

Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 April 2015



Council Plan 2015-2018 - Refresh of the Work Programme for the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide members with information contained within the Council Plan 2015-2018, relevant to the work of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This allows the opportunity for members to refresh the Committee Work Programme to reflect the 4 objectives and associated outcomes and action areas identified within the Council Plan for the Council's Altogether Better Council priority theme.

Background

2. The current Overview and Scrutiny Committees work programmes focus on the priority areas identified within the context of the Council Plan, Cabinet's Notice of Key Decisions, Sustainable Community Strategy, Partnership plans and strategies, performance and budgetary control data and changes in Government legislation.
3. In relation to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee, Members will recall that the Work Programme for 2014-15 agreed to focus on the Medium Term Financial Plan. Further areas of focus for the Committee were added to reflect changing Government policy and at the request of Members related to performance concerns.

Council Plan 2015- 2018

4. The Council Plan is the overarching high level plan for the County Council, which covers a four year period and is updated on an annual basis. The plan sets out the corporate priorities for improvement in delivering the long term goals in the Sustainable Community Strategy (2014-2030). Attached at Appendix 2 is the Altogether Better Council section of the Council Plan for members' consideration.
5. The Council's Altogether Better Council priority theme links to the work of the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee containing the enablers that allow the council to effectively manage change and deliver improvement across the other themes within the Council Plan. It is imperative that delivery is made against these objectives which are increasingly important in times of significant change.
6. To help improve the performance of the Council, there are 4 objectives for an Altogether Better Council, underpinned by 11 outcomes:

- Putting the customer first:
 - A range of access routes to services
 - Responsive and customer focused services
 - People are treated fairly and differences respected.
- Working with our communities:
 - Communities and stakeholders are engaged and communicated with
 - Effective partnership working
 - Responding to Welfare Reform and the effects of poverty.
- Effective use of resources
 - A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities
 - Council assets are optimised and information managed
 - Efficient and effective services.
- Support our people through change:
 - Employee and member well-being
 - A strategic approach to organisational development.

Current Work Programme

7. During 2014/15, Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee has undertaken budgetary and performance monitoring, in-depth Scrutiny Reviews, and overview presentations in relation to the following areas:

In depth Scrutiny Reviews

- Budget and MTFP process
(Objective: Effective use of resources: A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities ABC 7)
- Customer First Strategy
(Objective: Putting the Customer First – A range of access routes to services ABC 1; Responsive and customer focused services ABC 2; People are treated fairly and differences respect ABC 3)

Areas of Overview Activity

- Fairness of Local Government Funding
(Objective: Effective use of resources – Council assets are optimised and information managed ABC 8)
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
(Objective – Effective use of resources)
- Overview of Creditor Payment Performance (via performance reports)
(Objective: Effective use of resources – Efficient and effective services ABC 9)
- Overview of Sickness Absence Performance (via performance reports)
(Objective: Support our people through change – Employee wellbeing ABC 10)

- Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Reports
(Objective: *Putting the Customer First – People are treated fairly and differences respected ABC 2*)
- CAS Service Statutory Annual Representations Report
(Objective: *Putting the customer first – Responsive and customer focused services ABC 2*)
- ICT Strategy 2013/16
(Objective: *Putting the customer first – A range of access routes to services ABC 1*)

Budgetary and performance monitoring

- Quarterly budgetary monitoring for ACE and Resources.
(Objective: *Effective use of resources - A balanced three year financial plan that reflects council priorities ABC 7*)
- Quarterly performance monitoring for Altogether Better Council theme.
(Objective: *Effective use of resources – Efficient and effective services ABC 9*)

Areas for consideration in the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

8. Having considered the Altogether Better Council section of the Council Plan for 2015 - 2018 it is suggested that the following action areas could be considered in the update of the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee work programme (where they already link to the current work programme this is highlighted):

Putting the customer first:

- Customer First Strategy, including delivery of an easier to use website providing more self-service and online facilities, using social media more widely - update could link to the systematic review of the Customer First Strategy
- Use customer feedback to inform learning and improve services – CIOSC receives quarterly Customer Feedback reports, and the annual CAS Representations report.
- Treat people fairly through ensuring that any changes to the way we do things are properly assessed (equality and diversity) – CIOSC has input into the MTFP and savings planning process.

Working with our communities:

- During 2015/16 the Council will undertake a full review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. CIOSC already monitor performance quarterly, but may wish to consider this review in relation to their work programme.
- Develop the Durham Ask programme to transform the delivery of services through supporting organisations interested in running local facilities. CIOSC already have community asset transfer on its work programme.

Effective use of resources. It is imperative that we utilise all available resources both efficiently and effectively; this is especially the case when faced with unprecedented reductions in government funding requiring us to deliver savings of £225m between 2011 and 2018.

