

Appendix 4

Strategic Budget Review update as at November 2023

The first signs of the extraordinary financial pressure faced by the General Fund and the unsustainable financial position were set out in the MTFs in November 2022 (CAB3374).

An initial strategic budget review identified 12 themes for consideration. Work has continued over the year and selection of these twelve themes has provided essential learning for the next phase of this work but not significant savings. An update on each of those reviews is summarised below.

1. Future operation/management of Park and Ride services

The Park & Ride service is a key part of the parking strategy to support the council's carbon reduction aims by encouraging cars to stay out of the city centre.

Recognising this, the option for WCC to not provide this service was therefore discounted (CAB3397).

Tender returns for the park and ride contract have been received and are based on operating the service on hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO). If the tender return is agreed when considered by cabinet at its December meeting, the new service will have considerably reduced carbon emissions.

2. Tourism/Marketing (Visit Winchester)

This review has now been scoped to include various delivery model options and these will be presented as part of the Corporate Head of Economy and Communities TC25 Star Chamber proposals.

3. Visitor Info Centre Provision

This review has now been scoped to include various delivery model options and these will be presented as part of the Corporate Head of Economy and Communities TC25 Star Chamber proposals.

4. Digitisation and streamlining of Planning services

The planning service is wide reaching with stakeholders and users ranging from householders and Parish Councils to major developers. There is scope to transform the way the service is delivered and to digitalise elements to make them more accessible to customers and stakeholders while reducing costs. £20k has been used from the TC25 reserve to fund an external review of the service incl. process review and digitisation options. The external report and recommendations are due end of November '23.

5. Management of Public Conveniences

Provision of clean, safe and accessible public conveniences is an important part of the council's Pride in Place priority. A review of how they are used, cleaned and maintained is underway and a Public Toilets Improvement Strategy report (CAB3411) was considered by Cabinet in September 2023, with a detailed action plan to fully deliver the strategy to follow later this year following further discussion and data gathering.

Discussions are underway with Parish Councils with a view to seeing how joint working can improve the fabric and management of our district toilets ongoing.

The public conveniences contract has been extended and performance will be reviewed as part of any re-procurement.

6. Management/operation of off-street parking provision/enforcement

An external review by carried out by City Science is complete with recommendations to be progressed (Stage 2) in the New Year.

Stage 2 – Reducing costs and increasing income. A service operation review including rationalisation of multiple back-office systems and frontline payment systems into a single solution is to be progressed.

7. CCTV Provision and monitoring

Options were considered by Cabinet in December '22 (CAB3368) and a recommendation to re-tender was approved. A new 5-year contract was let in 2023 which does include some flexibility to vary the service and contract.

8. Customer Services – Investment in Online/app reporting (and reduced postage)

Digital Strategy to be developed to inform the future direction. Additional expertise is required to formulate and deliver a digital strategy for the Council. A £100k budget growth item is included in the MTFS to support digital transformation across the organisation. This resource will ensure work collaboratively to ensure the digital ambitions of services mesh with the IT Strategy.

A 'Digital by Default' policy was adopted in Apr 2023 so wherever possible, new customers interact 'paper-free' with the council. Work is underway to convert as many existing customers to 'paper-free' as soon as possible. For example,

- Revenues: work to assess mass-switch to e-billing is underway (e.g. data available already / campaign to switch).

- Waste: new bin calendar produced and distributed in September '23 and was paid for by Biffa with longer term digital options to be reviewed.

Improvements are being made to the on-line fly-tip reporting functionality (GIS / map location upgrade coming; 'save' button now removed) and other forms on the Your Winchester App streamlined to improve user experience.

The Customer Portal was updated in July so that it is Government Digital Service (GDS) compliant.

Data is being collected to inform recommendations for the future operation of the Reception in City Offices.

9. Management of Grounds Contracts/Highway Grounds subsidy

Work to clarify the IDV bill of quantities completed & subsidies are being calculated. On completion of this work, discussions are likely to be needed with HCC and Highways England.

A discussion with IDV is underway to review the services provided under the current contract to revise the current specification and release savings.

Contract Monitoring Officer (CMO) team structure and processes between CMOs, CSC and contractors are being reviewed for improvements.

10. Grants - Review of programme

This review has now been scoped to include various options and these will be presented as part of the Corporate Head of Economy and Communities TC25 Star Chamber proposals.

11. Management of key corporate assets A target of £530k p/a rental income growth by 2027/28 (excl. CWR assets) has been agreed by and will be monitored by Property Board.

12. Commercial operation and use of the Guildhall and Abbey House Work is underway to investigate the corporate event letting market for both the Guildhall and Abbey House. This market would seem to offer best opportunities without need for significant investment that would be a requirement of an events management company arrangement. New officer resource with experience in this market have been recruited.