

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting12th January 2012

1. Title of Item/Report

EIT Review of Legal Services

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report that set out the findings of the Executive Scrutiny Select Committee following the EIT review of Legal Services.

The Executive Scrutiny Select Committee received updates at key stages for independent challenge and was presented with the final report for comment at its meeting on 20 December, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

The Select Committee supported the recommendations following discussion around the key topics set out in the report.

It was explained that the review had concentrated on:-

- The provision of internal Legal Services
- The provision of external Legal Services
- The Local Land Charges Service

Cabinet noted the approach adopted in undertaking the review. Officers had been mindful of the need to make savings that may benefit other service groups, particularly Children, Education and Social Care where the demand for Legal Services was continuing to increase, particularly in Safeguarding. In terms of improvement and transformation, consideration had been given to linkages with other services, specifically Local Land Charges links with planning, GIS and Land Ownership Records.

As a support service, Legal Services was aware of the impact the service had on the delivery of the Council's key priorities and would often realign its resources to match Council objectives. Due to the increase in safeguarding work the Service had reduced the support to the Litigation Team by moving a Solicitor to the Child Protection Team. Cabinet noted that the legal priorities for 2011/12 were:-

- Achieving a balanced budget
- Safeguarding
- Delivering regeneration projects and the Schools Capital Programme

It was noted that the service had already reduced its resources by 19% by not filling vacant posts and early retirements, however the reliance on Legal Services had increased, both internally and externally. Members were provided with details of a number of the pressures faced by the service.

Members were informed of issues relating to Local Land Charges and noted that costs may be reduced in this area by automating access to all the Council's property search information.

Cabinet noted costs associated with the use of external solicitors on major projects and Barristers for specialist advice and advocacy. It was considered that a procurement exercise for Barristers would help demonstrate that the Council was receiving cost effective services in this regard.

RESOLVED that

1. Maintain the current in-house Legal Service taking account of 19% reductions in budget made to date.
2. Review the management of all the Council's spatial data sets to ascertain if further efficiencies or improvements can be gained by consolidating these services.
3. Undertake a tender exercise for the procurement of services provided by barristers.

3. Reasons for the Decision

As part of the Council's EIT Programme, the Committee had undertaken the review with the aim of identifying options for future strategy, policy and service provision that would deliver efficiency savings while sustaining/improving high quality outcomes for SBC residents.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 20 January 2012

Proper Officer
16 January 2012