

## Appendix C – Directorate Plan & Budget Variation Statement

### Directorate - Resources – Summary Overview

#### Overview of Directorate:

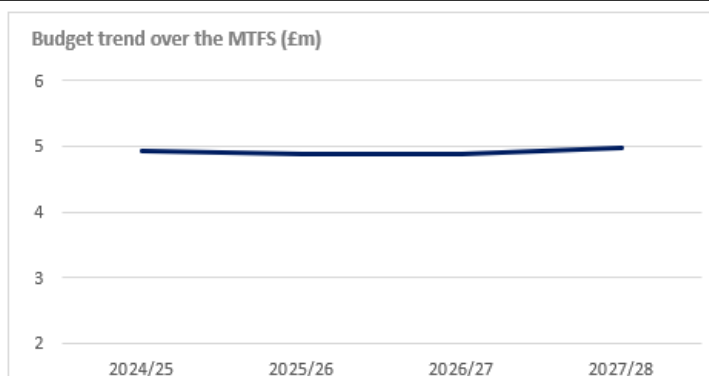
This department includes financial services encompassing financial planning and accounting, insurance, internal audit and property services. The department is responsible for transactional services including revenue and benefit services, payroll, income collection, payment of invoices, and finance systems. Alongside ICT and digital services to manage and support most of the council's business systems and drive to improve technological options for the council and its services. Whilst Human Resources and Organisational Development, and Health and Safety help deliver the Council's wider workforce strategic aims and overall service delivery.

#### Achievements / Performance

- Delivery of an enhanced budget process to facilitate the delivery of financial sustainability
- Statement of Accounts published online to statutory deadlines
- Increases in MyAccount registrations with 12,000 accounts
- 98% of customer invoices paid within 30 days of receipt
- Average customer telephone calls received 2,864
- Time taken to process new benefit claims is 30 days
- Average sick days lost per employee is 2.32 up to quarter 2 in 2023/24
- 9% is the current vacancy level as a % of the Council's overall workforce
- Lead authority in the regional SEND Alternative Provision initiative
- Accountable body for Levelling Up Funding

#### Summary Budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Financial Services, Insurance & Director cost	1,404	1,424	1,415	1,436
Information Technology	1,444	1,457	1,452	1,479
Customer Services Team	212	212	212	212
HR, Training & Health & Safety	546	537	543	549
Revenues & Financial Support	419	410	393	393
Property Services	1,056	988	1,024	1,062
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>5,027</b>	<b>5,038</b>	<b>5,131</b>



#### Summary Subjective table

Resources	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	3,416	3,426	3,351	3,365
Premises	1,461	1,416	1,480	1,546
Transport	1	1	1	1
Supplies & Services	1,802	1,847	1,891	1,934
Third Party Payments	3,382	3,342	3,351	3,351
Income Gov Grants	(3,553)	(3,553)	(3,553)	(3,553)
Income Fees & Charger	(1,281)	(1,307)	(1,338)	(1,368)
Third Party Income	(66)	(66)	(66)	(66)
Income from Contributions	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)
Other Income	(65)	(63)	(63)	(63)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>5,027</b>	<b>5,038</b>	<b>5,131</b>

#### Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities, and enables all of the other priorities indirectly through service support:

