

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Resources & Transformation  
**Date** 20 September 2023



## FUTURE COUNCIL 2025 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME SAVINGS UPDATE

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### KEY DECISION

#### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Members and seek agreement for changes in customer services location and opening times.
- 1.2 To inform Members of proposed changes to community advice, housing, and localities teams as part of activity-based review of services.

#### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the change of location of the customer service centre to the main reception entrance of Daneshill House be approved.
- 2.2 That the change of opening hours of customer services from 8am - 5pm to 9pm – 5pm be approved.

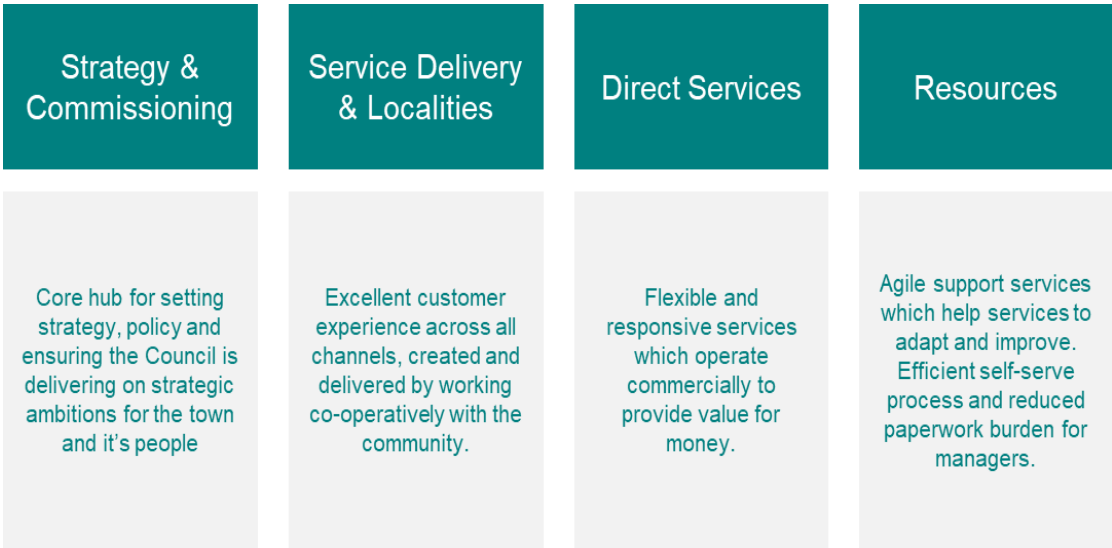
2.3 That the potential savings to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General fund in support of the medium-term financial plan be noted.

**3 BACKGROUND**

3.1 In August 2021, the Executive approved the development of a Transformation programme to improve customer experience, increase workforce productivity and organisational resilience, while supporting savings required by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

3.2 There are two main drivers for the Transformation programme: improving resident / customer satisfaction as well as supporting the Balancing the Budget strategy. In October 2022, the Executive considered a further report which provided an update on the Future Council 2025 Transformation Programme, including the approval to implement a Five-Star Customer Service programme, which responded to the key principles agreed by the Executive in August 2021.

3.3 The Transformation programme is organised into four main themes which were set out in August 2021 to help organise activities in the most efficient way and group particular skills and priorities together. The four themes are:



**Figure 1 Transformation Themes**

3.4 The changes proposed in this report are in line with the Service Delivery and Localities Theme and aims to improve customer experience across all Council teams, across the various routes and means that residents and customers engage with the Council, and the way the Council works co-operatively with the community. Given the potential benefits for customers, residents and the town, this area of work has been prioritised. In addition, this area covers the largest area of staff spend (approximately £9m).

3.5 Across the country, local government has been facing a challenging financial position after a decade of central government funding reductions and with

pressures heightened by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing inflationary pressures and the cost-of-living crisis driving up demand for services. Therefore, the focus on financial security is more important than ever to support a strong position for the Town and the Council.

3.6 The ability to identify options to reduce net spend has become ever more challenging, with a need to make annual savings to reduce the Council's cost base. The Transformation programme combines changes to processes, organisation structure, policy, culture, and technology; all these aspects need to be reviewed and redesigned, with changes implemented to each, to ensure improvements are sustainable and maintain delivery of priority services within a lower overall budget.

