



The Newbury Weekly News is proud to be the independent newspaper at the heart of West Berkshire and North Hampshire. We always welcome your feedback on how we can improve our service to the community.

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Council's efficiency plan could save £4m

Authority looks to transform the way it runs its business

By NIKI HINMAN
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WEST Berkshire Council leader Jeff Brooks hopes to save the authority more than £4m by transforming how the district runs its business.

The authority admits it is struggling to keep the lights on – and has recently received a £16m bailout from Government.

The Corporate Transformation Programme has been rumbling in the background for the past two years.

Much of the anticipated savings will come from jobs. But, as the leader stresses, not necessarily by reducing permanent ones.

The council employs about 1,400 people, making it one of the biggest employers in the district.

But temporary or agency workers are costly, so the council has halved the number it has from 300 to 145.

"We are trying to buy goods and services more effectively," explained Mr Brooks (Lib Dem, Thatcham West).

"Also, AI can help people do more by automating administrative tasks, leaving the worker to concentrate on key tasks."

The council's current model of providing 'business services' is being centralised to iron out an



Council leader Jeff Brooks

uneven position, where some services have little to no administrative support while others have multiple officers providing such a function, albeit with different job descriptions despite commonality of duties.

Comparable authorities have undertaken reviews of this nature and have been able to realise significant resourcing savings through minimising the use of temporary staff and deleting vacant posts due to enhanced efficiency.

They have also seen improvements in customer experience for both internal and external custom-

ers, as transactions and processes are performed more quickly and with a greater accuracy.

The council is also looking to reduce its footprint – physically and environmentally.

As a unitary authority, West Berkshire Council delivers almost 800 services to its residents.

And the council delivers services in a wide variety of corporate buildings, as well as eight libraries and more than 50 schools.

Its main corporate office at Market Street is reaching the end of its useful life.

The council is also trying to improve its planning department, and has been given grant cash to invest in making that more digital.

It is also in development of an in-depth business case for the future role of the council in local residential care provision – which has already seen suggestions that the three care homes in its control are put out to private contractors.

There is also a review of the service delivery model for home-to-school transport for almost 2,000 local young people, which costs more than £3m each year.

While a small percentage of this provision is undertaken in house and by schools, the vast majority of it is contracted out to external companies, but the costs keep increasing each year pushing already pressed council finances even more.



Freshly baked baguettes and croissants

Indulge yourself at this weekend's French market

THATCHAM residents and visitors are invited to browse a mouth-watering selection of freshly baked baguettes and croissants, artisan cheeses, saucissons and other delicacies prepared by visiting French traders.

Warm up with sizzling crêpes, hearty galettes and a variety of hot dishes.

The event is taking place on Saturday from 9am to 5pm at the Broadway.

Whether you're a gourmet connoisseur or enjoy a good pastry, this is your chance to indulge in the flavours of a true French market, right in the heart of Thatcham.

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