
Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Report by Cllr Dave Ray Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance	
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Portfolio includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal and Democratic• Elections• Finance• Internal Audit• ICT• Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance Management• Human Resources and Organisational Development• Health and Safety• Procurement• Customer Access

1. Resources and Performance

1.1 Agresso Project Phase 2

- 1.1.1 The Shared Agresso Business World Financial Management System (FMS) went live 1 April 2014 as scheduled, eight months on and users are now more familiar with the system and helpdesk calls have significantly reduced. However, we have identified a number of improvements which will make full use of the functionality of the system.
- 1.1.2 The implementation project team are now preparing to work on phase 2, as well as general functionality improvements. This also includes use of the Agresso module that can capture the 2015/16 budgets and Medium Term Financial Strategy, improved in year forecasting, and developing and rolling out dashboards (a single page, real-time user interface, showing a graphical presentation of the current status of tasks and/or performance) and reports.

1.2 Budget outturn and statement of accounts – 2013/14

- 1.2.1 The 2013/14 annual statement of accounts was presented at the September Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. Since then the audit has been concluded with no significant changes required and Ernst and Young have issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements.

1.3 2015/16 Budget and Budget Consultation

- 1.3.1 A considerable amount of work has already begun on identifying potential savings and income generation ideas in order to secure a balanced budget for 2015/16 and prepare for 2016/17. The approach has been that the council's resources for 2015/16 should be allocated according to their strategic priorities; this has helped to identify areas of the council's work which could either be scaled back or where further opportunities for the generation of income could be pursued.
- 1.3.2 Discussions with Heads of Service, Service Managers and Business Partners have taken place to review the 2015/16 supplies and services budgets taking a zero based budget approach and exploring further savings as a result of shared services. These savings have been captured as part of the budget setting process and have been reported to members along with the other local savings at the November Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3.3 However, other proposals required more detailed analysis in order to develop options and to provide clarity as to the potential savings/income. Indeed, some proposals required input from users and the public and were therefore explored as part of this year's budget consultation exercise. Details of this have also been reported to members at the November Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3.4 Further progress reports on delivering a balanced budget and proposals for the remaining budget gap will be presented to Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee in January.

2. Behaving more commercially

- 2.1 Work is continuing with raising awareness of commercial behaviours across West Suffolk and thinking about how they can be embedded into both day to day work and specific projects. A managers' forum took place on Thursday 27 November where managers had the opportunity to think through some real-life scenarios similar to those considered at the Members' Forum on behaving more commercially in July.
- 2.2 A number of projects across the council are already embedding more commercial behaviours, for example, renewable energy generation, investment in housing development and health and safety training.

3. ARP Strategic Review

- 3.1 Following the addition of three new partners a full restructure across the seven partners has taken place and will see significant savings.

3.2 Benefits

- 3.2.1 Housing Benefit claims and changes of circumstances for St Edmundsbury were being processed on average within 8.6 days as at the end of July 2014 and 9.5 days for Council Tax Reductions, both within the target. These figures are all actual days not working days.

- 3.2.2 On-line claims continue to increase. In this financial year to date 606 new benefit claim forms have been received on line, and a total of 6231 forms across Benefits, Council tax and NNDR, and comments on the use of the on line forms is very positive.
- 3.2.3 On request, landlords can have the records of their payments/schedules sent via e-mail instead of by post so they receive them quicker and have less paperwork.
- 3.2.4 Regular liaison meetings are ongoing with Suffolk County Council (SCC), housing associations and other agencies to help the understanding of each others work and awareness of our mutual customers' needs. For instance, ARP attended a SNAP (Support and Advice Project) meeting in Bury St Edmunds and hosted a Housing Association forum in October.