3.7 Through delivering sustainable transformation, the current programme aims to enable resources to continue to support the delivery of the priorities set out in the Council's corporate plan. The key drivers for the current proposed savings are:

- Deliver the Five Star customer service principles as approved in the October 2022 Executive report. See figure 2.
- Bring services and common activities together into larger multi-skilled teams to improve the handling of cases.
- Enable services to deliver savings 'year on year'.
- Deliver an efficient and high performing Customer Services.
- Improve the customer experience.
- Deliver customer expectations for an efficient and secure online transactional services and payments.
- Influence culture change and enable services to adapt to a new and reduced footprint required for the proposed new 'Civic Hub' building.

3.8 The agreed vision for the programme by the Executive is:

*'Customers are at the heart of our services. We will serve customers in a straightforward way, with resolution at the first point of contact and through the provision of easy to access online services that are so good, people prefer to use them. We will work cooperatively with residents to make sure services are designed with them.'*

### **3.9 Customer optimisation and efficiencies**

3.10 With the vision in mind, and the key drivers mentioned in paragraph 3.7 above, customers increasingly want convenient services, with access when, how and where they choose. For many this means online services which are easy to use and available "24/7".

3.11 While there has been an increase in the number of digital transactions over the past 5 years, there is opportunity to further improve the Council's online offer and the ease with which residents can access Council services rather than calling and waiting on the telephone for something they could easily do themselves online.

3.12 Any changes made need to follow the agreed Five-Star Customer Service programme is set out below in Figure 2. The programme set out actions which together will improve customer satisfaction, reduce complaints, and support savings:

**Figure 2. FIVE STAR CUSTOMER SERVICE**



3.13 Significant work has been taken to improve the customer service performance, but volume of transactions especially telephony still outstrips resources. Key to this are customers calling with topics which could be easily undertaken online e.g.

- Report an issue – abandoned vehicles, dead animal, fly posting, graffiti, fly tipping, street cleaning.
- Assisted Waste Collection

- Bulky Waste Collection
- Report a Missed Collection
- Request a New Bin
- Clinical Collections
- Find My Polling Station
- Pre-Application Submission
- Pavement Licence Application
- Report problem with a Public Toilet

3.14 To assist with these challenges customer services are currently:

- Promoting digital self-service as the preferred choice of customers and maximise the use of the Council's online service portal.
- Changing the Council's communication marketing to promote online – e.g., removing customer services numbers on refuse vehicles and promoting online services portal.
- Promoting online services and moving some services to online only. e.g., Garage lettings.
- Introducing a call forwarding service to enable customers to directly access online services when calling.
- Continuing to provide face to face and telephone services for those customers requiring digital assistance.

3.15 If the majority of customers can self-service this would give the Council the resources to deal with calls requiring personal or assisted delivery at level 2 and 3 as shown below in Figure 3.

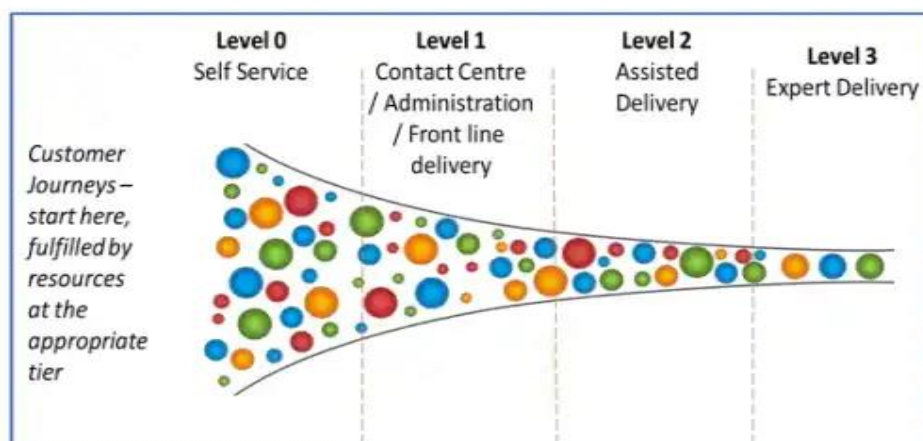


Figure 3 showing Customer Journey Pipeline

Therefore, the activities being undertaken in 3.14 will:

- Deliver customer expectations.
- Ensure the majority of type of calls in 3.13 are dealt with online by self-service, leaving high value calls to be dealt with in person by Customer Service staff.
- Deliver staff efficiencies.
- Improve the performance of the Customer Service and reduce the call answering times and abandonment rates.

