

Report to: The Cabinet

Date: 6 July 2015

Report of: The Chief Executive

Report No:

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Report Title: **Cross Cutting Savings Review: Update and Early Decisions**

Non Confidential:

Purpose:

This report sets out the approach to the cross cutting savings review and an early update on progress to date. It also seeks some early decisions, to begin the delivery of savings for this budget round

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note that the cross cutting work will be organised into two broadly sequential strands: a savings strand and digital strategy
- Note progress on savings activity to date and plans for further work, specifically around systems development
- Approve the removal of a Contact Centre agent from the switchboard, fly tip notifications and Local Welfare Provision enquiries within the Contact Centre, on the basis that high quality automated systems are available.
- Endorse the revisions to the corporate complaints policy
- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Cabinet Member Regeneration and Resources, to make further establishment reductions as work progresses, in line with the strategy set out in this report

Decision:

(for use on Exec Rep)

Signed:

Leader / Executive Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

Cross Cutting Savings Review: Update and Early Decisions

1. Introduction

This report sets out the approach to the cross cutting savings review and an early update on progress to date. It also seeks some early decisions, to begin the delivery of savings for this budget round.

2. Review Objectives and Approach

The cross cutting review was set up to achieve:

- Savings of £5 000 000 as part of the 2015-17 budget round
- The council's aspiration to make better use of digital communications, in line with Government policy to make Council services easily accessible through "Digital by Default", to personalise and direct communication with the public in order to deflect service demand; improve efficiency and ensure 24/7 access to information.

To deliver this, it is proposed that the work is organised into two broadly sequential strands:

- a savings review (based on optimising existing technology and transactional process improvements) and
- a digital strategy to consider investment in new technology to deliver the transformed processes, in support of strategic objectives. This assessment will be made once the Council has developed support processes for the future and considered the impact of further optimising existing ICT capability. This strategy will take account of relevant departmental systems development work, for example the development of on line assessments of adult social care need

Supporting work is also being developed including:

- A digital inclusion strategy, internally and externally for the public
- A review of the complaints policy and process
- A review of customer access points, drawing on the recent pilot exercise in conjunction with the Library service
- Development of a social media strategy

3. Savings Review

The savings review comprises two strands:

- A review and reduction of Council administration functions. Around 400 posts are in scope of this review including administrators, PAs and business support staff in every department as well as the Children and Adult's social care administration service and Revenue & Benefits support team
- A review of the processes and associated systems for transactions that are routed into the Council through the Contact Centre, to establish options to reduce customer contact and therefore resource requirements. In particular Revenues and Benefits assessment function; Environmental Services enquiries and other high volume transactional customer contact.

Each piece of work will involve:

- A desktop assessment of service volumes and demand; staffing structures, costs and systems
- Workshops with a sample of staff, to discuss ideas for savings, efficiencies and improvements
- Validation of data gathered, with managers
- Assessment of the scope for new or enhanced ICT systems to reduce or improve customer contact and therefore improve efficiency. This will include a review of the Council's web site

The Trades Unions are being briefed on progress fortnightly and will be invited to attend the workshops as observers and to support their members

The initial programme of work to deliver the £5m savings target is now underway and with a target date of summer 2015 for consultation on initial savings proposals. In the meantime, it is proposed to identify interim options for "quick win" savings opportunities, related to simple process/ procedural changes, systems development work and vacant posts, on an on-going basis. Such proposals will be presented to Members in future update reports.

As part of the summer report it may be necessary to consider further reviews of administration and customer services as part of other service reviews, if administration requirements cannot be reviewed outside of a wider review of service processes and capability.

4. Savings strategy

It is estimated that the majority of savings required will be achieved from a reduction in numbers of posts. To deliver a £5m savings target a reduction of c200 FTE posts will be required.

Analysis suggests that the Council is currently operating with the equivalent number of vacant posts and requests for severance / Voluntary Early Retirement. On this basis, the value of savings required may be achieved consensually.

