupation which will secure new employment opportunities for the area. Part of the site has been sold subject to contract and the remainder is being actively marketed.

A review of the delivery model for procurement was undertaken during the year resulting in fundamental changes to the service and the implementation of a new procurement model for the Council which will result in additional savings.

The use of technology continues to be developed with the introduction of phase 1 of the contractor system going live in February 2016 enabling a more responsive approach to tenant repair requests and attendance. 83% of all requests have been dealt with within their priority at an average repair cost of £106.83 and a customer satisfaction rating of 97.9%. The new centre point software was also implemented to support more flexible working.

Challenges

Any future plan must address the major funding challenge.

The delivery plan has identified a number of service reviews that each portfolio holder will be reviewing in key areas of budget spend and activity with the emphasis on reducing budget expenditure. The focus

will remain on ensuring key frontline services to the community are prioritised (living within our means and working with others to achieve more).

Other challenges include the management and delivery of several welfare reforms and the impact on collection and administration. This includes Universal Credit, the Benefits Cap, and our Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Maintaining current service delivery with reduced funding and resources will be a challenge. Monitoring the impact of business rates growth, where opportunities are particularly limited in the New Forest, will need to be monitored.

Corporate Requirements

- Undertake reviews and key activities as identified in the corporate plan (delivery plan) to improve services for our customers and meet the budget shortfall, including an increased focus on collaborative working.

Key Activities

- Delivery of required savings to meet funding shortfall through the council's efficiency plan and medium term financial plan
- Customer services review in response to customer increasing expectations for digital delivery and to reduce demand and enhance the customer experience through process redesign
- Digital services review to ensure the right technology is available to support corporate and service objectives underpinned by a new ICT strategy
- Building works review to ensure the existing model of delivery maximises outcomes for the council and customers, including optimising revenue potential and ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the service
- Continue to prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit and deliver the Benefits Cap and related welfare reforms to Housing Benefit, including working with those affected and partner organisations
- Delivery of the 2017 Business Rate revaluation and transitional relief scheme and extension of the local rate retention scheme
- Automate direct debit collection for Sundry Debtors and implement E-billing for Business Rate customers
- Fully implement new procurement model

Supporting Information

In support of this plan the following documents are available:

- 1) The Portfolio's Performance Scorecard
- 2) Summary of Net Portfolio Spend