

Medium Term Financial Plan Initial Equality Impact Assessment of Budget Proposal 2024/25



1. The Proposal

Budget Theme:	The way we work - strategic management of our assets.
Budget reference:	TWWW02
Budget proposal 2024/25 (£):	£215,000

The following savings are included within this Theme:

Directorate Reference	Service Area	Budget Proposal	2024/25 Budget reduction
CSD08	Office Accommodation	Savings following the closure and redevelopment of Castlewood	£170,000
PD30	Property & Projects	Corporate Landlord Model: - Asset rationalisation/disposal - Income generation	£30,000
PD31	Property & Projects	Asset Decarbonisation	£15,000
Total			£215,000

Theme Narrative:

Activity to ensure that the council maximises the value from the assets it holds, which includes focussing efforts on investing in assets that support service delivery, reducing our carbon impact and energy costs as well as the divestment of assets no longer required.

Summary of changes:

<p>CSD08 - Office Accommodation Savings following the closure and redevelopment of Castlewood.</p> <p>This proposal relates to the transitioned closure of Castlewood in Clevedon as part of the council's core office accommodation, in particular the transition arrangements where areas of the building will be closed off to reduce costs when staff have moved into the Town Hall. The saving will increase in future years.</p>
<p>PD30 – Property & Projects Corporate Landlord Model: - Asset rationalisation/disposal - Income generation</p> <p>This proposal relates to the way in which the council manages its assets, ensuring they are fit for purpose in delivering services, maximising rental income and including centralisation of functions and recharging to other areas of the council and third parties.</p>
<p>PD31- Property & Projects Asset Decarbonisation</p> <p>This proposal relates to savings released from property and project budgets because of work to decarbonise our assets.</p>

Is any of the proposals within this theme a continuation of a previous medium-term financial plan saving?

Yes **No**

If yes, please insert reference number and year of assessment?

3. Explanation of customer impact

Please describe the reasons for the impact level in the table above. Please describe both positive and negative impacts.

CSD08 - Office Accommodation

A full EIA has been completed of the proposed changes to Castlewood. It identified the following potential impacts for NSC staff:

Disability – For those who may have specific IT and furniture needs in flexible office space/home; all office areas accessible; plans are in place to ensure quiet space is available, anchored desks for those with accessible equipment will continue to be provided.

Sex – Women are more likely to have caring/school run responsibilities – our flexible workstyles offer more opportunities to manage work/life balance. People who are pregnant are likely to have more flexibility to be able to work from home. An Infant Feeding Room is being built in the Town Hall Gateway which will assist those returning to work whilst feeding/expressing milk.

Additional gender-neutral toilet facilities are also being planned for the refurbishment of the town hall.

Low income - People on lower incomes may be less supportive of hybrid working. The cost of utility bills working from home may be more expensive than the commute to work for some. Those who live closer to Clevedon will be adversely affected. They may be less likely to own a car/afford travel. We will continue to offer flexibility at work for those experiencing financial difficulty.

Age – There is a potential negative impact for younger people who live close to Clevedon who may find it more difficult to travel to Weston as they tend to have a higher preference for working in the office. If they find it more difficult or too expensive to travel to Weston and have a mobile/flexible workstyle, they may decide to work at home more.

Faith and Belief – a positive impact as there is no multi faith room in Castlewood but a new facility is being built in the Town Hall.

Carers/parents - may need to leave the office at short notice or do school runs, impact on working day, making up time. There could be a negative impact if this is easier to do from Castlewood rather than Town Hall but has a positive impact on those who find it easier from Town Hall.

The recommendations of the Council Report are to agree to transition the workforce out of the Castlewood building and to prepare detailed options related to the sites future use.

The actual closure of the building as a place of work will not be immediate and will be a phased transition within the context of an overall flexible working policy.

Further work will be required to understand the impact level and impact type of options and a preferred option. The future use of the site may provide opportunities for positive impacts on some groups of people.

PD30 – Property & Projects

The move to a Corporate Landlord Model should not in itself have any customer impacts, as this relates to improving the mechanisms through which properties are managed. Decisions about the assets themselves will be made separately and will where necessary be subject to additional EIAs.

PD31 - Property & Projects

No customer impact, although measures will result in reductions in costs and carbon emissions which will have indirect benefits to residents.

