

SUPPORTING NARRATIVE FOR BUDGET PROPOSALS

FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES

Overview

The Finance and Corporate Services Department (FCS) includes Revenues and Benefit Services (including financial and cash transactions teams) and back office business support services: Corporate Facilities Management; Finance (incorporating Procurement Advice and Audit Teams); Information and Data Services; and Legal Services.

The vision for Finance and Corporate Services is to “make a positive difference everywhere we engage”; underpinning the department’s need to be efficient and effective in what we do.

In line with the Fairer Future promises, FCS endeavours to help the council to “manage every penny as carefully as local families look after their own household budgets”.

The savings proposed for the department of £3.434m (9.4%) are in the main focused on more efficient ways of working and improving value for money in line with the fairer future promise. The budget consultation exercise recognised the need for savings to be concentrated as a priority on the back office services and this is reflected by these proposals.

Revenues and Benefits

Savings of £700k consist of staff savings resulting from improved processes, and new ways of working within the housing benefits claims and overpayments teams and the cash office function. It is proposed to close the two remaining cash offices in March 2015 and to redirect their activities to post office and pay point locations across the borough but more importantly to transfer these payments to accessible, cheaper and more efficient cashless methods, especially direct debit.

Corporate Facilities Management

Savings of £535k arise mainly due to more efficient contracting arrangements and building facilities operations; programmed capital investment reducing the need for reactive maintenance and, in addition, £90k savings from restructuring of the division.

Finance

Service savings proposed of £953k include a £229k saving in external audit fees, with the remainder of the savings to be delivered by a restructure of the finance teams. This is consistent with the reducing size of the organisation and follows on from a series of smaller scale changes over the last four years.

Information and Data Services

Of the savings proposed of £617k; half are proposed to be delivered through reduced IT transaction costs as volumes fall (e.g. printing) and half through restructuring and the loss of a number of posts that are currently vacant.

Legal Services

Savings of £629k will met by an increase in property related income of £100k and back office staff restructure resulting from improved ways of working.

FCS Equalities Impact Summary

The department is committed to achieving the required level of savings to meet the budget challenges and to reflect closely on the findings of public consultation while remaining mindful of the critical nature of many of the services provided and the need to sustain these at minimum levels.

The impact of implementing these proposals will fall largely on staff as the majority of the FCS budget is staffing related expenditure. The management team is committed to assessing the impact on staff to ensure fairness and equality. As budget reductions are implemented the impact on staff will be considered in detail throughout the implementation of each proposal, which will be conducted in accordance with the council's reorganisation, redeployment and redundancy procedure. Detailed plans and consultation documents are already being prepared and trades unions are briefed regularly.