- The Council will produce a rolling three year financial plan - CIOSC lead scrutiny of the financial plan every year.
- Robust assurance of detailed saving plans - regular delivery updates on the Medium Term Financial Plan are presented to CIOSC. In addition quarterly corporate performance reports are also presented. These are rolling items on the CIOSC work programme.
- Phase 2 of our Office Accommodation Project. Asset Management is one of the CIOSC areas of responsibility, so the committee may wish to consider this project.
- Ensure that the highest standards of Information Governance are being adhered to including in relation to personal data and publication of information. CIOSC receive updates on FOI performance.
- Regular updates on the ICT Strategy are presented to CIOSC and this is a rolling item on the CIOSC work programme.

Support our people through organisational change:

- Organisational Development Strategy. CIOSC will input into the theme of health, safety and wellbeing with a review of sickness absence and provide recommendations on the policy.
- Learning and talent development activities – CIOSC may wish to consider this area in relation to their work programme.
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and associated action plan – CIOSC may wish to consider this area in relation to their work programme.

Next Steps

9. The current Committee work programme was devised for a two year period, and therefore this provides the ideal opportunity for the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee to consider refreshing its work programme for 2015-2017 within the context of the Council Plan.

10. The Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the appropriate section from the Council Plan, Appendix 2 (copy attached) to inform the Committee work programme for 2015-2017, reflecting on the current work programme detailed in paragraph 7.
11. Members will receive a further report at the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 16 July 2015 confirming/agreeing the Committee's work programme for 2015-2017 based on today's discussion and agreement.

Recommendations

12. That the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the information contained in the Council Plan 2015-2018, Altogether Better Council theme (copy attached at Appendix 2).
13. That the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee refreshes the work programme for 2015 - 2017 by discussing and considering those actions identified under the Altogether Better Council priority theme of the Council Plan, as in paragraph 8.
14. That the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 July 2015 receives a further report detailing the Committee's work programme for 2015 - 2017.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - The Council Plan sets out the corporate priorities of the Council for the next 3 years. The Medium Term Financial Plan aligns revenue and capital investment to priorities within the Council Plan

Staffing - The Council's strategies are being aligned to achievement of the corporate priorities contained within the Council Plan.

Risk - Consideration of risk is a key element in the corporate and service planning framework with both the Council Plan and Service Plans containing sections on risk.

Equality and diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty - The cumulative impact of all savings proposals in total has also been presented to Council and will be updated as savings proposals are further developed. In addition a full impact assessment has previously been undertaken for the Council Plan. The Council Plan includes specific issues relating to equality and aim to improve the equality of life for those with protected characteristics. The Plan has been influenced by consultation and monitoring to include equality issues. There is no evidence of negative impact for particular groups.

Accommodation - The Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan is aligned to the corporate priorities contained within the Council Plan.

Crime and disorder - The Altogether Safer section of the Council Plan sets out the Council's contributions to tackling crime and disorder

Human rights – None

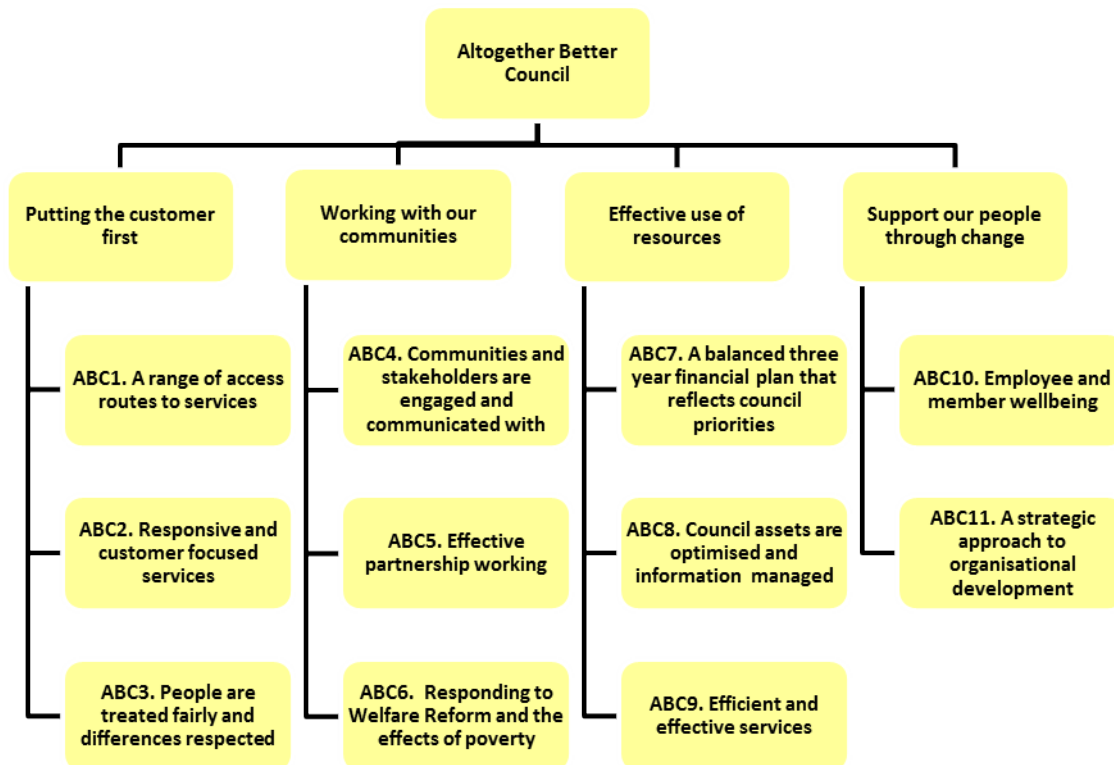
Consultation - Council and partnership priorities have been developed following an analysis of available consultation data including an extensive consultation programme carried out as part of the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and this has been reaffirmed by subsequent consultation on the budget. Results have been taken into account in developing our resourcing decisions

