

People Select Committee
Overview Meeting 2023
31 July 2023
Finance, Development and Regeneration

Context

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm where:

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
 - People live in cohesive and safe communities
 - People are supported and protected from harm
 - People live health lives

- This means that the Borough will have:
 - A growing economy
 - Improved education and skills development
 - Job creation and increased employment

- This means we will enjoy:
 - Great places to live and visit
 - Clean and green spaces
 - Rich cultural experiences

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

Finance, Development and Regeneration Director – Garry Cummings

Relevant services include:

- Finance
- Revenues, Benefits & Welfare
- Xentrall
- Strategy and Performance

Council Plan 2023-2026

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The key priorities for Finance, Development and Regeneration are attached at Appendix 1.

Emerging Issues

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities are summarised as follows:

Finance - Priorities for the year ahead

The priority for the service is to ensure the financial sustainability of the Council.

Delivery of the transformation programme across the Council is a key focus and priority.

We will need to consider any Government Spending announcements and how they link with the MTFP.

Finance – Challenges and opportunities

The Council's approved MTFP includes an estimated budget gap for future years of £4.5m. Given the level of savings already delivered in recent years, the delivery of these savings will be challenging .

We are continuing to experience high levels of inflation and interest rates which are impacting upon the cost of delivering services.

The cost of Children in our Care continues to be an area of financial pressure, and this is a key area of focus.

Revenues, Benefits & Welfare - Priorities for the year ahead

- Introduce a corporate debt management strategy, understanding an individual's indebtedness to the council and beyond.
- Implement an improved collection strategy, using data intelligence to target enforcement to those who are able and choose not to pay and supporting the financially vulnerable.

- Optimise customer self-service options for council tax, including a promotional campaign for customer portal sign up.
- Deliver schemes to help with the cost of living, including but not limited to Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments and Crisis support.
- Respond to and implement Government's review of business rates and revaluation.
- Review the delivery of the Council's cashiering function.
- Review of corporate administration functions.

Revenues, Benefits & Welfare – Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

- Maintaining council tax collection levels due to impact of cost of living crisis.
- Government's migration of housing benefit to universal credit.
- Respond to government initiatives e.g. business rate consultations, administration of new schemes.

Opportunities

- Further development of automation of council tax processes.
- Expand the offer of welfare support via an outreach worker.
- Review of circumstances with a view to reducing fraud in council tax discounts and reductions.

Xentrall - Priorities for the year ahead

Based on the Looking Forward priorities of the Xentrall Annual Report 2022/23, activities across Xentrall include:

- a) Continuing to help the Council retain the benefits that have been gained through agile working and help exploit the technology enabled opportunities and innovation that have also arisen across Council services, including further exploitation of the 365 suite of products.
- b) Continuing to develop and exploit the HR/Payroll systems for the benefit of the Council and continue to assess and take on new academy business as and when opportunities arise.
- c) Continuing to develop and exploit the main financial system and satellite systems.
- d) Continuing to maintain and enhance our security measures which keep our systems and data safe.
- e) Continuing to support events, campaigns and activities across the Council with eye-catching and effective printed media and materials.
- f) Continue to assist in planning for the move to Dunedin House and designing the underlying ICT infrastructure required, both for the building itself and as a backup data centre to replace the one currently at Municipal Buildings.

Xentrall - Emerging Issues & Challenges

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Current and emerging challenges and opportunities across Xentrall Shared Services are summarised as follows:

- Supporting Academies is a significant part of Xentrall HR and Finance activities and this income supports the Xentrall financial model. Academies transferring into Multi-Academy

Trusts (MATs) sometimes results in a migration away from Xentrall's services as some MATs have their own in-house provision. This reduction has been countered by additional Academies coming on-board with Xentrall, but this cannot be guaranteed.

- Most Council services could not function without their ICT systems and data. Resilience and security are designed into our systems, but the volume and complexity of threats continues to rise. Targeting end-users can be an easier way to break into an organisation's systems, rather than trying to "break down the front door". The continued awareness and vigilance of end-users is a key element to ICT defences and is something that continues to be a focus.
- **Strategy and Performance - Priorities for the year ahead**
 - Implement new children's services education/early years/send information management system
 - Implement children's services systems and information improvements
 - Implement new corporate strategic planning framework
 - Implement new corporate performance management framework

Strategy and Performance - Challenges and opportunities

- Service review to add capacity to deliver new functions
 - Staff consultation June-July
 - Appointments to new/vacant posts throughout August
 - Transitional period Sep-Dec to move functions/projects/people around and introduce new ways of working

APPENDIX 1 – COUNCIL PLAN - KEY PRIORITIES 2023-2024 - FINANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means that the Borough will have:

- a growing economy
- improved education and skills development
- job creation and increased employment

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- continue to develop the Invest Stockton-on-Tees branding campaign and attract inward investment into the Borough
- develop options to bring forward development on vacant employment land
- continue to deliver the objectives in the Inclusive Growth Strategy and using an agreed Action Plan
- develop a procurement charter with partners to promote social value and identify potential areas of development of supply chains in order to support local business

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive means we will enjoy:

- great places to live and visit
- clean and green spaces
- rich cultural experien

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- continue the redevelopment of Stockton Town Centre including demolition of the Castlegate Centre and development of the Urban Park, new leisure centre, library, customer services and registry office
- deliver interventions for a Town Deal in Thornaby
- finalise the plans for improvements in Yarm, Preston Hall Museum & Grounds and cycleway infrastructure in line with the Levelling Up fund allocation
- development of a business case to actively accelerate the provision of affordable and specialist housing provision within the Borough
- Strategy action plan which includes coalitions with residents, businesses, and partners

We will play our part in bringing about this vision for the Borough by being A Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve. This means that we will make sure that we provide:

- financial sustainability and value for money
- dedicated and resourceful employees
- strong leadership and governance

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- review of Medium Term Financial Plan including delivery and funding
- develop a Corporate Debt Strategy
- respond to and implement Government's review of Business Rates and Revaluation
- develop and deliver a transformation programme across all services to support the Medium Term Financial Plan
- deliver proposals for the redevelopment of Dunedin House to support flexible working arrangements and the re-location of staff from current buildings
- review the Council's land and assets and develop plans for disposal or for any potential development
- add new features and functions to the Council website and improve online services for customers
- continue the development and roll out of the Cost-of-Living Hub to support the Borough's residents