
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, ten months on and users are now more familiar with the system and helpdesk calls have significantly reduced. We continue to identify numerous improvements which will help make full use of the functionality of the system, and work continues on implementing these.

1.2 Performance Management

1.2.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) continue to be used in service areas to report data against agreed targets and to provide a measure of performance against our strategic priorities.

1.2.2 The third quarter's figures for 2014/15 were reported to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee in January 2015. Of the 27 St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) KPIs, 11 were on or significantly above target, 4 were below target but within tolerated levels and 2 were significantly below target. The other 10 KPIs are for information only and have no target associated with them.

1.3 Budget Monitoring

- 1.3.1 Budget monitoring continues to be undertaken on a monthly basis. The third quarter's figures were reported to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee in January 2015.
- 1.3.2 The forecast outturn position for the year end is showing a revenue under spend of £108,000. The Council's capital financial position for the first nine months of 2014/15 shows expenditure of £1,692,000.

1.4 2015/16 Budget Setting

- 1.4.1 A considerable amount of work has been done on identifying potential savings and income generation ideas in order to secure a balanced budget for 2015/16 and prepare for 2016/17 onwards. A balanced budget for 2015/16 is being proposed along with a council tax freeze for the fifth year running (six out of the last seven years).
- 1.4.2 Full details of the 2015/16 budget will be reported to full Council as part of the budget setting paper in February 2015.

2. Behaving more commercially

- 2.1 Work is continuing to raise awareness of how all teams can behave more commercially in their daily business, as well as in major projects. A "lunch and learn" session for staff on Behaving more Commercially was held on 7 January 2015.

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 7 days as at the end of December 2014 and 7.9 days for Council Tax Reductions, both within the target. These figures are all actual days not working days.
- 3.2.2 Online claims continue to increase. In this financial year to date 765 new benefit claim forms have been received online, and a total of 8211 forms across Benefits, Council tax and NNDR, and comments on the use of the online 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 continue with our stakeholders including Suffolk County Council, housing associations and other agencies to help the understanding of each others' work and awareness of our mutual customers'

needs. We continue to have discussions with the DWP concerning partial Universal Credit implementation scheduled for April 2015.

3.2.5 The Fraud team successfully investigated and prosecuted a claimant in December, resulting in an 18 month custodial sentence for failing to declare a partner was living with him and that she was in full time work. This related to a period over ten years causing overpaid Benefit totalling £81,000. The case was reported in the local press and the staff Wavelength publication. The Fraud team are in the process of implementing software to assist with data gather to detect and prosecute fraudulent activity.

3.3 Revenues

3.3.1 Collection rates are as follows:

	Collected by 31/01/15	Target to 31/01/15	Comparator figure to 31/01/14
Council Tax Net Liability: £53,824,111	95.67%	96.47%	96.24%
NNDR (Business Rates) Net liability: £47,393,939	92.56%	92.62%	96.54%

3.3.2 Council Tax collection for the year remains slightly lower than at the same point last year. This is affected by the gradual movement of some Council tax payers to 12 monthly instalments rather than ten. Collection on cases where residents were previously on 100% benefit is significantly lower than on general cases (59.5%). Those on full CTS collection is also substantially lower that among other groups (54.3%). 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.

The Council Tax team are currently undertaking 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 and slightly below target for the current financial year. The introduction of 12 monthly instalments has contributed to this reduction in performance compared to the previous year 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; £181,000 has been collected in the current financial year. This complements the work of the Fraud team to ensure where fraud is detected, monies are recovered.

4. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

4.1 ICT provision for councillors, May 2015 – after the May elections councillors will have a range of ICT options to support a move towards paperless working. The aim is to enable councillors to bring their chosen device to meetings and access papers using the new online committee system Modern Gov. Training sessions are planned to support councillors, and individual support will be given where necessary by the ICT team. Apart from being efficient, accessing committee and other papers through electronic devices will deliver savings through cutting postage and paper.

4.2 Members will be able to choose from the following options:-

- Council supplied device; 11" tablet, 14" laptop or 15" laptop;
- Use a personal iPad/iPhone, android tablet/phone or windows mobile tablet or phone with the Council's new Bring Your Own Device App.

4.3 Ongoing works by the ICT team include:-

- ensuring the wireless connectivity in meeting rooms, including the Council chambers, can support all councillors using ICT devices;
- liaising with Property Services on providing suitable power for both corporate and personal devices in the rooms.