3.16 Since the pandemic the number of people visiting customer services 'in person' has fallen from on average 78 customers a day in Q1 2019 to 7 in Q1 2023, a 90% reduction in the daily average 'in person' visits. The existing space is now oversized for the number of visitors and customers coming into the centre. Another costly and confusing issue for the customer is that there are two entrances to Daneshill House. With reduced numbers coming into the centre this is the right time to change our service offering as customers habits and behaviours have changed.

3.17 It is therefore proposed that the existing customer contact centre is closed and the main entrance of Daneshill House is utilised as the customer contact centre (see figure 4 below) with the corresponding back-office layout on the ground floor of the atrium to house customer service staff and specialist duty officers. Citizen Advice reception would also move across. Not only will this save money it will be a more workable space to meet customers, save costs for security, improve customer experience, and expedite customer queries. The existing drinks dispensing unit will be relocated and the TV repurposed and used for promoting Council services and providing information.

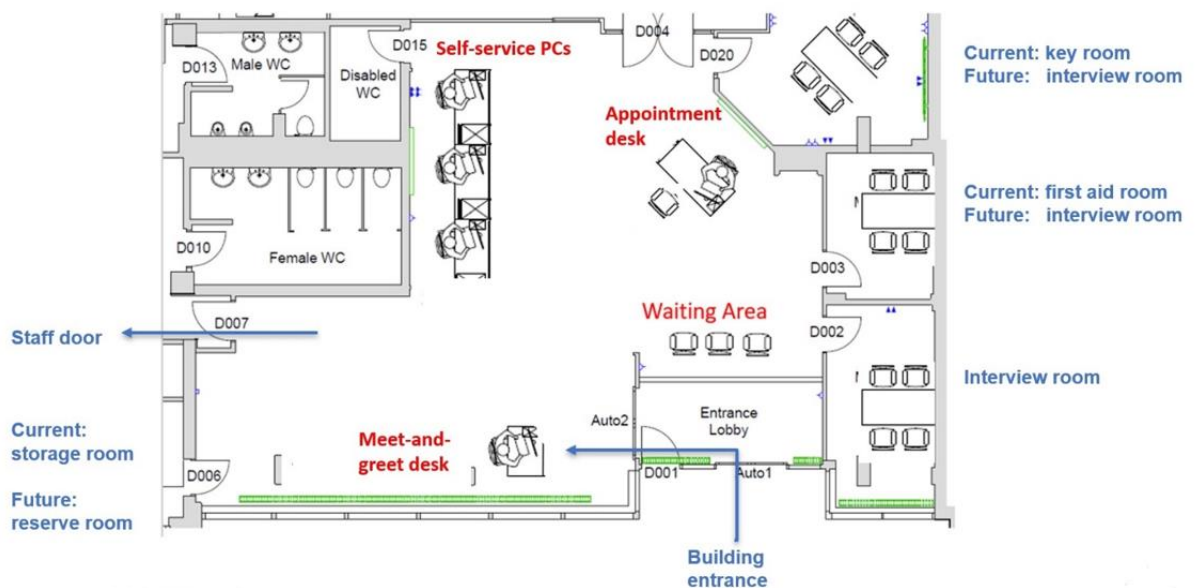


Figure 4 showing new Customer Services entrance at Daneshill House

- 3.18 In addition to the proposed move there is an opportunity to bring in line the Customer Services opening hours in line with neighbouring councils and reduce the need for two staffing shifts to deliver the 8am-5pm opening times. The proposed opening times will be 9am-5pm for both in person and telephones.
- 3.19 The combination of customers self-serving, moving to one entrance and reducing to one shift for 9am-5pm opening hours will deliver £200k of savings split between the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund. The changes are expected to be achieved through a combination of re-aligning staff workloads and reducing the number of staff in Customer Services teams through natural attrition which will reduce the need for potential redundancies.