Please describe how you will communicate these changes to your customers

Staffing impacts - All changes are communicated via Jo Walker's weekly staff message, The Knowledge, to individuals/managers where appropriate, and via staff webinars.

4. Staff equality impact summary

Are there any staffing implications for this proposal? **Yes** No

Explanation of staff impact

CSD08: The proposal will mean that Castlewood is no longer the main place of work for approximately 738 council officers (as at 3 May 2023) modelling the adopted 'Workstyle' behaviours of the council's hybrid working policy. 515 NSC staff will be re-located to the Town Hall in phases from May 2024 and space planning assumes directorate areas for the purposes of estimating capacity and to allow collaborative working. Some colleagues (approximately 220) are not included in the move because they (i) may need a presence in the north of the district or (ii) their pattern of work requires regular access to equipment and/or vehicles that cannot be accommodated at the Town Hall. Please see above in Table 3 for the description of how potential impacts are being mitigated for NSC staff.

PD30: The move to a Corporate Landlord model may require changes to the responsibilities of some staff, for example where services hold responsibility for the management of buildings. Those staff will be engaged with as part of designing the new model and changes are not expected to be significant or to impact on any specific groups.

6. Review and Sign Off

Service Manager Review

Insert any service manager comments here:

Development options for the Castlewood site have been subject to a separate EIA and included in relevant council decisions.

Is a further detailed equality impact assessment needed? **Yes** No

If 'yes', when will the further assessment be completed?

Completed 05/12/2023 and appended

Service Manager: Amy Webb

Date: 19 January 2024

2. The Proposal

2.1 Description of the proposal

“Castlewood Transition” is one workstream within the overall Accommodation Strategy Programme which was signed off at full Council in February 2021. Separate Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are being completed for all four of the workstreams. The “Ways of working and Invest in the Town Hall” EIA was completed in July 2022. EIA’s will also be completed for “Touchdown locations beyond the Town Hall” and “Travel and parking”.

The proposal is to agree to the transitioned closure of Castlewood in Clevedon as part of the council's core office accommodation. A detailed options analysis exercise was undertaken to recommend a preferred option for development of the site.

The proposal is set out in a report to Council 10 January 2023 “[Castlewood Redevelopment options including Commissioning Plan](#)”. Council approved the preferred option of a residential-led redevelopment with newbuild homes and small-scale commercial development”.

2.2 Summary of changes:

The Town Hall will be retained as our primary office building and reconfigured to accommodate most council staff currently based in Castlewood, current Town Hall staff and colleagues from partner and tenant organisations, as determined.

The proposal will mean that Castlewood is no longer the main place of work for approximately 738 council officers (as at 3 May 2023) modelling the adopted ‘Workstyle’ behaviours of the council’s hybrid working policy. 515 NSC staff will be re-located to the Town Hall in phases from May 2024 and space planning assumes directorate areas for the purposes of estimating capacity and to allow collaborative working. Some colleagues (approximately 220) are not included in the move because they (i) may need a presence in the north of the district or (ii) their pattern of work requires regular access to equipment and/or vehicles that cannot be accommodated at the Town Hall. Work is underway to identify alternative provision for these services, with a principle of ‘Town Hall by default’ with any exclusions explored, then finalised and agreed.

The target date for vacant possession is April 2025 as this is when savings are assumed in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. There may be a need for a small council office presence on the site from April 2025 and until alternative accommodation is delivered for those not moving to the Town Hall, however, the aim is for the building to be decommissioned and will not generally be available to colleagues to work from.

2.3 Please detail below how this proposal may impact on any other organisation and their customers

Tenants and partners within the Town Hall and Castlewood are included in the Accommodation Strategy proposals and have been briefed and consulted with at all stages and will continue to be so.

Agency workers, contractors and consultants working with the council and tenants/partner organisations on a long-term basis who use the Town Hall office space will also have use of the new working environment and will need to adopt the new ways of working.

Tenants within Castlewood. The Police and ICB have given notice to terminate their leases on 31 July 2023 so are unaffected by the proposals.

