

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**Report of:** Terry Huggins, Chief Executive

**To:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission

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**Subject:** Discretionary Spending at Breckland Council

**Purpose:** To indicate what functions delivered by The Council are discretionary, the approximate cost of doing so, and how important they are in terms of delivering council objectives and our resident's priorities.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- **Members note the report and discuss how this information can be used to inform future decisions regarding the focusing of Council resources**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Commission Members have asked what services The Council provides which can be deemed "discretionary". The purpose is to prompt discussion at Member and senior manager level regarding overall priorities and resource allocation.

1.2 In summer 2011 the Business Improvement Team undertook a review of all functions across The Council to establish what services can be described as:

- Statutory mandatory: we have to undertake the function by law and we have to do so in prescribed way
- Statutory power: we have to undertake the function by law but have some flexibility and freedom regarding how it is undertaken
- Discretionary: no obligation to undertake the function, and no prescription about how to do so

1.3 Appendix A outlines the results of that review, attributing proportionate costs to each service area according to the categories above, based on the 2010/11 budget.

1.4 The focus of this report is on the third of the above categories (ie. discretionary functions), thus Appendix B goes into more detail regarding each of these, ranking them in order of relevance to political priorities (using the Corporate Plan), resident priorities (using MORI survey data) and cost.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The information at both appendices was constructed via one to one conversations with service managers, alongside collection and analysis of financial data. It should be noted this information is indicative only and does not constitute a precise description of cost for each activity.

2.2 Its purpose is to prompt discussion at senior manager and Member level regarding overall priorities and resource allocation – helping inform debate – but not to drive detailed budget decisions.

2.3 A number of additional points need to be made concerning the data at both appendices:

- It is based on 2010/11 budget information (ie. pre shared management arrangements) and therefore may be out of date and equally exclude some more recent additional discretionary functions (including Business Development)
- The categories listed under section (1) were arrived at via discussion with service managers in early 2011. Given the complexity of legislation around some key areas the interpretation can be subjective – no legal advice was commissioned in producing this work
- In some cases the distinction between statutory and discretionary can be misleading, and doesn't accommodate the legal risks of not undertaking a discretionary function which may help directly or indirectly deliver a statutory function
- Appendix B uses three elements to help determine an overall weighting for each discretionary function:
  - Political priority (based on The Council's Corporate Plan) – each of the functions is scored against how well it meets the priority areas in the recently agreed Corporate Plan
  - Resident priority (based upon the last MORI survey in July 2010) – each of the functions is scored against how well it meets the issues local people have highlighted as important to them.
  - Cost (based upon the number of full time equivalents working on that particular function) – this is only a proxy for cost as it doesn't include additional spending beyond salaries. It also doesn't distinguish between salary scales. Equally where a small number of individuals may be undertaking a range of functions within a service it is difficult to precisely identify the proportion of their time specifically spent on discretionary activity. Please note also for the purposes of statistical analysis, 'cost' on Appendix B is inverted – ie. a lower cost is presented as a greater value on the graph.
- In summary, the information is indicative only and should not be considered a sophisticated tool to make decisions.

### 3. Analysis

3.1 The discretionary activities are ranked in Appendix B to give an overall score. The information at Appendix B is also presented in the table below.

3.2 A greater weighting indicates that particular discretionary service has higher relevance for political and resident priorities, and lower cost. The top three areas that fall into this category are animal dog fouling, provision of training courses for health and safety and empty homes prevention. Conversely a lower weighting indicates low relevance for political and resident priorities at higher cost. The top three areas that fall into this category are graphic design, performance management and ICT hardware and software support.

<u>Discretionary Function</u>	<u>Relative importance (Weighting)</u>
ICT Hardware and Software Support (disc applications)	6%
Performance Management	14%
Graphic Design	15%
ICT Project management and support (disc projects)	15%
Print Room	18%
Risk Management	18%
ICT Web Application Management	19%
Staff Training	21%
Central stationary and flex (central admin)	22%
Rewards and Recognition Evaluation and Award	24%
Admin support to elected members	25%
Environmental Awareness	26%
Media Enquiries	26%
Radon / air quality advice	26%

Arts Development	27%
Newspaper cutting, monitoring, logs etc	27%
Pride in Breckland	27%
Press Releases	27%
Sports Development	28%
Chairman support	28%
Member Training	29%
ICT Training	30%
Website and social media	30%
Brand maintenance	30%
Community Transport	31%
Internal communications	31%
Youth Engagement	31%
Environmental health marketing of services	32%
Home Improvement Agency	33%
Rail cards and other duties (central admin)	33%
Dog Warden Contract Management	33%
Pest Control Contract Management	33%
Contract management - grass cutting	34%
Ground maintenance strategy	35%
Pest Control	35%
Creation of publications	36%
Env Health - Project Management	36%
Pollution Control information	37%
Community Development and Match Funding	38%
Radon / air quality advice	41%
Roads - flooding – drains and gullies	41%
Delivery and promotion of events	44%
Voluntary Sector Grants	46%
Hostel Management	46%
Animal Dog Fowling	47%
Safety - health and safety - training courses	50%
Empty Home Prevention	51%

#### **4. Reasons for recommendations**

Given the caveats around the information outlined in section (2), Members of the Commission are asked to note the report and discuss whether this approach is helpful in prompting debate about Council spending.