

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Facing The Future 2013  
**Meeting(s)/Date(s):** Cabinet – 19 September 2013  
**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Leader - Councillor Jason Ablewhite  
**Report by:** Jo Lancaster, Managing Director  
**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- a. Cabinet approve the list of potential options for future service delivery and for them to be considered in respect of all the services currently delivered by the Council;
- b. Scrutiny Chairmen are requested to prepare proposals for a delivery review programme to be presented to October Cabinet for approval, to agree resourcing for that programme and a proposed governance structure, and
- c. Scrutiny Panels are requested to review all options in line with the programme and present their conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet.

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## 1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to:

- consider the future potential business models for the delivery of Council services and recognise how this shapes the medium term financial plan; and
- consider the programme of activity which will be needed to support the delivery of a robust business plan that will be able to deliver the Council's future plans and its ambitions.

1.2 The Council's gross budget for this financial year (2013/14) is £78M, made up of:

	£M
Staff Costs	25.0
Premises	3.5
Supplies and Services	7.5
Transport	1.9
Housing Benefits	35.8
Grants	1.5
Interest and Debt Repayments	1.5
Other	0.9

The report on the Financial Forecast to 2019 explains that, in the medium term (2015/16 onwards), the Council's funding position becomes somewhat precarious.

## 2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

2.1 There was a forecast budget deficit to be met from reserves of £2.0M in 2014/15. In order to remove this reliance before reserves fall below the minimum recommended level of £5M, savings of £2.6M were required to be found by 2017/18.

2.2 The Government's Spending Review announcements increase the need for additional savings to be found of up to a further £3.2M across the same time-line.

2.3 It has also been made clear that the Government grant will continue to decline (and possibly ultimately cease) and, whilst the Council will carry on generating income from retained business rates, New Homes Bonus, Council Tax and from fees and charges, the gap between the Council's spending commitments and its income will continue to increase. Given the caps on taxation redirection of other income streams, and that our opportunities for growing income will be limited, reducing net spend significantly over the coming 3-5 years remains the highest priority.

## 3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

3.1 Service budgets have been placed under pressure for some years now and whilst efficiencies continue to be driven out, opportunities are diminishing. There is an intention to implement a 'service challenge process' to take place during the service planning process ready for 2014/15, which will identify any remaining efficiencies, ensuring that service delivery budgets are as tight as they realistically can be and that any remaining anomalies and duplication are removed. However,

further efficiencies will not provide for a guaranteed balanced budget beyond the current year, and accordingly significant unidentified savings will have to remain a feature of the medium term plan.

- 3.2 In reality, the imbalance between our costs and our available resources boils down to some fairly stark choices having to be made:

### **3.2.1 Cutting Whole Services, i.e. stop doing things**

Undoubtedly, the pressure on public finances over recent years has been very difficult for service providers, service users and other sectors. However, the need for the consideration radical changes does provide an opportunity to redefine the role of local councils and the relationship between citizen and state. To date, few councils have actually chosen to stop providing services without any alternative delivery options being created.

Theoretically, if a service is non-statutory and does not directly support the delivery of the council's key priorities, council funding should not be committed to it, no matter how used people have become to that service existing, for example, 100% cuts to arts grant/spending by some of the Councils in the North East. This argument is particularly strong where there are already alternative suppliers available within the market place, e.g. pest control.

### **3.2.2 Generating Additional Income**

Further increases in fees and charges is an obvious area to consider in more detail, in order to protect spending on services. Particularly for those services which have a value and are provided to a select group of the community (i.e. is not a universally provided service which benefits all). Historically, many councils have, for example, relied on car parking charges to make a positive contribution. There has been a steady increase in the cost of car parking but further increases will have to take account of the impact on the viability of our market towns. However there are other services and facilities, which are currently not charged for, which could potentially be the subject of additional charging, e.g. shop-mobility, green bins, etc.