3.3 **Revenues**

- 3.3.1 Collection rates are as follows:

	Collected by 31/10/14	Target to 31/10/14	Comparator figure for to 31/10/13
Council Tax Net Liability: £53,768,101	67.87%	68.31%	68.19%
NNDR (Business Rates) Net liability: £47,465,972	66.67%	66.75%	70.51%

- 3.3.2 Council Tax collection for the year remains slightly lower than at the same point last year. Collection on cases where residents were previously on 100% benefit is significantly lower than on general cases (47.2%). Those on full CTS collection is also substantially lower than among other groups (41.5%). Collection is particularly difficult from these groups where previously there was no liability for Council Tax. The recovery team continue to work with residents to help them meet payments without incurring additional recovery costs where possible.
- 3.3.3 The Council Tax team will shortly undertake a review of all single person discounts to maximise the tax base.

3.4 **Business Rates**

- 3.4.1 National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) collection is below last year's rate but only marginally below target. The introduction of 12 monthly instalments has contributed to this reduction in performance but the collection rate should recover in the last two months of the year and is being monitored closely.
- 3.4.2 The Business Rates team is working with other services within the Council to ensure that all business intelligence is shared with the business rates team to ensure all potential changes to the business rates database are reflected in our records at the earliest opportunity.

3.5 Collection of Housing Benefit Overpayments

- 3.5.1 The Overpayment Collection team has over the past 18 months worked on improving processes and methods of recovery. This has resulted in an increase in monies recovered, circa £70,000 per annum for St Edmundsbury. This complements the work of the Fraud team to ensure that where fraud is detected, monies are recovered.

4. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

- 4.1 The following ICT transformation projects have recently gone live:
- Single shared main website - the old Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury domain names have now been redirected to the new www.westsuffolk.gov.uk website.
 - Committee minutes system - phase 1 of this was launched with the new website. Meeting papers can be viewed on the new website via this new system.
 - New licensing public access system - the old system has had to be replaced due to concerns around reliability and data security.
- 4.2 Further projects currently in progress include:
- Asidua CCP Customer Relationship Management system (implementation stage)
 - Single shared intranet (design stage)
 - Single shared Waste Management System (procurement stage)
 - Geographical Information System - GIS (implementation stage)
 - Elections Management System (implementation stage)
- 4.3 Work to migrate Revenues and Benefits services from Fenland District Council into ARP has now been successfully completed.

5. Internal Audit

5.1 Corporate Work

- 5.1.1 Internal Audit has continued to assist with corporate projects and work in this area has most recently included assisting with the following:
- Reviewing financial aspects of renewable energy investment options;
 - Housing Investment Project Group – a group of officers looking at investment options, for future consideration by Cabinet, to support and increase the delivery of housing across West Suffolk;
 - Risk Management Working Group – a group of officers reviewing West Suffolk’s approach to risk management (see also 5.4 below).

5.2 Statutory Internal Audit Plan

- 5.2.1 Progress on the core financial systems / fundamental review work audits, as well as other audit responsibilities, is in line with expectations and therefore it is currently expected that the Audit Plan will be completed on time, enabling a robust annual audit opinion to be delivered in the 2014/15 Annual Internal Audit Report.

5.3 Probity

- 5.3.1 The West Suffolk Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy, drafted by Internal Audit, has recently been approved and adopted. This Policy was last reviewed by both councils in 2011 and was reviewed again this year to ensure it continues to reflect best practice, legislation and shared services arrangements. The main change in updating the Strategy (re-named as a Policy) was to include a section on social housing fraud in recognition of the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 which as well as creating new criminal offences in this area gave greater powers to local authorities to investigate social tenancy fraud through better access to data from banks and utility companies.

5.4 Risk Management

- 5.4.1 West Suffolk's approach to risk management is currently being reviewed by an officer group to ensure that risk management continues to be fit for purpose and takes full account of different ways of working within West Suffolk, including the behaving more commercially initiative.
- 5.4.2 This review will look at the processes for identifying, recording, assessing, monitoring and managing risks and consider any ways in which these processes could be further improved to ensure that the risk management approach can be applied to any situation, will not restrict innovation, and supports sensible and calculated risk-taking.

