

Notes of Corporate & Finance O&S Committee Task and Finish Group Meeting

Implications of Savings

26 July

Committee Rooms 3&4, The Council House, 11am

Present:

Members: Councillors Deidre Alden, Albert Bore (Chair), Shabrana Hussain, Katherine Iroh, Kerry Jenkins, Ewan Mackey, Lee Marsham, Kath Scott, Paul Tilsley, Alex Yip

Attendees: Richard Brooks, Director of Strategy, Equalities & Partnerships; Sheraz Yaqub, Director, Tim Savill, Assistant Director-Revenue, Benefits and Rents; Jonathan Woodward, Head of Revenue.

Apologies: Councillors Fred Grindrod, Jamie Tennant.

It was noted that Cllr McCarthy, Cabinet Member for Finance had given her apologies for the meeting.

Savings Number	Saving Description	Key Issue / Comments on Implications of Savings	Recommendations
Digital and Customer Services			
217	Customer Contact consolidation Saving Target: 2024/25: 0 2025/26: 0.219	This saving is in the discovery and mapping stage Bringing into the contact centre will demonstrate its true value. Accounts payable and Adult Client Financial Services are on track. Work with Bereavement and Registrars has been slower. It was noted that Adult and Children's Services already have a front door services though the Contact Centre.	No recommendation

		The Contact Centre does not provide specialist advice. The work to implement the saving is looking at the end to end process.	
103	Voice Automation within Contact Centre Services Savings Target: 2024/25:1.490 2025/26: 1.690	Financial savings are being met and implemented. Interaction with the Voice Automation (VA) system is the first option available for customers and is available 24/7 and most queries resolved successfully. This is allowing staff to focus on other tasks and more complex enquiries. Staff are still available for customers requiring further input and specific queries. The Voice Activated systems allows the Council to get a greater insight into customer service and interaction and reflect our service. The abandonment rate of Voice Activated call is not monitored. The fail rate is monitored which records the calls that are put through to an officer to resolve. Members were concerned about the risk of vulnerable people abandoning call being dealt with by the Voice Activation service before getting support from officers available.	It is recommended that the abandonment rate of call received by the Contact Centre Voice Services is recorded and monitored in addition to the call failure rate.
Early Intervention and Prevention			
221	More efficient use of BCC Operational Estate – Resident Facing Assets Savings Target: 2024/25: 0	The Section 151 Officer and Medium Term Financial Plan update set out this saving will not be delivered in current form. The Committee was therefore unable to review the implications of the saving.	No recommendation

	2025/26: 2.000		
Revenues and Benefits			
10	<p>Increased tax collection - Additional Recovery Team</p> <p>Saving Target: 2024/25 3.840 2025/26: 3.840</p>	<p>Staff recruited are now in place. External training that supplemented the in-house training for these staff has also been secured. Debt collection training is also scheduled.</p> <p>As of end of June £350k has been additionally collected through chasing older and bad debt.</p> <p>Reminders and final reminders are statutory documents and are limited on the amount of information that can be shared on these however translation information is available on the back of these letters. Procurement of a new provider to send SMS and digital reminders to residents is being considered. Language and literacy barriers should be identified before using enforcement agents.</p>	No recommendation
4	<p>Insource Enforcement work</p> <p>Savings Target: 2024/25: 1.098 2025/26: 1.098</p>	<p>Resetting of Oracle has caused some challenges. The work to bring the service in house will be completed by early November 24. The impact on savings for this year and mitigations are being considered.</p> <p>The in house service will have more autonomy on charges and can profile data of customer to inform any action taken. Action will be dependent on individual circumstances and using the most appropriate method for recovery. The current service provider will still need to be retained for those cases outside the city.</p>	No recommendation

		<p>It was confirmed that the Council has changed its approach to pursue payment from those that can afford to pay. However, for those who are classed as vulnerable and need of support, the approach remains unchanged. Any debts that are written off are approved through Cabinet.</p> <p>There is no fixed definition of vulnerability and this can be identified by various means and can be long term or short term. Cases where a person does not have capacity to manage their own affairs account for 5-6% of cases and 10% of arrears caseloads.</p>	
3	<p>Review Benefits Advice Team Savings Target: 2024/25: 0.122 2025/26 0.162</p>	<p>Update on service review provided.</p> <p>The Council works with the voluntary sector to understand the support that can be provided to customers experiencing financial difficulty and the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) phone number is prominent in the letters the Revenue and Benefit Service send. The Council will to work to maintain the Discretion and Hardship Fund of £500k going forward.</p>	No recommendation.
9	<p>New Homes Bonus Savings Target: 2024/25: 0 2025/26: 1.984</p>	<p>A review of all empty homes has been carried out to check if any are occupied. A physical review now needs to be done as the Council Tax charge is the same as if it is occupied and often residents don’t always report the change.</p>	No recommendation.

		<p>The payments for the New Homes Bonus are made over 6 years to the local authority. Once re-occupied NHB is received regardless of if it becomes empty again. 100% premium only becomes chargeable if empty for more than 1 year.</p> <p>If there is a change of use so a building becomes a home, the Revenue and Benefits Team is notified by Planning.</p>	
7	<p>Review Council Tax Single Person Discounts</p> <p>Savings Target: 2024/25: 0.800 2025/26: 0.800</p>	<p>A review of all 90k single person discount accounts was carried out in January which resulted in a £2.5m reduction in discounts claimed. Audit will investigate cases of potential fraud. There was a discussion about publicising the action the Council will take in relation to fraudulent activity. Council tax can be recovered for example for the last 12/24 months or more.</p>	<p>The Council continues to publicise that single person discounts claimed in error or fraudulently will be identified and reclaimed as a reminder / deterrent to others.</p>
6	<p>Cease Local Welfare Provision Scheme</p> <p>Savings Target: 2024/25: 0.900 2025/26: 0.900</p>	<p>The budget of £900k ceased in April. Bids have been submitted for additional funds by the team. £500k household support fund application was successful and the scheme was extended for a few months.</p>	<p>No recommendation</p>