Procurement - None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications - None

Altogether Better Council



Our Vision

Like much of the public sector, Durham County Council faces the dichotomy of rising demand for many of its services and reducing resources available to help deliver them. The future for local government therefore involves investigating new ways to manage demand such as reducing avoidable contact, providing self-service options for some of our simpler services and looking at new models of service delivery, often together with our communities. We also owe it to our taxpayers to ensure that our services are operating as efficiently as possible and that both our service performance and finances are effectively managed. The local authority of tomorrow is likely to look very different to our current setup. It is therefore important that we have a strategy in place to make sure that our organisation develops and that the transformation is made smoothly.

1. Putting the customer first

Technology is changing the way people interact and our customers are demanding faster, easier contact at a time and place that is convenient to them. Our **Customer First Strategy** sets out how we will meet this demand, putting the ‘customer first’ and providing cost effective services. The Customer First Strategy has three main outcomes.

- We will provide a range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us. A number of projects are being implemented to achieve this, including; **making our website easier to use, providing more self-service** and online facilities, using social media more widely, and **making better use of our buildings**. We will also ensure **our customers receive the right information, advice** and support at their first point of contact, and that their information is held securely.

- It is important that we provide responsive and customer focussed services by **communicating clearly to our customers how and when services will be delivered**, and keeping them informed of progress. Our staff will be kept informed of customer needs through a programme of customer care training, which will improve the standard of customer interactions.
- We need to **use customer feedback to inform learning and improve services**. We will always take customer views into account before changing any aspect of our services, and following any change we will monitor its impact. We will continue to use feedback to shape service provision and let our customers know the difference it has made through the 'you said, we did' approach. We will also acknowledge where we have got it wrong and be clear on what we will do to put it right.
- We will treat people fairly through ensuring that any changes to council policies and the way that we do things is **properly assessed** to ensure that certain groups of people are not disproportionately affected by any changes.
- Another area of relevant council activity, putting the County's residents at the centre over the duration of this plan, will be the effective and efficient delivery of all **elections** in compliance with the Electoral Commission's performance standards, beginning with the Parliamentary General Election in May 2015.

2. Working with our communities

We have a reputation for working with its communities. We have carried out extensive consultation work on changes to our budgets with members of the public. Our 14 Area Action Partnerships are real catalysts for change in our local communities. We have introduced innovative participatory budgeting in our localities and have worked with a range of partners in ensuring that public services in County Durham are joined up.

- We will work with communities to commemorate the massive role that the people of County Durham played in **World War One** throughout the centenary of the conflict.
- We will develop the **Durham Ask** programme to transform the delivery of services through supporting organisations interested in running local facilities.
- As part of our work with communities and stakeholders, during 2015/16 we will undertake a full **review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme**, originally agreed following extensive consultation and adopted from April 2013.
- We recognise the powerful role that partners in the voluntary and community sector can play in the delivery of local services to residents. We will work with Durham Community Action to deliver a **Centre for Volunteering and Social Enterprise** to help strengthen the capacity of this sector in the future.

- We will continue to manage changes introduced by the **Welfare Reform Act 2012** such as the proposed rollout of Universal Credit. We will also ensure that our policies take into account the effects of **poverty** on our residents.

3. Effective use of resources

It is imperative that we utilise all available resources both efficiently and effectively; this is especially the case when faced with unprecedented reductions in government funding requiring us to deliver savings of £225m between 2011 and 2018.

