

Portfolio Holder Business Transformation and HR Work Priorities for 2011/12

- **Business Transformation**

Local government is under attack by Tory Ministers, who for ideological reasons want to dismantle local government. I believe city council services for Exeter should normally be provided by Exeter city council officers, not by the private sector or workers from other councils. However, our present structure is more than a decade old and is not fit for delivering those services in the 21st Century.

Following the restructuring of the senior management of the council and the development of a new organisational structure it is essential that we ensure that the new organisation adopts and operates efficient, cost effective and customer-led processes. This means a transformation of the way we currently operate. Proposals will be brought forward for a fundamental review of the way services operate. As Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation I will take the lead in this process. It is important that all my councillor colleagues are involved in this process, though I hope members of this committee will take a particular interest.

- **Customer Access**

To provide convenient, easy access to services there is a programme of providing 24 hour access via our website and our telephone payments service. However, there still remains a demand for customers to visit our Customer Service Centre outside of normal office hours. I have asked officers to look at options for opening the Centre on Saturday mornings. Already there have been early discussions with staff and a review is underway of current opening arrangements and costs to explore this further.

- **Housing/Council Tax Benefit**

There continues to be a growing demand for this vital service and our first priority is to continue to ensure that we provide a timely and effective service to current and future claimants. Caseload continues to grow at about 5% a year and staffing resources have not been increased yet our processing times have continued to fall.

Already there have been cuts to Housing Benefit. However, major changes have been indicated. The government's proposals for Universal Credit mean that from the autumn of 2013, only

claimants already receiving housing benefit will continue to receive this service from the Council. All new claimants will have the housing element of their benefits paid for in Universal Credit, with housing benefit being phased out over a number of years. Council Tax benefit will cease on 1 April 2013 and every council has to design it's own scheme for delivering this element of the benefit system while achieving a 10% reduction in the gross cost of the current scheme.

These are huge changes to come to terms with in a very short period of time and the proposals for council tax benefits raises significant issues of having to design a local scheme and avoid a potential huge financial risk for the council. At the present time, government has not provided the information needed to plan for these massive challenges. I will be working with officers to prepare for these changes and to bring proposals back to Members so we can start to understand the issues and challenges we face.

- **Information Technology**

No modern organisation can operate effectively without an efficient use of IT to provide service support and delivery and we have been fortunate that in previous years we have had the resources to invest in the robust systems we currently have. Things will be much more difficult in the future, yet the need for systems development will be even greater as we look to modernise and automate processes. I want to make sure that the review of the council's processes considers fully the opportunities modern communications technology offer, but that investment requires a sound business case to ensure that payback is achieved. One example of this is electronic forms which automatically process data into our back office systems.

- **Civic Centre Accommodation**

In the past two years the Council has seen its staffing reduce by some 20% and this is clear from the utilisation of office space within the Civic Centre. This provides an opportunity to review the allocation of accommodation in light of the forthcoming organisational review and I will be looking to release space which can be let to generate much needed income. Clearly, it will be helpful to have in mind where it would be most beneficial to let any surplus capacity, so I will be considering the options in the near future so that we are ready when the opportunity presents itself and nothing is done in the intervening period which might prejudice our options.

- **Procurement**

I will be spending some time in the coming months familiarising myself with the Council's procurement and Health and Safety arrangements. Procurement is an area under great pressure as resources diminish and I'm keen to review the arrangements we have in place to ensure best value. I have asked for an update on the 'Green Accord' to come to this committee in September. I am attending groups that are consulted in the health and safety process and visiting council departments where there are the greatest risks to see how our policies protect our workers.

Councillor Ian Martin
Portfolio Holder, Business Transformation and Human Resources
June 2011