

To: Value & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date: 12 September 2011

Report of: Head of Environmental Development

Title of Report: Service Reconfiguration – Forthcoming Changes to Low Priority Service Request Handling.

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To outline to the Scrutiny Committee the proposed changes to service delivery to implement the savings agreed by Council

Report Approved by: Tim Sadler, Executive Director

Policy Framework: An efficient and effective Council

Recommendation(s): To comment upon the proposed changes prior to the City Executive Board sign-off of detail in October.

Background

1. Council has approved a series of savings in response to national public sector budget reductions. One saving for the years ahead is a £162k staffing reduction in the revenue budget for Environmental Development, phased over the 3 years 2012/13 to 2014/15. This saving will give rise to a service reconfiguration which will affect the handling of low priority service requests.

Service Request Prioritisation

2. The attached table sets out the services provided by Environmental Development and these are colour coded, either in green, orange or yellow. Green refers to the category of call which will be unaffected by these changes, whereas the orange category (the low priority) will be subject to change. The yellow refers to optimal services which are not currently provided but are shown for completeness of the table.

3. It can be seen from the table that the low priority service requests relate to matters that are not statutory duties for the Council and, on which the Council therefore has no obligation to intervene and in some cases no locus to become involved. Many other councils do not provide these discretionary services and Council has decided that in response to the budget pressures we need to minimise expenditure on these areas.
4. Medium and high priority service requests will continue to receive the same response as is presently delivered. These include calls about protecting the environment and people from significant forms of pollution, safeguarding health and safety via mechanisms including licensing, ensuring food is safe, that infectious disease is contained, that essential repairs and improvements are made to homes, businesses and places of work; and ensuring public health burials are properly arranged. Likewise, calls about loans and grant aid to ensure essential repair, or arrange aids and adaptations for disabled applicants, will continue to receive a full response.
5. In addition, programmes that greatly contribute to the Council's corporate priorities, such as internal carbon management, energy resource management, Low Carbon Oxford and flooding are similarly protected.

Planned Changes

6. Low priority service requests will continue to receive a response but this will be delivered by Customer Services as part of the Customer Relations Management regime (CRM). This response will be limited to advice, guidance and referral. In many instances, in practice the service will be similar to the front end service currently provided by Environmental Development, though in some cases there will be a service reduction in terms of specific individual attention that enquirers currently receive.
7. The attached diagrams compare two typical low priority service requests as handled by the current system and as planned following the change.

Achieving the Saving

8. Service requests fluctuate from month to month but there has been an overall approximate 4% rise in the number of service requests received in the last two years. At present over 70,000 service requests per annum in total are handled by Environmental Development.
9. In a typical year, around 14-15,000 service requests are low priority and to process these equates on average to 4 full time officer posts. Deletion of these 4 posts will provide the saving of £162k.

Impact of the Saving

10. Since this affects future service users and the nature of their calls is as yet unknown, the impact cannot be easily defined. However, based upon previous experience and assuming a similar distribution of calls to the last year, it is probable there will be three categories of impact.
11. In the first category, will be callers who experience little change in the actual service and therefore minimal impact. The second category will be where callers need to make private arrangements or take private action to secure the outcomes that would have been delivered by the Council and in this category the impact will be limited to the time and costs involved. Finally, in the third category there may be a minority of cases where the service user does not have the time nor the resources to resolve the problem which therefore may remain.
12. Environmental Development does not ask service users to reveal their financial standing when making a service request. The only exception to this is where means tested services are being provided and it should be noted that these are not part of the proposed changes. In view of this, it is not possible to provide any numerical analysis of probable impact upon parts of the community. An equalities impact assessment is attached.

Conclusion

13. Due to the number and diversity of service requests received, this will be a complex saving to deliver. However, officers are confident that provided all parties are clear about what services will be delivered, and this is maintained by officers and Members alike, all savings can be achieved.
14. Environmental Development will keep under review the impact of the changes. It is likely that some enquirers will be disappointed with the service and this will be tracked through the corporate complaints system and reported to Members in due course.
15. Members of Value & Performance Scrutiny may have views on the detail of where the line is drawn between services to be retained and reconfigured. In the context of the Council's budget it is important that Members understand the need to balance this to achieve the saving.

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