The remaining tenants are:

- Sirona Health
- DWP (lease expires August 2027)
- Register Services (lease expires April 2026)

The remaining partners are:

- Agilisys – will be moving to Town Hall
- Liberata – will be moving to Town Hall
- BANES – will be moving to Town Hall
- Milestone Infrastructure – will move with the Highways teams
- Centregreat – will move with the Highways teams

3. What Do We Know?

3.1 Customer/staff profile details – what data or evidence is there which tells us who is, or could be, affected?

Data sources are available that can inform consideration of people or groups who may be affected by the moving of services out of Castlewood and its eventual development. These include:

- Demographic data about the North Somerset population
- Customer contact with the council through different channels when Castlewood provided Gateway services
- Results of the Customer Services pilot
- Anonymised demographic data about the council's workforce
- Data of where the council's workforce live and travel from
- Current usage of Castlewood and the Town Hall

These are considered below

3.2 What does the data or evidence tell us about the potential impact on diverse groups, and how is this supported by historic experience/data?

Pre-pandemic, the Castlewood site provided some limited public facing customer services such as being able to make general enquiries from a telephone, access computers or to meet council officers or members for pre-arranged appointments.

The predominant use of the building is as an office for professional teams within the council, its partners and commercial tenants. Some equipment and vehicles are stored on the site while important business continuity infrastructure is also housed on site. The Department of Work and Pensions has a public facing Job Centre plus on the site with a tenancy until summer 2027. This will remain open on the site until then or will be relocated to somewhere suitable with their agreement.

Both Castlewood and the Town Hall benefit from step free access to all floors and on-site disabled parking. Both buildings are serviced by bus services that connect them to the wider district and region, although there is greater frequency and more service availability in and around the Town Hall. The Town Hall is an approximate 8-minute walk to the railway station that provides connections to local stations within North Somerset and then further afield. The station benefits from step free access on each side of the track.

Workers and visitors in both Castlewood and the Town Hall can access free local car parking and secure cycle parking with changing and showering facilities. In Weston, Locking Road Car Park is an approximate 8 minute walk from the office. The car park is in the council's ownership and it is not part of the planned redevelopment for mixed use development.

Customers

Data from a typical month of September 2019, showed that only 1.5% of all face-to-face enquiries occurred at Castlewood, with the majority of contact with the council being made through the website and telephony. The council's customer service strategy is for self-serve first and customers are encouraged to use the website and contact centre.

A six-month Customer Service pilot from August 2022 made use of Library facilities for six months to test demand for and quality of services that can provided in this way. The summary findings are that:

- 24% of the available appointment capacity was used
- Council tax, housing and blue badges were the top 3 services required
- Demand for complex enquiries is extremely low
- Cost per visit is over £144 which significantly higher than an industry standard benchmark of £8.76
- High levels of customer satisfaction

As a result of the pilot and review of the findings, a new approach has been implemented that equips library colleagues to provide the most frequently required face to face customer services. More complex enquiries will be addressed by engagement through appointment.

In the case of Clevedon, it is worth noting that the library is in a more central location accessible by multiple modes of travel and close to shops and services and has benefited from a recent capital investment to improve facilities and accessibility at the building. Monitoring of customer usage of the new approach will be undertaken, but it is anticipated that this will provide a greater coverage of customer service for settlements in the north of the district than Castlewood was ever able to.

Staff

The council's establishment is circa 1550 (although this does change as teams grow or contract or externally funded projects come to fruition such as BSIP). 69% of the workforce work in the wider built-up area of Weston-super-Mare and rural villages, while 31% live in the built-up areas of Portishead, Nailsea, Yatton and Clevedon. 9%, or 137, of the workforce live in Clevedon.

We know that there are number of staff living outside of North Somerset in the wider West of England area, Somerset, Wiltshire and Wales.

Our colleagues have a primary place of work identified within their contracts, and in most cases, this is either the Town Hall or Castlewood. This is consistent with our hybrid working policy, even if colleagues tend to work from home more often than not. Of the 137 colleagues that live in Clevedon, 35 of these (2.3%) of the overall workforce have Castlewood named as their primary workplace.

69% of our workforce between the ages of 41 and 65 or over, with the rest between the ages of 16 and 40. 59% of our colleagues work full time and 41% part time. Colleagues that identify as women make up 73% and men 27% and 13% of our colleagues identify as having a disability. Exactly in line with our population, 4.3% identify as Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and 'white other' ethnic group. (This has reduced to 4% as at 01.12.23)

Recent data of staff accessing the Town Hall and Castlewood demonstrates a daily occupancy of approximately 30% of the capacity of the buildings. There is also evidence that people are also working in a 'touchdown' way from time to time, making use of other places and assets to work on their way to and from the office or to meetings, suggesting that the organisation has significantly adjusted to many jobs being delivered in a hybrid way.