**Tackling the Climate Emergency**

**A diverse & sustainable economy**

**Support the most vulnerable**

**Provide good public services** ✓

## Directorate – Resources – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<b>Financial Services, Insurance &amp; Director cost</b>	<b>1,404</b>	<b>1,424</b>	<b>1,415</b>	<b>1,436</b>
<p><b>Ambition:</b></p> <p>Our service ambition is to provide exceptional financial management and support to the Council, ensuring the efficient and effective use of public funds while promoting transparency and accountability.</p> <p>The Finance Team will move to a risk-based strategic approach that aims to integrate risk management principles into the overall financial operations of the Council to enhance decision-making processes and strengthen financial resilience ensuring the Council's key risks are managed appropriately. The finance function has a self-service ambition that empowers managers with the tools, information, and resources they need to pursue and achieve their service aims and objectives. Key components of such a finance function:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Risk Identification and Assessment</li> <li>2. Risk Mitigation Strategies</li> <li>3. Transparent Financial Information</li> <li>4. Self-Service Reporting and Analytics</li> <li>5. Budgeting and Planning Support</li> <li>6. Financial Skills Development</li> <li>7. Strategic Support</li> <li>8. Collaboration and Communication</li> </ol> <p>This ambition for the Finance Function will be one that supports managers to self-service enabling managers to take ownership of their financial goals and make informed decisions. It promotes a culture of financial accountability, fosters innovation, and empowers managers to drive their own success while ensuring the Council's financial health is maintained / or improved. This coupled with a risk-based finance function to create a strong risk governance framework that enables the Council to proactively identify, assess, and manage financial risks, will go along to ensuring long-term financial sustainability and resilience of the Council.</p> <p><b>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</b></p> <p>The Finance team will need to embed the restructure of the team, which will address the uncertainty created through the current levels of vacancies and use of interims. The impact to permanent staff members is expected to be minimal.</p> <p>The section intends to purchase Invoice Scanning Software to remove large non-value added processing. Which will compliment the review of transactional / processing activities in line with 'Enabling Services' transformation workstream actions.</p> <p>The department will complete an analysis that will confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, replace with better systems / technology / greater use of what the Council already has in place.</p> <p>Work will commence to investigate synergies between the Revenues and Benefit Team and the Finance team and see how the resources and skill sets can be used more effectively and efficiently to increase both resilience and create capacity.</p>				
<b>Information Technology</b>	<b>1,444</b>	<b>1,457</b>	<b>1,452</b>	<b>1,479</b>
<p><b>Ambition:</b></p> <p>Our main ambition will be to maintain the overall quality of the IT Infrastructure and to support the organisation operating within a hybrid environment.</p> <p>We will look to reduce our reactive support operations by improving self-service, creating a service catalogue to define what service we offer, improving our monitoring and alerting to reduce calls (where we can rectify before users are aware) and improving the overall service.</p> <p>We will continue to develop digital solutions to enable external customers to access our services including improving MyAccount.</p> <p><b>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</b></p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<p>We will improve the ability for service users to self-serve and to reduce reactive support led demand on the service. This approach will be developed and embedded in the first two years with the target to achieve cashable savings in the final two years of this strategy.</p> <p>Some costs are directly related to overall headcount, for instance a 10% reduction in headcount should allow the number of Microsoft licences to fall by a similar amount (ignoring inflation). Reduction in headcount is also likely to reduce hardware costs around laptops and mobile phones as IT will have more equipment to redistribute to those in most need.</p> <p>We are expecting to reduce the costs on new contracts, eg in printers and telephony alongside cost savings from a review of the data connections and alternative ways of connecting key assets. There are opportunities to review data connections and to release costs when the PSN network is closed following a delay into 2024/25.</p> <p>There are limited opportunities for further application rationalisation however these will be explored. Opportunities to explore opensource software for core IT software will be undertaken, for instance help desk software and log management with businesses cases developed as part of approval governance.</p>				
<b>Customer Services Team</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>212</b>