### **3.2.3 Asset Sweating**

HDC owns a significant operational property portfolio and it also own a significant community related portfolio including advice centres, sports clubs (bowling, cricket, football and rowing), community centres, education centres, function rooms, girl guide and scout group buildings, market rights, Mencap centre, nurseries, pavilions, public conveniences, nature reserve and visitor centre. The total asset value of the HDC Estate is currently estimated to be around £57M.

This option considers the potential for generating the highest possible income from the Council's property portfolios. This would mean reviewing the operational portfolio in order to determine that we are getting the best possible income and that we are using those buildings to their utmost

capacity. In order to maximise returns within our operational estate there may need to be further investment to support more agile working across all of our services, including the potential for mobile working, using other public sector buildings for hot-desking and remodelling how we actually deliver some services. This could lead to us disposing of some of the assets or alternatively sub-letting them to generate a revenue income. Work is underway across Cambridgeshire under the Making Assets Count (MAC) Programme to support this type of activity.

There is another strand of proactively pursuing appropriate development and investment opportunities, centred around our commercial holdings, and indeed, an effective investment strategy would assist portfolio management. Early valuation advice would need to be obtained on schemes and, if a number are to proceed, a disposal strategy would assist with audits and any challenges. Most councils are actively exploring this option as a way to drive down unit costs, reduce central recharges and maximise operational property income potential.

#### **3.2.4 Smart Investment**

Smart investments can potentially deliver significant savings in overall public expenditure. An example of this is the Government's focus on 'early intervention', in children's lives and giving children the right type of support, as a means to avoid the need to spend additional sums in the future. This type of approach could also be applied to work and skills programmes as well as such things as community safety and homelessness.

Other types of investments with large potential returns include advance funding for enabling infrastructure to allow important developments to proceed as quickly as possible. For example, it has been calculated that investment of £60m in infrastructure required to enable Kettering's 'Enabling Responsible Growth' project to proceed would deliver an economic benefit to the UK of £1.2bn over 25 years. A proposed new Energy Park will deliver 50MW of green power from a combination of technologies, which is enough to satisfy Kettering's electricity requirements without the need to spend on upgrading the existing grid infrastructure. Plans also include a 250,000m<sup>2</sup> business park creating up to 7,000 jobs and a housing development of 5,500 homes to be built nearby.

#### **3.2.5 Property and Land Development**

A number of councils have looked at actively developing property or land assets either through acquisition or by developing on land they already own, either in partnership with a developer, other land owners or on their own. Initial investigations highlight that becoming a property developer and social landlord in the residential market requires significant capital outlay in order to be in a position to make a return (circa 1500 units). However, whilst HDC is not a major landowner, it has some limited parcels of land that a multi-disciplinary team has been examining to assess the development potential. Several of these plots are currently used for off-road parking, as green space, or are occupied under license by adjacent residents.

There would obviously be some resistance to the development of such areas and they will all need to go through the planning application system. On some similar type of sites, the Development Management Panel have previously rejected such proposals as they take out green space or result in the loss of other amenity land.

### **3.2.6 Transfer of Services / Assets to Community Groups Charities / Other Councils**

Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of ownership or management of land or buildings to a local community group or other appropriate third sector organisation. Where the asset is used for service delivery it can be transferred with or without continuing council support for that service. Freehold ownership of an asset may be transferred or it may be transferred on a short or long-term lease with the council retaining the freehold. Transferring the freehold provides one-off income from the sale while a lease provides income while retaining ownership.

Where the Council continues to provide support for transferred services, these can be community managed (community led and delivered but with some support), community supported (funded and led by the Council but with significant community support) or commissioned as community services (commissioned and fully funded by the council and delivered by the community organisation). As an example, Northampton Borough Council has transferred 7 community centres to community groups and expects all of its community centres to become community managed. They describe the financial benefit to the council as being in the medium term, but with the related community benefit being in terms of better use of the centres. They dealt with a number of community groups and were involved in helping some become incorporated and produce business plans. The centres are leased out to the groups, who are responsible for running them and for the internal maintenance, in their model the council retains responsibility for external maintenance and insurance.