Service Area	Vacant Posts
Administration vacancies & severance applications	151
Revenues & Benefits officers	40
Contact Centre vacancies & severance applications	42
Total	233

It is unlikely that the vacant posts / severance applications may all be contained within the services they fall in, however. It is therefore assumed that a process of re-distribution of remaining posts across the services in scope will be required. A process will be determined to achieve this, with regard to the skills and aspirations of individuals and in consultation with the Trades Unions. The approach taken and lessons learned from previous successful reviews of administration in Children and Adults services will be drawn upon to inform the approach.

4.1 Systems development

The Council has made significant progress in transferring customers to web-based contact over recent years. The Council now receives 2.5 times the number of web visits to phone calls (1 500 000 enquiries via the web each year, compared with 650 000 phone calls), which suggests that on line contact is the route of choice for the majority of customers. The Council's gov delivery programme, which facilitates email "push" notifications to the public who choose to sign up to it, already has 27,000 subscribers and could easily be expanded for all other households.

The majority of the Council's high volume transactions are now available on line, including:

- Council tax queries and payments
- School admissions – c85% on line
- Library renewals
- Local Welfare Provision applications – 95% on line
- New benefits applications – 80% on line
- Payments – just 4% on line

Despite this service development, the number of web transactions is still relatively low at c.100 000 per annum. The assessment is that this is because:

- The council's strategy to date has been to grow the number of access channels and give customers choice. Staff are familiar with this approach and not currently trained or required to re-direct customers to on-line services
- The current web infrastructure has some limitations in relation to authentication and "user-friendliness" – e.g. the process for a citizen to gain secure access to transactions online is perhaps too cumbersome and mitigates against take-up
- The Council does not give prominence to digital access first

Within this review it is proposed to improve on-line uptake of available web-based processes by:

- Launching a comprehensive service signposting and communications campaign, to encourage the public to deal with the council via the web and promote on-line services. Staff training to be updated to reflect the same.

The proposal is that general communications begin as soon as possible, to direct the public to the web and highlight existing on line provision. Further communications will be linked to the launch of the new One Stop Shop, which will be positioned as a supported self-serve environment rather than guaranteed personal customer service. The associated branding proposals for the OSS and communications strategy is appended, for approval

- Improving and expanding the existing functionality for on line transactions, including:
 - A new online form for missed bins;
 - Improvements in functionality for the existing Revenues and Benefits on line system (Connect), including customer usability improvements; on-line authentication; the Benefits Eligibility Checker interface and a new system to register people on line as they contact the Council
 - Expanding the number of lines to make payments from 2 to 16

- Removing the option to speak to an agent where high quality web transactions are already available and passed through comprehensive User Acceptance testing:
 - With immediate effect, approval is sought to remove the “speak to an agent” option from the switchboard as this works well through automated delivery and also from fly tip notifications and Local Welfare Provision enquiries which have well developed on-line processes and most existing customer contact is via on line self-serve. This would reduce contact centre resource requirements by 2 FTE immediately with scope to make further reductions as the review progresses. There are no implementation costs to this proposal beyond those already provided for within the service budget
 - By October 2015, subject to the systems improvements above, missed bin enquiries, registrar appointments and payments would all be automated (i.e. via the web or phone, as applicable) and on-line only registration and access to Housing Benefit and Council Tax enquiries would be rolled out on a phased basis

It is anticipated that reducing customer contact through web provision will:

- Improve the customer experience by facilitating access to their information 24/7 and improve associated SLAs for customer contact delivery
- Reduce phone calls to the contact centre by 25%, which equates to c17 FTE.

The option to speak to an agent would be removed from the menu, but Members may be reassured that processes will still provide for calls / contacts to be re-directed to an officer where progress is not being made.

This scale of channel shift and agent reduction will still mean that the council would probably still take almost 500,000 phone calls per year and operate with a c.60 seat contact centre, however. The scale of ambition to achieve greater savings by driving further channel shift will be considered in the report with savings proposals for consultation.

A formal review of the council’s digital technology requirements will also be considered at this time. At this stage it is anticipated that there is considerable scope to drive savings and improvements by optimising our current ICT platform, but the case to invest further in new technology to further our digital ambition will be considered.