<p><b>Ambition:</b></p> <p>The ambition for customer services is that we will grow the team such that the team will take the vast majority of the call across all services. This will allow the front office to be freed up from taking customer interactions and to concentrate on their service delivery.</p> <p>Our ambition is to adopt tiers of service requests so the central customer services can deal with transactional requests and less complex enquiries from residents, and only escalate to the back office the most complex cases. This will mean we reduce the demand into the back office by a tirage operation within customer services.</p> <p>We will use CRM technology to take all external customer interactions across telephony, face-to-face, emails, web-forms, MyAccount, video calls. These will be managed as cases by customer services and where there is a level of complexity will operate as a case manager for the lifetime of the service request. Technology will be used to improve digital journeys for residents and to reduce costs of delivering service in the back office. Where we will improve the options for customers to go online and make service request and be able to then track this call using a different channel.</p> <p><b>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</b></p> <p>We will continue to provide a face to face service at Catmose with a floor walker to help ensure a good customer service is offered, whilst committing to the self-service principle. We will remove the lunchtime closing introduced over Covid. We will review our opening hours across all channels and will consider how to best structure these hours, for instance considering the balance between opening hours for face to face - perhaps mornings we offer and enhanced floorwalker service - and potentially leveraging our hybrid working to extend hours for web chat into some evenings.</p> <p>To support this we will grow the use of Salesforce within the team and within service areas. This will allow one key system to store all customer interactions with updates on progress on service requests being updated by the back office.</p>				
<b>Property Services</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>988</b>	<b>1,024</b>	<b>1,062</b>
<p><b>Ambition:</b></p> <p>Principle ambition is to align business and property asset strategies, ensuring the optimisation of the organisation's property assets in a way which best supports key business goals and objectives such that property assets that are fit for purpose and capable of delivering services and activities required.</p> <p>To manage property to support the Council's objectives and priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimising the operation and long-term cost of the Council's estate</li> </ul>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing Value for Money by using Council resources wisely and having the required information to make robust and informed decisions for example developing a planned maintenance approach</li> <li>• Supporting the delivery of services through assets that add value and enhance modern ways of working</li> <li>• Considering the impact of sustainability in all decisions, making buildings as sustainable as possible and considering the impact of our carbon footprint</li> <li>• Taking a dynamic approach to asset management including retention, repurposing and disposal</li> <li>• Working with Partners to maximise opportunities and consider the transfer of services / assets to Town and Parish Councils and others</li> <li>• Embedding a Corporate Landlord Model</li> <li>• Having assets that are fit for purpose</li> </ul> <p><b>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</b></p> <p>This ambition can be achieved subject to the overarching Asset Review business cases decisions being approved and delivered. It is anticipated that front-loading of capacity and capability to achieve the outcomes of Asset Review. This can be achieved by a combination of interim staffing and / or consultants. Indicative delivery programme not known at time of writing but will be five years plus.</p> <p>As the Asset Review programme concludes, it is feasible to plan for reductions through more effective use of third parties for activities currently completed in-house subject to assessment over the value for money proposition. There will still be a need to maintain a suitably qualified / experienced in-house team to complete certain activities, act as Corporate Landlord and as Intelligent Client. Business cases will be required to quantify and ensure that savings are derived, with the expectation that it is likely to be cheaper to out-source some activities to specialists rather than deliver in-house.</p> <p>The Council's current assets are largely older buildings, with several services delivered out of inadequate or converted spaces. Many are listed and through achievement of past saving plans planned maintenance has been reduced. Delivery of the Asset Review transformation workstream aims to result in lower asset running costs.</p>				
<b>HR &amp; Organisational Development, Health &amp; Safety</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>549</b>
<p><b>Ambition:</b></p> <p>Our ambition is to create a culture of excellence, innovation, and collaboration. Activities of the team will support the strategic goals of the Council by supporting the attraction, development, and retention of the best talent, fostering a positive work environment, and enhancing employee engagement. The ambition is to be a strategic partner to the business, providing expert advice and guidance on all aspects of people management, performance, learning and development, diversity and inclusion, and employee engagement. The function also aims to be a leader in best practices, benchmarking, and continuous improvement, leveraging data and technology to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. By achieving this ambition, the function will contribute to the Council's success and sustainability in a competitive and dynamic environment.</p> <p><b>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</b></p> <p>In line with the transformational workstream we will complete the review of transactional / processing activities. This will confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, replace with better systems, technologies, and greater use of existing systems and technologies.</p> <p>We will investment in technology, following a review with ICT of all HR digital systems and identify opportunities for synergies, for example link between the recruitment, financial and learning platform systems. Investment in interfaces is expected as part of this work. Success of this work will be the achievement of a reduction, and / or shift in processing and transactional tasks which is anticipated to create a saving towards the end of 2024/25 with further cashable savings expected in the final two years of this strategy.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<b>Revenues &amp; Financial Support</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>393</b>

