

Finance & Efficiency Oct 2017

Priorities of the Portfolio

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

Performance

The Portfolio, including General Purposes and Licensing, is the Council's second largest in net expenditure, accounting for £42.08 (25.8%) of the £163.36 annual Band D Council Tax. The cost of the Portfolio reduced in 17/18 in comparison to 16/17 by £216k. The largest spend areas in the Portfolio relate to the Pension increase act, Corporate Management, Council Tax Collection and Members' Expenses.

The Council once again had to identify significant savings in setting the 2017/18 budget to help mitigate a £1.8m reduction in government determined funding in comparison to 2016/17. A further reduction in funding of £1.7m is expected in just 2 years to 2019/20, whilst cost increases over the same period based on a 1% pay award are forecast at another £1.7m. The Council's future plans must address this major financial challenge and ensure the Council's strategic objectives are aligned to resources available.

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 were 99.10% at year-end, and non-domestic rates stood at 98.80% at year-end. The council also administers Housing Benefit of over £40 million and processes new claims (15 days) and changes in circumstances (4 days) above the county and national average. We helped 468 payments with Discretionary Housing Payments, and issued 92 food bank vouchers. Through our Digital Champion project we helped 150 people get online.

The Council continues to review its asset holdings. 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.

The maintenance of our housing assets through the building works team is under review to ensure the ongoing efficiency and effectiveness of this high value and high impact service area.

ICT's key priority is to protect and maintain front line services. This includes ensuring increased resilience and fixes on known issues are delivered, with anticipated technology problems mitigated.

The customer service review continues to identify opportunities to improve efficiency, and work is underway to capture and prioritise further business improvement activity.

Challenges

Any future plan must address the major funding challenge and this remains the highest risk for the portfolio.

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.

In addition, 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
- Delivery of the procurement and implementation phase of the customer services review in response to customers' increasing expectations for digital delivery, and to reduce demand and enhance the customer experience through process redesign. This includes website redevelopment
- Develop and undertake programme of business improvement activities including business process reengineering across the organisation
- Continue the digital services review to ensure the right technology is available to support corporate and service objectives underpinned by a new ICT strategy. Complete the restructure of ICT by creating a culture of Continual Improvement, initially through workflow and knowledge management.
- Continue the 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 implementing discretionary policies

Supporting Information

In support of this plan the following documents are available:

- 1) The Portfolio's Performance Scorecard

2) Summary of Net Portfolio Spend