In the meantime, an options appraisal for a “web chat” customer contact channel and a mobile phone “app” will be undertaken over the summer. From September, work will begin to review and improve the web site design and content.

5. Review of administration – emerging findings

In parallel to the systems development work a review of administration tasks and processes is underway, to identify:

- Options to cease or diminish activity, to reduce resource requirements
- Scope to optimise technology to reduce contact time.

Emerging findings from initial analysis suggest significant savings could be achieved from:

- Greater manager self-serve, e.g. recording minutes or case notes directly through a laptop / tablet
- Investment in document scanning technology
- A reduction in the volume of hard copy letters that are printed and posted by the council and for all communications to be via registered on line accounts
- Reducing failure demand – e.g. by ensuring systems and processes can get it right first time and reducing/ avoiding the need for “chasing calls” from customers
- Maintaining the transitional arrangements and not resuming cash payment facilities in the One Stop Shop
- Addressing hand off arrangements between the front and back offices

Further data will be gathered through remaining workshops. However, on feedback to date, it is evident that key to reducing support capacity will be managing the expectations of professionals and equipping them with the skills and technology to self-serve their own administration requirements. This is likely to be a significant practical as well as cultural issue.

6. Update on Enabling Strands

6.1 Managing complaints

The Council's complaints policy and process has been examined in the context of diminishing resources and anticipated risk of a greater number of complaints with further service reductions to be made.

The conclusions of this work are as follows:

- Current processes for managing complaints are effective and have been strengthened recently with an increase in volumes resolved at the informal stage by the contact centre and a separate review of statutory processes within Children's and Adult's services
- To streamline administration it would, however, be helpful if every complaint were initially routed through and recorded by the contact centre, before being directed to the relevant technical officer if it cannot be resolved within Customer Services. This would be a change in process within Children's services
- The policy timescales are very tight, in the context of diminishing resources. It is proposed that the response timeframe is extended from 14 calendar days to 20 working days. This is consistent with similar process timescales e.g. Freedom of Information requests and the practice of neighbouring authorities
- To manage the number of issues that are treated as a complaint it would be helpful to revise the Web-based customer contact form and replace the term “complaint” with “feedback”. The nature of the feedback provided would then be assessed by a CSO, in consultation with the Monitoring officer, to identify those that ought to be categorised as complaints and action taken accordingly
- It would be helpful to set out the scope of the complaints procedure for customers, to make it clear that complaints about Council policy are excluded from the procedure although all feedback will be shared with the relevant portfolio holder
- A review of arrangements for handling MP complaints would also be helpful.

A proposed revised procedure is appended, for approval.

6.2 Social Media Strategy

Key to positioning the council as a digital organisation will be making full use of emerging technologies as a basis for user engagement and communication. Social media is an important hub for the on line community as well as a very cost effective communication channel.

The Council already makes use of social media, with Facebook and Twitter accounts running across a range of umbrella brand accounts including:

- Bolton Council, Visit Bolton, Business Bolton, Bolton Life
- individual services including Bolton Market and Libraries and Museums
- particular campaigns eg the Food and Drink Festival

In total we have xxx followers across collective Twitter and Facebook accounts. Work is currently underway across the web and communications teams to review and refresh the Council accounts to refresh their core purpose and practical arrangements to deliver these aims

As part of this review it is proposed to develop a unified strategy for use of social media to:

- Ensure that the council is represented on and makes maximum use of existing and emerging social media channels, eg video streaming, both internally and externally
- Agree language use and messaging to establish a single, professional “voice” of the council
- Establish commercial opportunities such as online advertising
- Agree general protocols, including how long a response should take; ensuring congruent messages and how we deal with abusive comments from the public
- Enable the council to engage with the totality of our workforce, not just those with PC access at work, and to up-skill our people with the digital communication skills that we are seeking within our community

This will involve examining the following four strands of work:

- an assessment of current and emerging social media tools to determine where the Council should be represented by customer / target group
- determination of responsibilities for managing social media interaction, to ensure timely responses to comments and questions raised and a single, consistent voice of the council
- a refresh of the council’s internal communications strategy, linked to the actions from the Investors in People plan, to determine how social media may be used to strengthen our staff engagement
- a review of options for non-interactive web-based Organisational Development tools for generic leadership and management development, e.g. Webinars and You Tube materials
- a review of our information security policy to ensure it is consistent with this approach.