The council has a hybrid working policy which is available on the intranet and all managers are advised to signpost their staff to its contents and all staff have been allocated a workstyle and had the opportunity to have their workstyle amended, including for personal reasons.

Since the start of the pandemic there has been continual staff engagement to understand views on changes to ways of working and wellbeing. This engagement has been primarily through the staff survey and the introduction of a pulse survey which ran twice in 2020 and asked questions around wellbeing and ways of working. A Ways of Working inbox is publicised and monitored daily, and questions are taken at all staff webinars.

To conclude, the withdrawal of customer services from Castlewood will have impacted a small minority of customer contacts with the council, and this should be mitigated by the newly agreed investment into enable local people to access services through their local library as opposed to traveling to Castlewood.

Additionally, the workforce predominantly resides in neighbourhoods away from Castlewood, and only a very small number live in Clevedon and have Castlewood identified as their primary office location.

3.3 Are there any gaps in the data, for example across protected characteristics where information is limited or not available?

Adequate information is not available about transgender, sexual orientation and religion and belief, although it is worth noting that it is not expected that this change will have a negative impact on any of these groups, the improved facilities available in the refurbished Town Hall will have a positive impact. The free text responses to the staff survey questions and questions raised at webinars have also been considered, although a breakdown by protective characteristics is not available for these.

3.4 How have we involved or considered the views of the people that could be affected?

- Regular updates at staff webinars with opportunity to ask questions.
- Regular messaging via Jo's weekly message and The Knowledge.
- Ways of Working inbox monitored daily.
- Regular updates at union meetings.
- Regular updates to Leadership Delivery Team with request to share information with teams and feedback to the Ways of Working group.
- Regular attendance at tenants' stakeholder engagement group.
- Engagement with Sustainable Travel Team.
- During March and April 2022, we asked team leaders to validate workstyles for each role and to inform us of any specific individual needs or exemptions. These have been incorporated into final designs.
- Members have also had regular briefings – Informal Exec, EM briefings? PCOM Steering Group. Member Advisory Group

A consultation with affected staff took place over a three -month period ending 17 October 2023. 35 individuals and Unison responded to the consultation. A separate report summarising the outcomes of the consultation, main issues etc. was presented to the Accommodation Strategy Board in November 2023 and decisions made and recommendations included in the report. This included confirming there will be no changes to the way staff currently claim business mileage, seeking to house pool cars throughout the district to make it easier for staff to access them and to explore touchdown work and meeting locations and publicise further to staff. As a result of the consultation all staff identified to move in May 2024 will do so. Further consultations will be undertaken with individual staff and recognised unions for staff who need to move from Castlewood.

3.5 What has this consultation told us?

Challenge/impact	Mitigation
Additional mileage costs for individuals to travel to work	No change will be made to the mileage policy. The issue was raised by only 11 individuals during the consultation process (4% of those consulted). However, impact is significantly mitigated by the introduction of home working and flexibility and can be used by individuals to offset any impact. In addition, alternative modes of travel have been encouraged and signposted to staff.
Access to pool cars	The Accommodation Strategy Project Board has decided to explore and implement the provision of pool cars across the district, to ensure not all pool cars are stored at the Town Hall site.
Touchdown work locations/meeting space	During such time as Castlewood is decommissioned meeting rooms will remain open. A list of additional meeting rooms/workspace available to staff has been collated and shared (November 2023).
Costs of working from home	This is not a comment that is specific to the closure of Castlewood but is due to the increased level of homeworking. Staff are still able to ask for changes to their workstyle that would allow them to work in an office location rather than home. The council also covers the cost of all ICT and associated equipment and pays a contribution towards the purchase of a desk for home. The level of control offered to the individual mitigates against this impact.

3.6 Are there any gaps in our consultation, what are our plans for the future?

We will consult with Directorates on the proposed accommodation changes and make any changes needed to accommodate team and individual requirements.

We will continue to seek views from all recognised unions and staff forums – Disabled Staff, Carers, REACH, LGBTQIA and Young Persons group.