6. Human Resources

- 6.1 The Human Resources, Learning and Development and Health and Safety teams continue to support a range of organisations and partners through significant organisational change.
- 6.2 Following our successful internship programme this year, which concluded with a presentation to Councillor Mark Bee and other invited guests at Endeavour House at the end of September 2014, we are now leading the intern recruitment for 2015, in conjunction with the Suffolk County Council 'Raising the Bar/Rising High' initiative. We are developing 12 new intern roles for Suffolk undergraduates across a range of services.
- 6.3 Our apprentice programme continues to grow, reflecting our organisation design principles, which include reviewing vacant posts, where possible, to identify career and apprentice pathways and opportunities. We currently employ 19 apprentices, and have continued to support the transition from apprentice to permanent employee where the opportunity arises and across a range of services.
- 6.4 In November 2014, our new West Suffolk Performance Review Scheme has completed its first annual cycle and enabled us to effectively discuss with our staff our expectations with regard to the outcomes and behaviours we need, and support them in meeting those expectations.
- 6.5 The Workforce Strategy was approved at Cabinet in October. This strategy sets out how we will recruit and develop our workforce and work with our

communities to make sure that we have the people, the skills and the behaviours we need to make sure that the priorities in the Councils' strategic Plan are delivered. The key areas that we focus on are: Skills and Behaviours Development, Recruitment and Retention, Pay, Reward and Recognition, Well-being and Engagement, and Performance and Change. Actions and outcomes have been identified that will enable us to continue to build a professional, resilient and committed single workforce.

- 6.6 We have, also, implemented two new joint policies – the Adoption Policy and the Flexible Working Policy.
- 6.7 The recent restructure of the Joint Leadership team has been completed and appointments made. We continue to review the capacity and structure of the leadership and management of the Councils to make sure that we provide visible leadership, lead from the front, and have the people in place who can work collaboratively in the local public sector networks to secure the best outcomes for our area, whilst building a corporate, commercially astute and project-centred culture, delivering our services whilst influencing the outcomes we desire for our communities.
- 6.8 Service Manager and Business Partner Forums continue to develop the capacity and understanding at this level across the organisation and involve this key group in successful organisation development, and transformational change. The most recent session involved and enabled discussion with regard to 'Behaving More Commercially' and what that means for us in our day-to-day roles. The forums enable middle managers to share best practice and network together as they deal with operational matters in their services.
- 6.9 We have had 78 of our Service Managers and Business Partners, and the Leadership Team involved, to-date, in the "Go Make a Difference" accelerated change programme. October saw the end of the first 90-day challenges undertaken by Service and Operations Managers, as part of this programme. Outcomes include increased collaborative working, better strategic thinking and structured planning, increased confidence and keen focus on outcomes. Those Heads of Service involved in the subsequent 90-day challenges reported that this "snapshot" deep into the organisation was illuminating and engaging, enabling them to ensure connections and delivery across a breadth and depth of activities was taking place, as well as alignment to the strategic priorities. Next steps are to embed the techniques and disciplines throughout the organisation, with an on-going series of 90-day challenges from October 2014 to February 2015, and a series of one-day classroom sessions for managers and team leaders with 30-day challenges, all supported by internal coaching.

7. Health and Safety

- 7.1 The Health and Safety team continues to support the Anglia Revenues Partnership and has delivered an on-line training package for the partnership. The Health and Safety Policy (issue 3) has been reviewed and approved.

8 Member Development (September 2014 – December 2014)

- 8.1 Following some months of planning and preparation in September 2014, we achieved re-accreditation of the Charter for Elected Member Development. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury is the first partnership of Councils to be awarded the Charter, reflecting our effective shared approach to the development of our Members. The team of assessors praised West Suffolk for its comprehensive member development programme, our 'next generation leadership development', as well as our culture change journey.
- 8.2 Work continues in line with recommendations made to focus now on an effective and comprehensive 'New Member Induction Programme' ready for the May 2015 Elections.
- 8.3 On 22 September 2014, in the Jubilee Centre, Mildenhall, Members were introduced to "Transformational Thinking" by Dr David J Hall, Chief Executive Officer, The Ideas Centre Group. The session was well received. Dr Hall delivered an interesting and thought-provoking introduction to creative thinking, and made no charge to the Councils for the session, at which new techniques for problem solving were explained and practised.
- 8.4 Forthcoming events for 2015 will continue to be publicised in Members' News on a weekly basis.