4.4 ICT will be running drop in sessions at the Members' induction days to demonstrate the devices and explain the advantages and disadvantages of the devices. This will enable councillors to make informed decisions on which device is best for them.

4.5 Public Services Network Compliance - The Council's annual ICT Health Check took place in January and initial feedback indicates an improvement of ICT security since the last test. There are several pieces of work that are due for completion before the Council needs to submit its return to the Cabinet Office in June. This includes the replacement of any Windows 2003 Servers by its End of Life date April this year. No major problems are anticipated with this year's return.

4.6 Following the successful proposal to extend the ICT support we provide to Abbeycroft Leisure and to the Anglia Community Leisure, ICT have begun scoping of the work to merge the two Trusts ICT systems.

4.7 Other Projects currently in progress include:

- Asidua CCP Customer Relationship Management system (implementation stage)
- Single shared intranet (implementation stage)
- Single shared Waste Management System (procurement stage)
- Geographical Information System - GIS (implementation stage)

- Elections Management System (implementation stage)
- Additional Video Conferencing facilities to allow for Video conferencing between Bury St Edmunds, Mildenhall and ARP Thetford

5. Statutory Internal Audit Plan

5.1 Work on the fundamental systems audits continues to progress well and the work contained within the annual audit plan for 2014/15 remains on track for timely completion. The audits fully complete or nearing completion for 2014/15 include payroll, treasury management, council tax, non-domestic rates, housing and council tax benefits, and cash handling.

5.2 Corporate Work

- 5.2.1 Internal Audit's involvement in corporate project work has recently included:
- a review of the West Suffolk Councils' fees and charges resulting in a West Suffolk Fees & Charges Policy being produced, and approved by Cabinet in December 2014;
 - continued involvement in the business process re-engineering (BPR) team which is reviewing and redesigning service processes in order to deliver improvements across West Suffolk;
 - assisting in reviewing financial aspects of renewable energy investment options;
 - participation in the Housing Investment Project Group – a group of officers looking at investment options, for consideration by Cabinet, to support and increase the delivery of housing across West Suffolk; and
 - assisting in reviewing West Suffolk's current approach to risk management.

5.3 Probity

5.3.1 The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) results were released on 29th January 2015. A total of 977 matches occurred for St Edmundsbury with 185 of these being high priority matches (as defined by NFI) and work has already commenced in reviewing these. This is in addition to the 28 matches released on 19th January 2015 matching Housing Benefit Claims and Resident Parking Permit holders to Deceased Persons.

5.4 Other Work

- 5.4.1 Internal Audit has recently carried out a review of the income collection processes for markets and provided recommendations to further improve the controls in this area.
- 5.4.2 Fee earning work undertaken on behalf of other organisations is nearing completion. This work includes:
- council tax, non-domestic rates, housing and council tax benefits audits on behalf of East Cambridgeshire DC and Breckland Council;
 - additional audits to those above undertaken on behalf of East Cambridgeshire DC as part of an annual agreement with that council;
 - grant verification work on behalf of Suffolk County Council; and
 - financial vetting work on a non St Edmundsbury project.

6. Customer Access

- 6.1 The customer access project has continued to progress. The customer service team now delivers a range of services across both councils. Regular liaison meetings are scheduled with the services throughout the year and refresher training for all customer service staff. Recent service integrations to the customer service team have included Public Health and Housing in November, Phase 2 of Waste Management in December, Elections in January and Parking Permits to follow in February.
- 6.2 Performance remains high with on average 90% of all calls answered is being achieved. From April to the end of December, over 107,000 phone calls were received and 95,000 visitors have been received across all West Suffolk offices.
- 6.3 It is important that we measure the quality of customer experience alongside the volume of queries so developing customer satisfaction measures is an area we will progress over the next few months.
- 6.4 The team has already introduced customer excellence standards training for all customer service staff and it is anticipated that this will be rolled out to all staff in the near future.
- 6.5 Universal Credit will be partially introduced across West Suffolk in April and the customer service team is working closely with the Jobcentre, ARP and colleagues in housing to ensure that the council is prepared and able to advise customers affected by the change. At this stage, Universal Credit will only affect a small number of people in the area. However, it is important to ensure that we understand its impact and provide support and assistance where necessary.