Continued regular attendance at staff webinars, tenants' engagement meetings and union meetings.

A formal HR consultation process will take place with any affected staff.

Section 4 - Assessment of impact

Will the proposal have a disproportionate impact on any of these groups?

Insert X into one box per row, for impact level and type.

H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, N = None

+ = Positive, = = Neutral, - = Negative

Impact Level	Impact type							Summary of Impact
	H	M	L	N	+	=	-	
Disabled people		x					x	Specific IT and furniture need in flexible office space/home; all office areas accessible; noisy working environment – there would be a negative impact if needs not met.
People from different ethnic groups			x		x			
Men or women (including pregnant women or those on maternity leave)		x			x			Women more likely to have caring/school run responsibilities – easier to manage work/life balance if have a more flexible workstyle. People who are pregnant are more able to work from home. An Infant Feeding Room is being built in the Town Hall Gateway which will assist those who return to work whilst feeding/expressing milk.
Lesbian, gay or bisexual people				x		x		

Impact Level	Impact type							Summary of Impact
	H	M	L	N	+	=	-	
People on a low income		x					x	People on lower incomes may be less supportive of hybrid working. Cost of utility bills working from home may be more expensive than commute to work for some. Those who live closer to Clevedon will be adversely affected. They may be less likely to own a car/afford travel.
People in particular age groups								Negative impact for younger people who live close to Clevedon who may find it more difficult to travel to Weston as tend to have a higher preference for working in the office. If they find it more difficult or too expensive to travel to Weston and have a mobile/flexible workstyle, they may decide to work at home more.
People in particular faith groups				x		x		Positive impact as there is no multi faith room in Castlewood but a new facility is being built in the Town Hall.
People who are married or in a civil partnership				x		x		
Transgender people								
Carers and parents			x				x	May need to leave the office at short notice or do school runs, impact on working day, making up time. There could be a negative impact if this is easier to do from Castlewood rather than Town Hall but has a positive impact on those who find it easier from Town Hall.

4.1 Explanation of customer impact

Please see the table above for the detailed list of potential impacts on NSC staff. The recommendations of the Council report are to agree to transition the workforce out of the Castlewood building and to prepare detailed options related to the sites future use.

The actual closure of the building as a place of work will not be immediate and will be a phased transition within the context of an overall flexible working policy. A separate piece of work is underway to develop a new Customer Service Strategy for adoption by the council this year.

Further work will be required to understand the impact level and impact type of options and a preferred option. The future use of the site may provide opportunities for positive impacts on some groups of people.

Does this proposal have any potential Human Rights implications?

Yes No

Could this proposal have a Cumulative Impact with any other budget savings?

Yes No

This is an impact that appears when you consider services or activities together; a change or activity in one area may create an additional impact somewhere else.

If 'yes', please describe?

Timing of savings yet to be determined:

- c£1m of accommodation costs associated with release of Castlewood site.
- Energy inflation cost avoidance.
- Repairs and maintenance cost avoidance for Castlewood site
- Reassessment of ICT equipment budgets to support new workstyles (may be added cost)
- Reduced requirement for office furniture - shift to home working allocations

5 – Action Plan

Where you have listed that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Action taken/to be taken	How will it be monitored?
Disabled staff – where staff have identified that they have a disability and adjustments needs – these will be captured and fully addressed to avoid any negative impact.	This information has been collected for every service and addressed by the Ways of Working group, in liaison with the individual and their manager. This is regularly updated to take account of any new starters.

<p>Staff will be offered more flexibility around working hours, workstyles.</p>	<p>Hybrid working policy and homeworking policy have been introduced. Workstyles are all being captured on iTrent, and every individual has been offered the opportunity to ask for a change to their workstyles. Workstyles are checked every month by the HR team to ensure no new starter information is missed.</p> <p>Bandwidth working times have been extended to 7am to 7pm.</p>
<p>Consider any requests to remain in Castlewood until closure.</p>	<p>No requests received to date; these will be dealt with by HR on a case by case basis.</p>

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Negative impact could remain for a few individuals once Castlewood closes if they need to visit the office and incur additional travel costs. However, these will be minimal and are largely offset by mitigating actions.

Please set out how you intend to communicate these changes with your customers.

All changes are communicated via Jo Walker's weekly staff message, The Knowledge, to individuals/managers where appropriate, via staff webinars.