Support Services Review
Aim and Scope

1.   Aim of the Review

1.1   The aim of the review is to:

(a)   Identify the level of support services required to meet the Council's needs;

(b)   achieve the most effective and efficient arrangements for procuring (externally, internally or both) the support services needed by the Council;

(c)   ensure that services make the most effective and efficient use of support services;

(d)   ensure that support services are deployed as effectively as possible;

(e)   ensure that arrangements for accounting for support services support, rather than conflict with, the above aims.

1.2   It is further intended that the review will:

(a)   develop an overall strategic view of how the organisation's support services contribute to the achievement of the Council's corporate plan;

(b)   apply the template provided by the Gershon Review of efficiency in public services, and form part of the authority's response to that review.

2.   Constraints on the review/Exclusions

2.1   It is intended that the review will consider whether or not the Council makes best use of its existing IT investment, and whether planned developments provide scope for greater efficiency. It is not envisaged, however, that the review will recommend major overhaul of the Council's IT systems as this will lead to unacceptable delay in implementation. Minor modifications may, however, be recommended.

2.2   Local Taxation and Benefits services will be excluded from the review - it is anticipated that these may (in due course) need to be considered as a separate strand of the authority's response to Gershon, but this is as yet unknown.

3.   Services within the Review

3.1   The proposed scope closely follows Gershon's definition of back office functions in the public sector. It includes the following services, whether provided centrally or departmentally at present; and whether or not included in internal trading arrangements:

(a)   Finance (including fundraising);

(b)   Human resources (including equalities; health and safety; and training);

(c)   ICT;

(d)   Legal Services;

(e)   Procurement of works, supplies and services; including project management. (This could extend as far as care commissioning, commissioning of housing repairs, stock functions, construction procurement, and letting of road contracts);

(f)   Facilities Management;

(g)   Property Services (unless already covered between procurement services and facilities management);

(h)   Marketing & Communications (including any sale outlets);

(i)   General administrative functions;

(j)   Policy and performance functions.

3.2   It is stressed that the above categories do not in any way imply groupings of services that will be considered separately - they merely state what the review includes. It is not, for instance, implied that equalities is merely a sub-set of HR.

4.   Process

4.1   It is proposed that the review will undertake the following.

4.2   Initially, it will be necessary to identify in detail which functions (central & departmental) are included within the scope of the review.

4.3   A process mapping exercise will be carried out, identifying precisely what each function/section does, fitting this into a larger organisational model. The full costs of each function (central and departmental) will be identified.

4.4   Any functions which are "non core", i.e., which do not directly support core front line services, will be identified.

4.5   Each function will be analysed, and subdivided into three elements (this is drawn directly from Gershon):

(a)   the "corporate core", which is responsible for setting high level policies and procedures (and monitoring their application);

(b)   "Core expertise", which is responsible for the active management of key strategic functions, where the focus ought to be on delivering a professional service which enhances the

efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation as a whole (e.g. specialist advice to managers, management of sickness absence, or strategic sourcing of goods and services);

(c) "Transactional Support Services" – processes such as invoice raising, which are replicated across the Council.

4.6 On completion of the above, the following will be considered, with a view to delivering efficiencies:

(a) reviewing and stream-lining corporate policies and procedures, with a view to providing standardised policies that will work across the whole organisation;

(b) standardising and simplifying the way transactional support services are carried out;

(c) identifying the extent to which the corporate core and core expertise elements benefit from professionally qualified support, and the extent to which they ought to;

(d) assessing the contribution made by the corporate core to the needs of the Council;

(e) considering the way in which there is scope to benefit from changes in the way we use our existing IT infrastructure, or IT developments which are already planned. New IT developments may be considered (and indeed some existing IT plans may change), but only to the extent that these do not prevent early implementation of the review. Such consideration will include the extent to which the internet and similar technologies enable service users to carry out direct input to Council systems themselves.

4.7 The following assumptions will then be tested:

(a) the hypothesis that the corporate core should be located centrally, streamlined as appropriate, reporting to a head of profession;

(b) the hypothesis that transactional support services provided in more than one department can be consolidated into one place;

(c) the presumption that non-core functions should cease to be carried out.

4.8 It will then be necessary to consider:

(a) the appropriate location of core expertise functions – these will either be departmental or central, and the likely answer will depend on the nature of the function itself;

(b) any gaps within the corporate core or core expertise role (Gershon, for instance, believes there is inadequate professional support to procurement in public services);

(c) standardised roles for heads of profession, defining their relationship with devolved staff, and their responsibilities for procuring the service (including any externalised elements);

(d) whether the present trading basis of some support services remains appropriate.

4.9 This will lead to subsequent consideration of:

(a) whether there is scope for efficiencies by outsourcing transactional support services, or sharing these with other local authorities;

(b) the appropriate size, structure and staffing complements of other functions.

5. Professionalisation

5.1 It has been noted above that the review will consider the extent of professionalisation of support services, and a mixed picture is expected to emerge. As part of the latter stages of the review, it is intended that job descriptions and person specifications of professional and technical support staff providing functions which exist in more than one department will be reviewed, with a view to:

(a) ensuring that the employer is unambiguously the Council, not the department; enabling the Council to deploy staff flexibly to meet the needs of the service;

(b) creating common job descriptions for common jobs;

(c) creating a common career grade within each profession;

(d) standardising training and development processes, including succession planning and promotion opportunities.

6. Timescale

6.1 The following timetable is outline only, and will need to be reviewed by the project manager:

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8 November 2004	Cabinet approval
December 2004	Project manager starts
January 2005	Completion of all project initiation documents, detailed timescale, identification of all functions within the scope of the review
May 2005	Completion of process mapping
July 2005	Completion of analysis phase of review, initiation of any organisational review
November 2005	Final proposals to Cabinet

7. Overlapping Work

7.1 The review will impact on a number of other reviews, either already in train or in their formative stages. We need to ensure compatibility with:

(a) the procurement efficiency review – in effect, it will cover the transactional side of this work, and it may be best if the procurement review continues to do this. However this is managed, it is envisaged that the procedural analysis to enable the implementation of e-procurement will be undertaken;

(b) work we have just launched to seek to streamline the Council's policies and procedures into one single procedures manual;

(c) a review of Accountancy staff across departments, which has not got off the starting blocks yet. This was intended to create a common job description / common career grade, and portability of finance staff across the authority;

(d) the Payroll / HR review – in practice this review has carried out much of the work I envisage more widely, and can be seen as a good practice model for some of the work;

(e) the work of the Resource Management Systems Project Board, which will identify the Council's future resource management systems direction. I do not really see any conflict here – this review will need to take into account the changes emanating from the Support Services review, and its direction is (in the main) more forward looking;

(f) work in train to develop the customer services centre and call centre, which is a significant part of our overall approach to "transactional support services";

(g) a review of communications, including organisational responsibility for communications, which is being carried out by the Head of Communications;

(h) the information management project, which is considering document and record management and retention standards.

(i) the Legal Services Best Value improvement plan;

(j) the Property Efficiency Review, and the education premises review;

(k) the Building Schools for the Future project, in particular arrangements for services to be provided by the LEP.

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