Proposals will be shared in the next update report.

6.3 Digital Inclusion Strategy

Research tells us that around 80% of Bolton residents have internet access at home, via a smart phone or through a friend / family member. The Council also provides free internet access and ICT training at twenty sites across public libraries, children's centres and UCANs and has records of over 60 establishments which provide free wi fi, including shops, hotels, pubs and restaurants. On this basis it seems reasonable to shift greater volumes of Council communications and transactions on line. This is entirely consistent with the Government's Digital by Default strategy

In support of this strategy the Council is already underway with the national Go On strategy within the Contact Centre, which involves signposting customers to on-line provision and a triage system at the One Stop Shop to assess those enquiries where customers could self-serve their own enquiry and to assist them to do so.

To ensure further inclusive digital access for our residents it is proposed that skills development and internet access work is expanded to include:

- Ongoing communications about on line provision and how to access it, linked to the new One Stop Shop (OSS) which will open in July. Specifically, it is proposed that:
 - the next edition of Bolton Scene includes major coverage of the new OSS provision which is designed to enable people to self-serve on site
 - a poster campaign is launched from July "Have you clicked yet" to show case what is available on line. Materials will be published on line, at Council sites and extensively within the One Stop Shop. An example is appended
 - an open evening is held for Council Members before the OSS opens to the public, to show them the facilities and on line capabilities in order that they can advise residents
 - telephone messages and customer services scripts are updates to refer to on line access
- A review of the web access points referenced above, to ensure there is adequate provision across community sites including libraries and the One Stop Shop for those people who do not have home or smart phone access
- Analysis of customer skill gaps and requirements, to be undertaken through the existing Working Together user consultation machinery

There may be scope to achieve greater impact and access further resources across the community through joining up this approach with other Vision partners within the public, private and voluntary sectors as part of the Community Strategy refresh later this year. In particular:

- Collaboration with the private sector will be explored to learn from best practice and seek to access wider resources such as Barclays "Digital Eagles"
- Voluntary sector capacity to assist with community skills development will also be important.

Proposals will be shared in the next update report.

7. Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note that the cross cutting work will be organised into two broadly sequential strands: a savings strand and digital strategy
- Note progress on savings activity to date and plans for further work, specifically around systems development
- Approve the removal of a Contact Centre agent from the switchboard, fly tip notifications and Local Welfare Provision enquiries within the Contact Centre, on the basis that high quality automated systems are available.
- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Cabinet Member Regeneration and Resources, to make further establishment reductions as work progresses, in line with the strategy set out in this report
- Endorse the revisions to the corporate complaints policy, as set out in section 6.

The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal

The Council welcomes feedback about our services. We will seek to resolve any issues raised quickly and informally, without you having to make a formal complaint.

Please note that complaints about policies and decisions made by elected members do not fall within the remit of the complaints procedure. However a complaint about the way in which the policy or the decision has been implemented by the Council does. We will, however, feedback residents' views on policies and decisions made by elected members to the relevant portfolio holder.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

Your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. Complaints made by email to our advertised email addresses or via our web site will be acknowledged within one working day.

The complaint will then be investigated and responded to within 20 calendar days by email unless you request otherwise. If the officer is unable to reply within 20 working days, i.e. because the complaint is very complex, we will let you know the progress we have made in the investigation of your complaint and when you can expect to receive a final response

Stage 3 – Appeal

If you are unhappy with the response that you have been provided with under Stage 2 of the procedure, you may ask the Chief Executive to review how your complaint was handled within 28 days.

The Chief Executive will refer your appeal to one of the Council's Departmental Monitoring Officers who will review your complaint on his behalf. Before you make contact, it would be helpful if you could be clear about what parts of your complaint you feel have not been dealt with satisfactorily and say what you would like to happen.

In very rare cases, the Monitoring Officers may feel it necessary to refer the complaint to an independent investigator (outside the Council) or to a complaints panel made up of appropriate Members and Officers of the Council.