

CABINET – 18 SEPTEMBER 2018

THEMES ARISING FROM THE COUNCIL DEBATE ON A NEW OPERATING MODEL FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 11 September 2018, Council debated proposals for a new Operating Model for Oxfordshire County Council. Decisions relating to the Operating Model are on the agenda for Cabinet on 18 September. This note summarises the key themes raised by Council during this debate for consideration by Cabinet.

Themes Arising from the Council Debate

2. Overall, Council was supportive of the case for change and noted the opportunities that members have had to understand and engage with the development programme so far.
3. Council raised issues around the following themes which are summarised here for the attention of Cabinet:

Digital access – Some members stressed the importance of considering accessibility issues, particularly for vulnerable residents and for those with various challenges with communication. Accessibility for those whose preference was on-line access was also considered. The importance of assisted digital and alternative channels was raised, including access via the library network. The importance of user testing and good system design was highlighted.

Implementation issues - Several issues were identified associated with implementation including:

- Deliverability of IT projects and the importance of strategic planning for IT systems rather than piecemeal development
- The importance of pilots and testing and the need to upgrade the Council's website
- Risk that the voluntary and community sector may not be in a position to support delivery of the pre-front door layer
- That unless the final offer is high quality and that investment is maintained, staff may find alternative ways of working and the benefits will be lost
- That implementation contracts need to incorporate clear performance indicators and exit clauses to manage risk

- Concerns that implementation needed to be fully owned by Council staff and members and that engagement of external advisors may make that less likely
- That the scale of the programme means that timescales are likely to be longer than those set out
- That the right internal team needs to be in place to manage the process and that contingency plans are in place for when things go wrong
- Questions on how the Integrated Business Centre (IBC) will interact with the new Operating Model

Impact on staff – Issues raised included the impact of redundancy on individuals, the risks of losing the knowledge of longstanding members of staff, the specific risks of loss of professional staff and the risks of major changes in staffing having an impact on positive culture. The concern was raised that managing the link between vacant posts created through staff turnover, and those at risk through the process, was not straight-forward. Members noted that it was important for business continuity to maintain key staff in key positions throughout the change. Good business continuity planning was advocated. The impact on staff morale of regular change was raised as was the importance of comprehensive staff engagement.

Finance issues – Further certainty and detail on costs and on the delivery of benefits was requested by some members. The potential additional impact of redundancy costs currently not factored into the financial model was raised. The potential for contract management and contract failure to increase costs was considered.

Oversight and Scrutiny – Members emphasised the importance of member engagement and effective scrutiny throughout the process to:

- Ensure the most effective use of resources
- Monitor and challenge timescales and the delivery of benefits
- Challenge and improve business cases
- Review performance and delivery
- Ensure member intelligence informs implementation

The development of a joint Performance Scrutiny and Audit and Governance sub-committee for this issue was discussed. A formal cross-party Member Reference Group is also being proposed.

4. Other specific points raised included:

- The risks and costs associated with contact management and the commissioner/provider split and whether these were given sufficient focus within the Business Case
- Concern that insufficient detail on prevention was given
- The use of customer service language in the documentation
- That to deliver the full benefit, digital transformation needs to focus on innovative new approaches – not simply taking existing processes and delivering them online
- Whether the potential for additional income generation identified within the Business Case was sufficiently ambitious

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