### **3.2.7 Shared Services with other Councils**

Sharing services, for example Revs & Benefits, Development Management and Environmental Health, is increasingly common, but does require investments in technology to make them genuinely transforming.

Benefits can include streamlined processes, better collaboration and potential savings through economies of scale. For example, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils agreed to share services in 2008. The arrangement has delivered significant benefits with employment cost savings between 2007/08 and 2011/12 from the shared service arrangements at £5.7m following an upfront investment cost of £1.8m, delivering a net employment cost saving of £3.9 million over the five year period. Further budgeted savings of £4.9m are forecast between 2012/13 and 2013/14 to be delivered from improvements in waste and recycling contracts and in improved business processes, IT and reductions in staff. Service delivery, performance and customer satisfaction have not suffered and, in many cases, have improved. By sharing senior managers and staff, the councils work more closely together and benefit from a

stronger Oxfordshire presence, with greater operational resilience. Both councils are similar in scale and demographics and the administration centres are not too far apart. The willingness of the two sets of councillors and their officers to effectively collaborate has been critical to the success of this initiative.

### **3.2.8 Outsourcing to the Private Sector**

Outsourcing involves transferring a business activity to an external company or supplier, and traditionally these initiatives have focused on back office functions such as IT, HR and finance. According to a recent study, about 23 per cent of human resources, IT and payroll functions are now privatised, as are half of council waste management services. The value of council contracts for the private sector more than doubled between 2008 and 2012 to £12.9bn.

Within the last few weeks Barnet LBC has signed two major contracts worth nearly £500m with the outsourcing firm Capita. The authority has agreed to a ten-year deal worth £350m in which Capita Business Services will run its back-office services, and a separate £130m ten-year deal in which Barnet's development and regulatory services – including strategic planning, transport and environmental health – will be run by Capita Symonds in a partnership with the authority. Barnet claims the contracts will save taxpayers £126m over the next decade.

### **3.2.9 Demand Management**

Demand management is prevalent in many situations, and in reality there have to be mechanisms applied within the public sector in order to prevent, reduce or direct demand. Much focus is currently on the health care sector as it looks to deal with the impact of an aging population, but in reality evidence suggests that public sector has ceased to be the last place of resort, and has instead become a point of first contact. Prevention is generated by early intervention and a focus on self-reliance and, where users enter a system, there is a process to lower costs or introduce changes which drive a lowering of demand.

### **3.2.10 Tighter Commissioning**

Council spending in the private and voluntary sectors is worth over £62bn p.a. according to the Local Government Association (LGA). Quick wins identified by the LGA include up-skilling local authority procurement teams, introducing common policies and practices, and fully engaging with suppliers. Commissioning and procurement are not the same; a commissioning strategy may result in procurement but could just as easily result in a policy change. Increasingly councils are likely to see expansion from commissioning for specific services to commissioning across councils or on a corporate basis.

For example, Brighton and Hove City Council have developed on “intelligent commissioning” model. This is a cultural and structural change process aimed at supporting the delivery of the city's strategic outcomes and key services. A wide number of benefits have been generated including better

service prioritisation and outcome improvements, budget savings and stronger community participation and ownership.

Commissioning is not just about the bottom line, it is also about the most efficient way to deliver services while creating value - social, environmental and economic. Commissioning should be focussed on community needs and priorities. For example, Oldham has focused much effort on their Children's centres. A district-led workshop event brought together members, partners and citizens to work together to identify key issues and agree performance measures critical to improving outcomes. The process resulted in a saving of £220,000. This new commissioning process was completed within 10 months including developing the business case, engaging partners and citizens, tendering and awarding contracts.

The wider economic and social perspective is evidence by The City of London's Local Procurement Directive' inspiring a change in culture to consider the wider social impact through increasing the Small and Medium Enterprises local spend and employment opportunities whilst maintaining 'Best Value'.

### **3.2.11 Joined Up Public Services**

This refers to bringing public, private and/or voluntary sector bodies together to work across organisational boundaries towards a common goal and this can take different forms. These include realigning organisational boundaries (bringing together the whole or parts of two or more organisations to create a new organisation), formal partnerships (working together by contract, protocol or framework agreement) and informal partnerships (working together by liaison, consultation or unwritten mutual agreement).

