

PROTOCOL ON KEY DECISIONS

Definitions of key decisions

There are two types of key decision:

1. Those which are above a general financial threshold

Key decisions are those which result in the authority incurring expenditure or savings of £500,000 or more.

Examples include:

- disposal of any council property with a value of £500,000 or more
- taking by the council of any interest in land with a value of £500,000 or more
- the granting of any interest in land worth £500,000 or more
- applications for funding from any external body which if successful would require match funding of £500,000 or more, or require revenue commitment of £500,000 or more
- the award of a contract worth £500,000 or more in any one year.

2. Those which have a significant impact on communities

Key decisions are those which are likely to be significant in terms of their impact on communities and specifically in one ward or more.

Examples include:

- closure or significant changes to the provision of any council service, school or education facility
- where there is evidence of significant local opposition to any proposals.

In considering whether a decision is likely to be significant, the decision maker is to consider the strategic nature of the decision and whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the local amenity of the community or the quality of service provided to a significant number of people living or working in the locality affected.

In deciding whether a decision will have a significant impact on communities in one or more wards the following factors should be taken into account:

- the extent of the impact (i.e. how many people and wards will be affected)
- the likely views of those affected (i.e. is the decision likely to result in substantial public interest)
- whether the decision is likely to be a matter of political sensitivity
- where the decision may incur a significant social, economic or environmental risk
- where there is evidence of significant local opposition to any proposals

Where a decision is only likely to have a significant impact on a very small number of people in one ward, the decision maker should ensure those people are informed of the forthcoming decision in sufficient time to make an input into the decision making process. Ward councillors should also be

informed of the decision to be made. Officers should always be aware of the issues arising which might mean that a decision becomes a key one (for example, if input, even from a small number of those likely to be affected points to the decision being one which will have a much greater impact than was first apparent).

3. Decisions which should always be treated as key decisions

In addition there are other decisions which are deemed to be key decisions because of their significance and will be included in the forward plan. These are specifically:

- the setting of fees and charges
- the granting or withdrawing financial support to any external community or voluntary organisation in excess of £10,000 (this would not apply to those organisations from which the council commissions services)
- the writing off any bad debt in excess of £50,000 per case
- the disposal of any council property for less than best consideration
- the exercise of the council's compulsory purchase order powers
- the consideration of an inspection or reports by the Social Services Inspectorate or Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), public interest reports or advisory notices from local auditors, and the council's response to any such report
- the strategic procurement strategy approval decisions (Gateway 1 reports)
- reports on corporate budget monitoring and performance
- the pre-procurement strategic assessment approval decisions in respect of services over £10,000,000 or for other strategically important contracts where requested by the relevant cabinet member (Gateway 0 reports).

4. Guidance on determining if a decision is key or not

Where there is any doubt as to the financial value or the significance of the decision, it should be deemed to be a key decision and included in the forward plan.