

Environment and Neighbourhoods

Initial Budget Proposals 2013/14

The Department manages a diverse set of functions which, nevertheless, combine to form some of the key foundations of strong communities. Clean streets, well maintained green spaces which people can use, sound housing which meets people's needs, safe neighbourhoods - these are marks of desirable places to live. Some services, such as refuse collection are taken for granted but when not delivered are immediately noticed. At a time of significantly diminishing resources, priority has been given to ensure that these bedrock services are maintained.

The Department, beyond its universal duties, also serves some of the most vulnerable in the city. As well as providing advice to the many thousands in housing need, the Department supports many others to sustain their tenancies. The department intervenes in the private sector to tackle some of the worst housing conditions in the city. Through close working with the police and health service, services are commissioned to help people leave a life of drug dependency.

There is also a longer term agenda. Work to improve and add to the city's housing stock has importance for many years to come, as do the environmental choices we make today.

The Key Outcomes

Based on the above, the Department has a number of key priorities which the budget is designed to support. They are as following:

- preventing homelessness;
- improving the quality of private sector housing
- reducing crime and anti social behaviour.
- reducing fuel poverty and providing sustainable energy
- Providing a reliable refuse and recycling service
- minimising the amount of waste that ends up in landfill by promoting reuse and recycling;
- clean neighbourhoods, reflecting local needs;
- green spaces which people can enjoy

To achieve these outcomes, the budget brings forward proposals clustered around a number of key themes which are detailed below:

Stopping services or subsidies which don't support social need

At a time when the Council is hard pressed to deliver services, the Council has to prioritise. This budget contains a number of proposals to stop or eliminate subsidy where there is no strong case of social need being met.

It is proposed to end the subsidisation of bereavement charges. The Council provides cremation and burial services at a loss to everyone in the city, regardless of

income and increases in charges will seek to remove the subsidisation for these services over a period of three years. Hardship grants are available to those in financial need.

A review of Bowling Greens in 2010 identified that the cost of Bowling Greens to the Council equates to a subsidy of £133 per bowler and that Leeds had more bowling greens than any other core city. As a result, a number of options are being explored that aim to reduce the overall cost of bowling to the Council. Some parks have multiple greens, which enables the Council to consolidate without affecting access. Other options under consideration include the transfer of ongoing bowling green maintenance to some of the existing bowling clubs with a high number of active members. Support will be given to clubs who are not in a position to sustain bowling greens themselves.

The Parks and Countryside service runs 97 allotment sites in Leeds at a cost of £175k. Income from allotment holders generates £45k. At present the rental charge for a full plot is £37 per annum for a full plot (£53 with water supply). Allotment gardening is very popular and there is a huge demand for plots and waiting lists have to be managed for many of the allotment sites. It is proposed that charges to allotment tenants and organizing committees are reviewed with the aim to eliminate the subsidy on this service, thereby saving the Council £130k

It is proposed to close Middleton Park and Gotts Park golf courses. Both courses run at a loss and the numbers using them continue to decline. There is no evidence that those who use the courses would be unable to access other facilities in the city. The explosion in golf provision has brought down the cost of golf significantly and ensured places to play across the city. Middleton golf course is adjacent to another private course and there are other nearby alternatives to Gotts Parks. Returning the golf courses to parkland will achieve savings and also open up large areas of land to general public usage.

Increasing numbers of commercial companies are accessing Household Waste Sites across the City for the illegitimate disposal of commercial waste. As a result Leeds City Council is currently subsidising these businesses by paying for the disposal of their waste. It is therefore proposed for Leeds to adopt the position taken by many other Local Authorities and enforce a ban on the acceptance of commercial waste at all Household Waste sites, by directing marked commercial vans to Kirkstall Road and East Leeds, where appropriate arrangements exist to facilitate charging businesses for the disposal of their waste.

Ending Duplication

The budget proposals contain a number of proposals to consolidate work within the Authority to avoid duplication of effort.

The cessation of the Supporting People ring fence facilitates the transfer of half of this budget to Adult Social Care. Not only are they best placed to deliver efficiencies but it allows the services to be commissioned from one place which creates a better overview of the whole activity.

The provision of the housing management function, currently provided by the ALMOs, is under review. Regardless of the outcome of this review, it is proposed that resources that deal with improving the environment within both the ALMOs and Environmental Action are combined. Not only will this deliver an enhanced service that is responsible for the environmental wellbeing of areas, but it would also clarify responsibilities and accountability for service delivery as well as realising efficiencies.

Working in Partnership

The cost of the Environmental Health function will be reduced through a combination of reviewing the level of resources required to delivery statutory requirements and progressing proposals to work more closely with other West Yorkshire Authorities in the delivery of statutory responsibilities.

A reduction in the amount of waste that is collected by the bulky waste service and then land filled will be targeted. In order to achieve this it is proposed to work more closely with Third Sector organisations to recycle and re-use more of the items that are collected. In addition options to determine an appropriate charging arrangement for the collection of bulky household items is to be developed.

Utilising external funding to support energy efficiency. There is also the opportunity to tackle carbon reduction, reduce fuel poverty and provide an income stream to the Council through renewables.

Income generation

Within the Parks and Countryside service it is proposed to increase the level of income receivable thorough trading activity. Through increased marketing it will seek to sell its expertise in landscape contract management, forestry, sponsorship, Rights of way and natural habitat management primarily to other public sector bodies as well as continuing to develop the expansion of its nursery business activities.

Following the receipt of the Car Parking review report at Executive Board in September 2012, a consultation exercise is now underway. In the context of this review, proposals are being developed around a charging policy for Sunday parking in the City Centre along with the extension of evening car parking charges to cover all off street car parks as well as on street parking.

In 2011/12 CCTV and Security functions were consolidated within the Community Safety service. In addition to the realisation of efficiencies that have already been delivered by this action, further cost savings can derive by aiming to consolidate responsibility within Community Safety for the management of this type of activity council wide. The service will also seek to expand by engaging with both public and private sector organisations with a view to providing them with both security and CCTV related functions.

Innovation

In September 2012 Executive Board received a report with set out as series of proposals to increase the supply of affordable housing in the City. In order to progress this objective an allocation of New Homes Bonus will be used to resource a staffing structure that will deliver on the targeted level of increases to the housing stock in the City and the consequential increases in Council Tax and New Homes Bonus receivable. In the past twelve months the amount receivable as new Homes Bonus will increase as a result of 1024 successful interventions which has reduced the number of empty properties in the City..

It is proposed to implement alternate week collection of recyclable and residual waste citywide. By March 2014, this enhanced service for the collection of recyclables will have been rolled out to 150k or 44% of properties in Leeds. Further rollouts will occur in the following financial year with the intention that 80% of households will ultimately be in receipt of this service. Not only will this development lead towards a reduction in the Council's waste disposal costs but it will also contribute towards increasing the overall level of recycling across the City.

Other

It is anticipated that the retendering of recycling contracts in respect of the contents of the green bin, along with separate glass and textiles contracts, will continue to deliver further procurement savings.

Charges to the Housing Revenue Account will increase to more accurately reflect the cost of maintenance and landscaping work at recreation areas on Council estates, activity levels in respect of the nuisance service and the level of support that is required to ensure that vulnerable adults can continue to live in their own homes.