Making Assets Count (MAC) is an example of this where public sector partners in Cambridgeshire are working together (currently as an informal partnership) with the objective of using their collective property portfolio in a more efficient manner to reduce costs to the public purse, improve services offered to the public and support economic growth through construction and knock on economic activity.

Potential MAC benefits to partners include reduced overall footprint of estate and lower property costs, delivery of significant property-related revenue savings, capital gains through disposing of redundant properties, service alignment benefits through service and partner co-location, improved public services, new retail, housing and community facilities for communities, regeneration, economic development and growth across the county, support for jobs and skills in the construction industry, mapping all public sector assets to support improved property management and service delivery and improved energy efficiency and carbon emission reductions.

Examples of some of these benefits have already been achieved through informal partnership (e.g. the NHS renting office space above our Civic Suite). Others, such as the Joint Operations Centre in the south of the county, may require evolution into a more formal partnership. Some may require the creation of a new organisation, as is currently being proposed



for the market town regeneration programme which includes St Ives and St Neots.

### **3.2.12 Cutting Pay**

The objectives of the pay review currently being undertaken are to deliver a fairer pay system which complies with equalities legislation and ensures that pay levels are at market rates. It is possible that the final pay model adopted will result in lower salaries for some employees and this should be taken into account when considering any further cuts to pay and conditions.

In addition to the option of reducing salaries across the board, such as the cut of up to 2.5% imposed by Doncaster Council on nearly 6,000 employees in 2012, other options include reductions in allowances or allowing staff to reduce hours voluntarily.

Alternative ways to lower the wage bill without cuts to salaries include reducing sickness absence (reducing average days lost last year from 8.9 days/FTE to 7.5 days/FTE would have meant nearly 900 fewer days lost – equivalent to nearly 3.5 full-time employees), holding posts vacant for longer (delaying the starting dates of each of the 70 new recruits in 2012/13 by a further five working days would have saved over £40,000 last year) and allowing staff to take unpaid leave.

### **3.2.13 Management Restructure**

Over the last three years there have been significant changes to the senior management structure. As a result of these changes we have delivered full year savings of £600k per year. During the coming months, and indeed, years, the shape of the Council will need to continue to change to reflect the applicable business model and this will obviously again involve changes to how services are managed. The process of management review is unlikely to be a single event or projects, but will be a theme running alongside all other reviews, with the obvious direction of further reducing our costs.

### **3.2.14 Further Efficiencies (as opportunities arise)**

As reducing net spend will be the Council's biggest priority over the coming 3-5 years, it is essential that all potential opportunities to appropriately increase income or cut spending are considered. Such opportunities may be identified by our employees, Councillors or residents and we need to be open to listening to their ideas. All employees should be encouraged to identify opportunities to make savings, increase income or improve services. A revitalised staff suggestion scheme currently under development may be one mechanism to help engage officers across the Council.

### **3.2.15 Outsourcing within the Public Sector**

Councils are actively taking matters into their own hands and setting up in competition with the private sector. LGSS (Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire) and Herefordshire and Shropshire already have trading arms that sell back-office services such as payroll and ICT to other councils.

Huntingdonshire District Council provides ICT services to East Cambridgeshire and previously ran payroll services for other public sector organisations in the district. Currently exploratory discussions are underway across many of our service areas.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Some of these potential options overlap significantly, but the reality is that doing nothing is not an option. No single one of these options will deliver a definitive model for the Council and it is likely that a combination approach will need to be employed. The Council has an emerging corporate plan which aims to set out priorities and focus activity. All our energy and resources should concentrate on achieving the priorities whilst fulfilling the Council's legal duties. Beyond that there exists a range of services that the Council may find desirable, but which alternative providers can be encouraged to provide for our communities or indeed, community resilience can be increased such that demand on our services decline.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report on Financial Forecast to 2019