### **3.20 Space utilisation in Daneshill House**

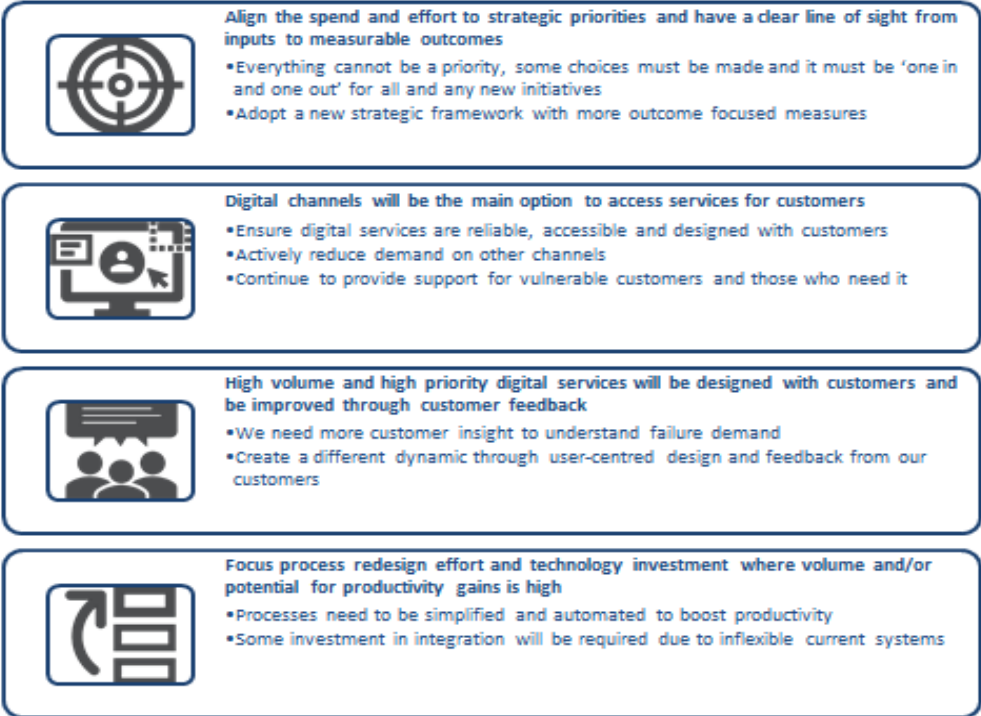
- 3.21 While using the ground floor atrium space, there will be an opportunity to co-locate teams, bringing together Customer Services with Duty Officers from a range of services and the whole of the Housing Repairs team. This will add value for customers with officers available in a timelier manner and promote collaborative working with colleagues. The Facilities Management team will also be located on the ground floor to facilitate easy access for contractors not having to go to the fourth floor.
- 3.22 By moving staff to the ground floor atrium, it will empty office floors and reduce the office space used in Daneshill House. This will enable some floors to be closed or partially closed, saving energy costs and supporting the Council's climate change agenda and Balancing the Budget plan. It also enables services to work in line with the proposed new Civic Hub building offering being considered for 2025. The key benefits to moving and space utilisation are:
- Customers have only one entrance.
  - Facilities can see contractors at the rear of building on the ground floor using a separate rear access.
  - Members of public have access to Customer Services and key services on one floor.
  - Allow SBC to test 'civic hub' ways of working and identify best practice.
  - Encourages hybrid working.
  - Bringing teams together with improved communication between key services
  - Improved security.
  - Enable cashable savings / income by freeing up CSC and office space.
  - Savings in energy costs

**3.23 Service delivery and locality model service reviews**

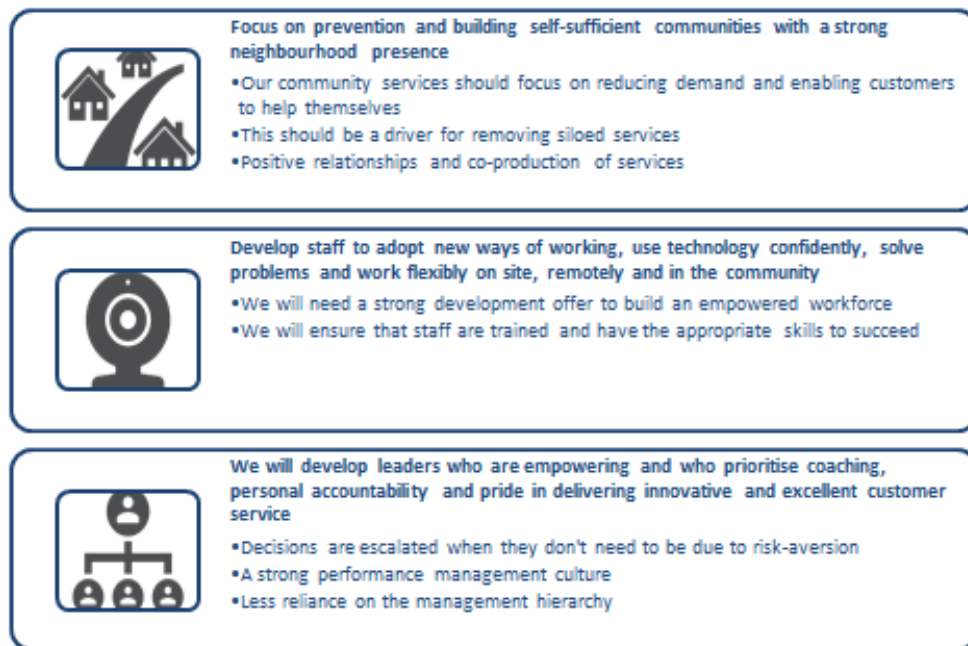
3.24 As mentioned in paragraph 3.3 the Transformation programme has been set up to review all aspects of how the Council operates to improve efficiency, enhance productivity, and ensure its resources go further towards supporting members priorities. The principles also seek to further embed the co-operative neighbourhood model, working closely with communities to help resolve problems, maintain a visible and proactive presence, and help Council teams to work effectively together. Several activity-based service reviews have taken place to look at delivering efficient services and efficiencies and include:

- **Community Advice and Support**
- **Thriving communities (Housing services and Localities)**

3.25 As part of the activity-based analysis the transformation team and staff consider individual processes by which services are created for customers and looks at how to streamline these processes, group common ones together and spot areas of waste or inefficiency. This way each individual process can be made better so that the teams improve as a whole and at the same time deliver staffing efficiencies and savings. The foundation principles underpinning the programme are outlined below in Figure 5.



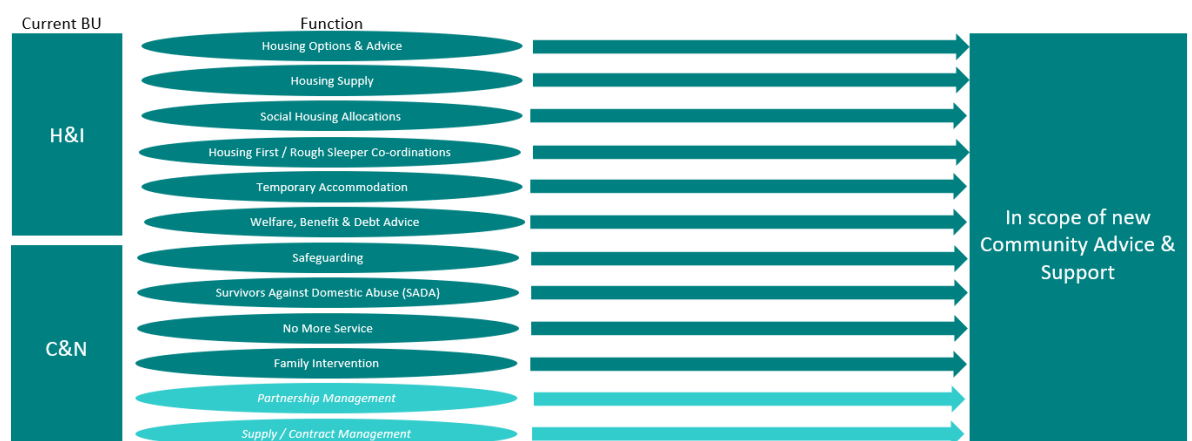




**Figure 5 Foundation Principles**

- 3.26 **Community Advice and Support** - The activity-based review of Community Advice and Support is about providing services which assist residents where they need help. The proposal recommends bringing together Community Advice and Support functions to deliver a “One Stop Shop” service area for residents that need to engage with Council officers for support and advice for wellbeing (this includes housing options and homelessness advice, domestic abuse, complex needs, and engagement with other agencies).
- 3.27 The project to create the Community Advice and Support team started in May 2023 with the initial phase of bringing the teams together by autumn 2023. Process and technology redesign is now underway together with a management review, both of which will inform the future team structure and resourcing to provide a ‘one stop shop’ service for customers who need additional advice and support, continuing the co-operative working with partner organisations and providing prompt response and action where crisis intervention is needed. Staff are directly involved in the service design.