**Ambition:**

As the Revenues and Benefit Service we will provide a more cost-effective service in this vital part of the Council's operations. The function collects and manages the income that the Council needs to provide essential services, such as council tax, business rates and other debts. It administers and delivers welfare support to the people who live in the County, such as housing benefit, council tax support and discretionary housing support. The service aims to provide a fair, efficient and customer-focused service that meets the needs of the Council its residents and businesses.

**What are we doing over to meet this ambition:**

**Local Taxes-** we will aim to increase online self-service forms to increase to be 90% of all transactions over the period. The use of technology such as with Chatbot and AI would be used to answer 90% of all enquires with Customer Service to respond to remainder which are more complex and require specific tailored advice. Increased use of the Council's My Account alongside promotion of e-billing will help create efficiencies in how customers can interact with the Council and decrease the time required to respond to queries. e.g. recovery action, Direct Debit processing and complex enquires, complaints, appeals and statutory returns. Simplification/reduction of discretionary reliefs.

**Benefits-** We will aim to increase online self-service forms to increase to 80% for all claims and change in circumstances over the period. As with the above the use of technology such as with Chatbot and AI would be used to answer 60% of all enquires with Customer Service to respond to remainder which are more complex and require specific tailored advice. Increased use of the Council's My Account alongside 90% take up for e-notifications (replacing paper versions) will help generate efficiencies in service delivery. This approach will enable a core team to manage our existing document management system (DIP and Workflow), traditional access channels for customers who are unable to use self-service and to administer back office work that sits outside of self-service and to administer work from Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) e.g. Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative (HBAA), Verification of Earning and Pensions (VEP), Automated Transfer to Local Authority systems (ATLAS), Universal Credit (UC), complex enquiries, complaints, appeals and statutory returns. A Review of the Local Council Tax Support scheme, including the use of discretionary funds, will be completed to simplify and reduce / remove administrative tasks that add costs to the system.

**Community Care Finance-** the existing policy will be reviewed and updated to clarify and create self-assessment opportunities to reduce back-office processing. This is anticipated to enable the introduction of self service for 90% of all service users over the period. Efficiencies are expected through greater working and sharing of skills sets with the finance function which will enable a reduction in resources following the embedding of new ways of working. Consideration will be given on the best management arrangement to enable an alignment of with the assessments and management / control of budgets.

**Deputyship and appointeeship** -a business case will be developed which looks at the cost / benefits of alternative service delivery for the cases presented to the Council. This task will assess the application of criteria for the Council to be responsible for any new deputyship cases to keep level to under a target level of cases.

## Directorate - Resources – Variation Statement

Ref	Resources Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<b>2023/24 budget</b>					
RE001	2023/24 Budget	4,990	4,990	4,990	4,990
<b>Previous MTFS budget adjustment</b>					
RO001	Service Adjustments	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)
RO003	Inflation allocation	94	172	261	354
RO004	2023/24 Pay Award	152	152	152	152
<b>Service Investment</b>					
RP001	Increase resources in the HR & OD team to add capacity for organisational development, employee health and well being initiative	27	27	27	27
RP002	Increased cost of using technology to lead to savings in processing and administration of tasks across the Resources functions.	8	39	48	48
<b>Savings</b>					
RS001	Implementation of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will review transactional and processing activities. Support to the wider Council will adopt an approach to confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, and / or replace with better systems, technology, and greater use existing functionality. Consideration to alternative service delivery methods included in approach.	(53)	(65)	(151)	(151)
RS002	Procurement of new contracts across in ICT & digital function with some minor system savings.	(62)	(74)	(74)	(74)
RS007	Insurance Contract retender savings	(35)	(35)	(35)	(35)
RS009	Review effectiveness of subscriptions to keep only those that add value to the operations, technical and professional advice and support continuing professional development	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)
RS011	Opportunities following the review Local Council Tax Support scheme	0	(40)	(40)	(40)
RS018	Full cost recovery of professional support services in delivery of Council activities which are grant funded	(22)	(20)	(20)	(20)
RS019	Savings from the repurposing of an asset in association with the Levelling Up Fund schemes	0	(40)	(40)	(40)
RS020	Reduction in maintenance and increased income	0	(60)	(60)	(60)
<b>Investment funded from reserves</b>					
PI011	Temporary Customer Relations Manager to assist with workloads associated with the redesign Highways service	46	46	0	0
RI001	Investment in temporary resources to support the delivery of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will facilitate savings in the short to long term. Activity includes updates to Council policies, development of Council employee skill sets, implementation of systems and process reviews.	145	27	0	0
RI007	Professional support to deliver support the transformation agenda across the Council	156	156	100	100
RI009	One off investment in IT software solutions to increase efficiencies, remove burdensome administrative tasks	227	160	0	0

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Resources Budget Variation Statement</b>	<b>2024/25 £000</b>	<b>2025/26 £000</b>	<b>2026/27 £000</b>	<b>2027/28 £000</b>
RI016	Funding of the capital programme for replacement of IT end user hardware	80	80	80	0
RI019	Council wide service efficiencies pump priming	250	250	250	250
<b>Reserve funding</b>					
RF004	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(904)	(719)	(430)	(350)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>5,027</b>	<b>5,038</b>	<b>5,131</b>