- To plan effectively over the medium term, we will produce a **rolling three-year financial plan** which reflects council priorities and feedback from budget consultation processes, forecasts government funding reductions and budget pressures, and identifies the savings required to ensure we can annually set a balanced budget.
- Detailed plans to meet the required individual savings will continue to be subject to the robust assurance process currently in place to ensure that all savings are achieved, and **managers will be supported** throughout this complex process of significant and ongoing organisational change, whilst managing budgets within cash limits.
- Phase II of our **Office Accommodation Project (OAP2)**, with its focus on identifying alternative office accommodation to County Hall as an enabler for the future redevelopment of the Aykley Heads campus as a strategic employment site, will continue over the duration of this plan and beyond.
- Underpinning this work on office accommodation are the delivery of our **ICT Strategy** and the Organisational Development Strategy, which together set out to link our future accommodation plans, to the development and design of Human Resource processes, whilst taking full advantage of emerging ICT technologies.
- With a view to releasing efficiencies, developing capacity and knowledge through the reduction of overheads, removing duplication of activity, management and support costs, and the sharing of specialist knowledge and skills, we will explore opportunities to **work collaboratively with external organisations**.
- We will ensure that the highest standards of **information governance** are being adhered to through our practices and procurement arrangements to ensure that personal data is adequately protected and also that we are being open and transparent in the publication of information.

4. Support our people through change

In the current climate we need to look at very different approaches to how services are delivered and ensure that the workforce is able to contribute by being enabled to be creative and flexible, and possess the right skills to respond positively in a changing environment.

- Our **Organisational Development Strategy** outlines our approach that connects people management and development with organisational improvements. The strategy includes an action plan which focuses on four overlapping themes that provide a coherent approach to improvement: a flexible workforce and workplace; employee engagement; leadership, learning and talent development; and health, safety and wellbeing.
- We need leaders and managers that can effectively empower, engage and motivate the workforce to deliver 'optimum' service delivery at a time of significant austerity. The **Durham Manager** programme has been designed to meet the development needs of our managers, in alignment with our corporate culture, values and priorities. Going forward we will continue to evaluate and develop the programme to support managers and meet the changing needs of the organisation.
- Effective learning and talent development activities will also be provided and utilised including extending learning and development through coaching, mentoring, **e-learning**, and working in partnership with other organisations. In line with our aspiration to achieve optimum individual and organisational performance, we will improve the level and quality of employee performance appraisals undertaken across the council.
- Establishing a flexible workforce and workplace will enable us to adapt to changing business needs, and enable individuals to embrace broader roles within the council, be resilient in a consistently changing environment and be equipped with the right skills to deliver our aims and objectives. To this end, the **Office Accommodation Programme II (OAP2)** will involve linking the development of Human Resources policy and processes with future workplace accommodation plans.
- Our **Health, Safety and Wellbeing** Strategy and associated action plan identifies how we implement the Health and Safety Policy in terms of practical solutions while enabling key strategic objectives to be identified and delivered. The health and safety team work with senior officers to ensure that visible and effective leadership guidance and advice is in place to enable informed health and safety decisions.
- We will explore opportunities to improve **efficiency and effectiveness** through exploring opportunities to collaborate with other organisations in the provision of local services. We will continue to monitor our performance and tackle areas that are underperforming.

Summary

<p>Going Well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Managers utilising 'Business Intelligence' tool to enhance access to budget information • The ongoing development and delivery of our Medium Term Financial Plan and monitoring of MTFP savings • The external audit VfM conclusion identified that we have robust arrangements in place to secure financial resilience • Our innovative triage process for handling enquiries from residents affected by the Government's welfare reforms is helping people to stay in their home, improve their financial situation and find work 	<p>Look Out For:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015 Parliamentary Elections • Improved pathways and joint working between various agencies involved in the provision of Advice Services through the Advice in County Durham Partnership • Promotion of take-up for online access to Council Tax accounts, Business Rates benefits and e-billing, e-reminder and SMS texting
<p>Cause for Concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlements for 2015/16 • A reduction in organisational capacity and a potential skills gap as a consequence of down-sizing • Re-aligning systems and processes to accommodate the switch in banker in 2015/16 	<p>Did you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Pension Fund has 109 employers who contribute to the fund in addition to the Council and the fund is currently valued at £2.1 billion • There are 238,000 domestic chargeable properties in County Durham, with a gross Council Tax liability of £306m and 85% of these are in Bands A to C • There are an estimated 70,000 claims for Council Tax Reduction each year, with £53m of support being provided. 54% of all claimants are of working age and of these 10,000 are in work claimants