The diagram below shows those services in scope of Community Advice & Support:

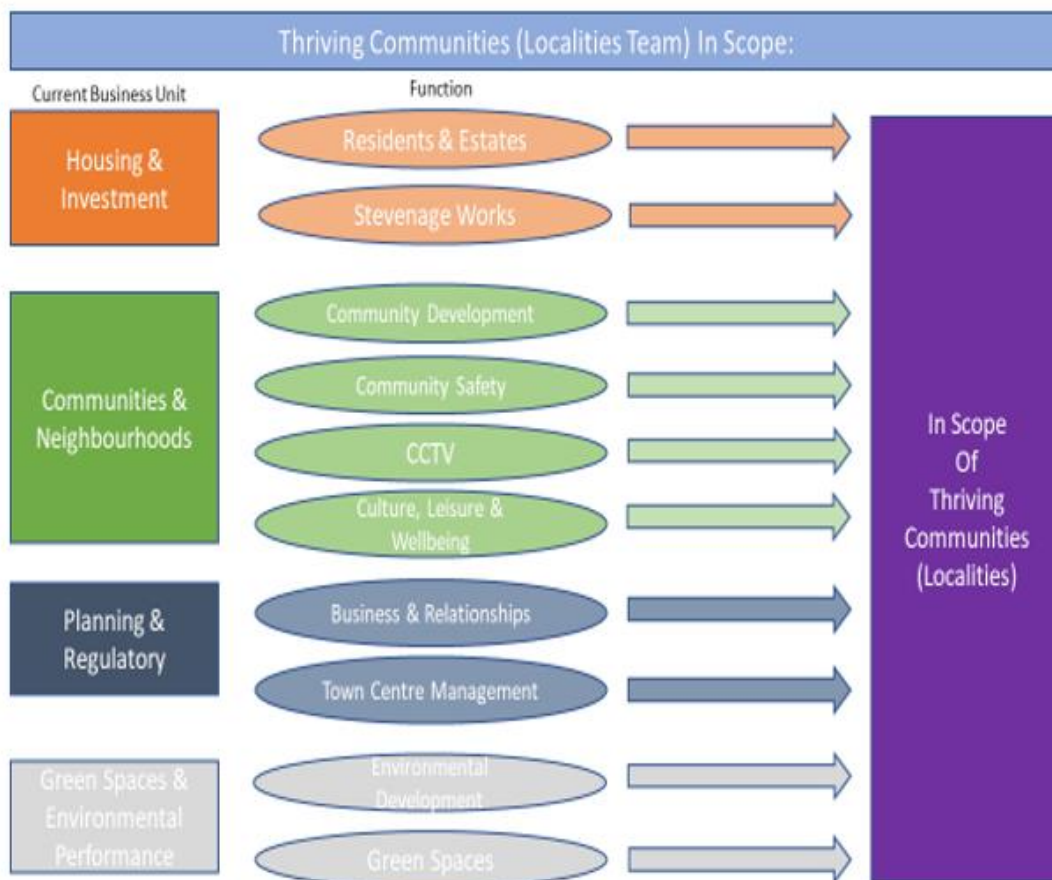


- 3.28 The Community Advice and Support grouping will be a Centre of Excellence, providing support focused on the person to avoid unnecessary hand-offs and referrals. This provides an opportunity to meet a wide range of support needs of individuals, and to focus on intervening early to support people before needs escalate, as well as helping people at points of crisis.
- 3.29 At its core will be the Council's statutory advice functions in relation to housing options, temporary accommodation, and homelessness. The functions will be supplemented by wrap-around and support functions that will be based on locally determined priorities for the town. These functions will be capable of being scaled up or scaled down depending on both need and funding (particularly external funding) available. Key customer benefits will be:
- Streamlined processes and procedures that are embedded into service delivery.
  - Customers will be signposted to the advice they need.
  - A team that is trained to be able to solve issues and concerns swiftly, supported by a management team that are forward thinking and knowledgeable.
  - Up stream prevention activity which helps customers and reduces demand on council services.
  - Clear process and pathways into services supported with specialist support plans made with customers and partner agencies.
  - Team Members will be able to support the colleagues in the hub and available to talk to customers on the phone and face to face.
  - Experts have the knowledge to be able to support the customer together with ongoing coaching and training.
  - A dedicated advice and support team will have the knowledge to be able to support customers consistently across the services.
- 3.30 **Thriving Communities (Localities).** This activity-based review is about providing services which aim to build healthier, happier, and more engaged communities for residents by working in partnership with local people, Council officers, commercial businesses and voluntary, community and social enterprises. This approach aims to increase the level of participation from a wider cohort of people with shaping Council services and local provision, and because of improved and more effective communication channels, increases customer satisfaction with the Council as services are designed in co-production.
- 3.31 The Thriving Communities (Localities) grouping will further align key officers (through structural change) into front line neighbourhood delivery teams to build upon and embed the existing Co-operative Neighbourhoods working model. It will be made up of four distinct workstreams. People, Place and

Provision will become the three service delivery areas within the Localities workstream and will be further supported by a dedicated Programme Management/Business Support team.

- People: Co-operative Neighbourhoods Residents and Estates delivery team comprising of; Housing, Community Development and Environmental and Anti-Social Behaviour Enforcement functions.
- Place: Skills, Wealth Building and Economic Development, Business Relationships and Development (including Town Centre Management)
- Provision: Health and Wellbeing, Arts and Culture, and Event Management (corporate, town centre and community event advice/guidance). This may also include certain Green Spaces Development activities.
- Programme Management will provide the fourth workstream offering specific support for all Thriving Communities key delivery functions. This will include tailored business support and a new Volunteer Co-ordinator role to bring together and strategically develop and maintain volunteering opportunities across the Council whether this is for individuals or organisations already supporting the Council such as; Community Pay Back, Green Spaces Volunteers, Waste Not Want Not.

3.32 The following services are in scope :



3.33 Key customer benefits of this review will include:

- Streamlined processes and procedures that are embedded as part of the service delivery.
- Team members will be clear and honest with customers and signpost them for advice they may need.
- Streamlining of council services and functions across Co-operative Neighbourhood teams
- A team that are trained to be able to solve issues and concerns swiftly, supported by a management team that are forward thinking and knowledgeable.
- Have management team that understand the importance of resolving concerns that are raised.
- Increased residents' satisfaction by providing a 'one front door' approach for residents and customers interacting with council services.
- Co-operative Neighbourhood Officers accessible for advice and support in specific neighbourhoods and relevant forums (resident meetings, community events etc)
- More effective referrals and a 'right first time' approach.
- Improved communication and relationships between council staff and customers because of visible, interactive Co-operative Neighbourhood teams. Working directly in specific neighbourhoods

3.34 To implement the changes the initial step will be to bring teams together. Significant work and staff led design will be undertaken to deliver the proposed teams. An Assistant Director with a portfolio of housing and community based services is being advertised to lead on these services. Key factors and considerations in this decision include:

- The Council will continue to work co-operatively with Stevenage residents, community, voluntary, social enterprise organisations, local businesses and other wider delivery partners to provide a neighbourhood level-based Localities service.
- The new service will be aligned with the development of a new Strategic Housing team, Community Advice and Support service and Customer Hub to provide one front door for customers and a 'right first time' approach to delivery.
- Better customer experience by aligning front line delivery into one team, bringing together common activities, and streamlining processes.

## 4 IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Transformation programme activities highlighted in this report will deliver savings split between Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund and will contribute to the medium-term financial plan.
- 4.2 Subject to approval of the scope, budget is in place to deliver the savings required. However, it is anticipated that further business cases may be brought forward for targeted Transformation projects as required.
- 4.3 The Balancing the Budget 2023/24 Cooperative Corporate Plan programme is used to ensure that the Council remains financially resilient whilst striving to deliver against its service and high-level ambitions across both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. The key activities highlighted in this report will maintain services with less resources whilst supporting customer service and service delivery. Balancing the Budget consists of four main streams. The graphic below sets out the process for 2023/24 onwards.



### Legal Implications

- 4.4 There are no identified direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the activity set out within this report will need to consider any resulting legal implications in consultation with the Borough Solicitor.

## Risk Implications

4.5 The key risks associated with the report are:

| Risk description (Cause / consequence)   | Mitigation  |
|--|---|
| Current performance pressures in Customer Services impact on customer satisfaction and Council's capacity for change                 | Invest in temporary adviser resources to support Customer Services through changes and to improve performance.  |
| Involvement of residents in the design of the future service model.  | Design a programme of resident engagement to seek views on the key issues to be tackled through the programme and their priorities for transformational improvements.   |
| Appropriate staff involvement and consultation   | <p>All Staff communications and engagement</p> <p>Regular staff side (unions) briefings</p> <p>Staff Transformation Champions programme is being developed to ensure changes are effectively communicated, staff are engaged and input into the changes</p> <p>Staff involvement in redesign of business processes.</p> |
| If there is insufficient ICT and digital capacity or skills, opportunities to exploit technology will not be realised.               | <p>ICT Strategy in place to deliver foundation work.</p> <p>Additional roles appointed in Digital and Web team to support online service delivery.</p> <p>Business cases for additional resource to be brought forward as required.</p> <p>Seek third party support where appropriate.</p>                              |
| If the focus of the Transformation programme is limited to structural change only it is unlikely to meet the desired benefit levels. | <p>Investment in process redesign and technology improvements.</p> <p>Appointment of temporary Service Development Leads to ensure opportunities fully considered.</p> <p>Prioritisation within services to facilitate involvement in transformation projects, process redesign and assessment of opportunities.</p>    |

## **Policy Implications**

- 4.6 There are no specific policy implications of this report. Policies related to specific service areas may be reviewed as required and decisions taken in line with the Council's scheme of delegation.

## **Climate Change Implications**

- 4.7 Moving to more digital service delivery and improving the productivity of the Council will have a positive impact on the environment and support the Council's Climate Change Strategy for example:
- Reducing the Council's and residents' reliance on paper to deliver/ access services.
  - Improving efficiency in service delivery will improve efficient use of resources (travel to work, fuel for fleet etc)

## **Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

- 4.8 It will be evident that there are potentially staffing implications in this report. The associated matters will be discussed with the Trade Unions at the earliest opportunity. Overall, the proposals will result in a reduced headcount as a result of efficiencies and restructures e.g. increased adoption of self-service tools, greater automation and reducing management layers. Redeployment of staff will be a priority.
- 4.9 The design of future structures will take into consideration the possible impacts of reduced staffing on business continuity and emergency planning.
- 4.10 It is aimed that by moving to bigger, cross-functional teams there will be greater day to day resilience than currently as more staff will be trained across several different areas.
- 4.11 Long term accommodation requirements are being considered as part of the Council's Civic Hub programme. A reduced headcount will provide greater flexibility for the Council's accommodation strategy, although this needs to be balanced against requirements of other programmes/ strategies which may see growth (e.g., Commercial). Considerations will be given to the space requirements for example more staff may need to be co-located together to support the new Service Delivery model.

## **Human Resources Implications**

- 4.12 A significant proportion of Council spend is on staffing and the Transformation programme will result in a headcount reduction over time. Where possible the approach taken will minimise the impact on staff, such as looking at options to deliver savings through staff turnover rather than redundancy. The Council's digital offering to customers will deliver efficiencies and reduced head count through natural attrition.

- 4.13 Where structural change may be needed, this will be managed in accordance with the Council's Organisational Change Policy. Our established approach is to work close with Trade Unions and staff, to plan, reduce disruption where possible, to look at suitable options for opportunities such as retraining where colleagues are impacted by change. Redeployment of staff will be a priority.
- 4.14 Future proposals will be subject to consultation with affected staff.
- 4.15 All staffing relating proposals that come forward will have an associated workforce EqIA undertaken.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 4.16 The Council has committed itself to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation, or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions. The Equality Duty and the impact of decisions on people with protected characteristics must be considered by decision makers before making relevant decisions, including budget savings.
- 4.17 Overall, there are no identified areas of discrimination for most characteristics. Under the Digital First approach, alternative options will remain available for those who require support in person or over the phone. The addition of new ways to access services online is likely to have positive impacts for those with some types of disability.
- 4.18 Equalities impact assessments for further specific changes yet to be fully scoped, will be delivered in parallel with project plans/ business cases.
- 4.19 The process used to develop the Council's budget has been designed to ensure appropriate measures are in place to ensure the impact of decisions on the community is considered as part of the decision-making process. It is officers' view that undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIAs) on the strategy is not appropriate at this stage. EqIAs will be done on individual savings proposals (when relevant) at an early stage in the budget savings process to aid decision makers in their consideration of the Equality Duty. This work is being planned into the budget setting process.

### **Service Delivery Implications**

- 4.20 The report outlines a redesign of the way Council services are delivered. The proposals are intended to strengthen the current offer and build in additional resilience into service delivery teams. The programme aims to protect service delivery by ensuring that efficiency improvements have been implemented before any headcount reduction is made.



### **Information Technology Implications**

- 4.21 A shared ICT Partnership Strategy is in place with an associated delivery programme. The strategy was reviewed by the partnership in early 2022 and considered fit for purpose to meet the requirements of SBC's transformation programme.
- 4.22 Delivery of the ICT Strategy programme will enable further transformation by providing stable foundations for technology.
- 4.23 Key systems have been procured and implemented which will enable the transformation programme including Microsoft 365, a Digital Platform, website, and Robotic Process Automation tools.
- 4.24 Further business cases for system improvements may be brought forward in due course.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e., they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

BD1      October Executive report 2022