7. Human Resources, Legal & Democratic Services

- 7.1 The newly formed Human Resources, Legal and Democratic Services team continues to support the services within West Suffolk Councils, underpinned by the business partner model. Within the team, we also continue to support a range of external partners throughout their organisational change and their day to day operations.
- 7.2 Our Leadership Team consists of our first two levels of management, our directors and heads of service. This is a small, more strategic focused leadership team. We have created a distinct third tier of management at Service Manager Level, who will deputise for their Heads of Service. We are in the process of appointing those officers to the new roles which will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of each of their services. This structure will enable us to create more capacity at the leadership level and empower Service Managers to lead on service delivery, with a clear understanding of how operations deliver the West Suffolk councils' vision and priorities. The Service Manager level will also encourage greater cross-boundary working and accountability, enabling a cohesive and consistent approach to service delivery across our Councils.

- 7.3 The shared services agenda has seen an increase in creative ways of working. Maximising the best use of staff time is essential. There has been a need for greater increase of effective working arrangements including dual office base contracts, flexible working, home working and home enabled, combinations of office/home working, and a range of different working patterns in order to deliver services. Other initiatives, such as video conferencing between locations, are being expanded to enable meetings to be held at various locations, bringing together teams through technology rather than travel. This is underpinned by our mileage reduction plan, setting a target of reducing travel by 10%. Our main focus has been and continues to be maximising our opportunities and focusing on output and outcomes.
- 7.4 From 2 February 2015, we have been required to publish our data on our website. This was a requirement from the DCLG, who issued a Transparency Code in October 2014, which requires all local authorities to be open about their data. We have published HR data on how we organise our structures, our senior salaries, pay multiple, and trade union facility time.
- 7.5 The code was issued as part of a drive to increase local accountability, giving local people the opportunity to contribute to the local decision-making process and help shape their public services.
- 7.6 We have introduced a new scheme which provides our staff with the opportunity to volunteer for activities either linked to their normal role or outside their role. There are no boundaries to the scheme and all reasonable requests will be considered to enable our staff to seek out new skills and experiences whilst making valuable contributions to our communities. Both individual and team requests will be considered on the basis of worthwhile activities that have a benefit to the community and/or provide an opportunity for team building and forging strong working relationships to benefit our service delivery.
- 7.7 The new committee management system (modern.gov) was launched in November 2014 and, although there have been some minor implementation issues, the system has already made the production and publication of committee agendas much easier and quicker. The next step will be to enable 'paperless' meetings where agendas and reports can be accessed electronically; full training and support will be given to all members after the election.

8. Health and Safety

- 8.1 Again, a very busy period providing support/advice on various Health & Safety issues, including accident/incident investigations, both for West Suffolk and Anglia Revenue Partnership.
- 8.2 Following the major overhaul of the Health and Safety training modules on the intranet, the updated system was rolled out at the end of 2014, and 72% of staff have completed the training so far. We are monitoring the training and addressing any issues with relevant line managers.
- 8.3 Christmas Fayre 2014 was another outstanding success. Each year the Fayre has grown in size and popularity since its inception in 2004. This year the event was held on the 27-30 November 2014, it was estimated that over 120,000 visitors enjoyed the three and half day event, with over 300 stall-

holders spread over different venues around the town including Angel Hill, Abbey Gardens, Athenaeum, The Apex, Hatter Street, Cathedral, Moyses Hall, Charter Square and the Cornhill/Butter Market. The Health and Safety team advises on all relevant matters including writing the Event Safety Plan, makes sure that risk assessments are in place, and are present both in the control room and around the Fayre itself.

- 8.4 We are currently undertaking a health and safety review of the event to make the necessary recommendations to ensure events continue safely.
- 8.5 We are now looking at future events such as the Woman's Tour of Britain cycle event, for which we are working in partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure and other stakeholders to ensure its safe delivery.

9. Member Development (December 2014 – February 2015)

- 9.1 In December the respective Councils were presented with the Charter for Elected Member Development.
- 9.2 Planning work continues to ensure that an effective induction programme is in place for new council members following the elections in May.
- 9.3 Two 'prospective member' events are scheduled for February 2015. These sessions will aim to provide information for those considering standing for election as District or Borough councillor in May 2015.
- 9.4 Whilst feedback from members given at each event is generally very positive, the value of the events would be greater if more members attended events regularly. 96 West Suffolk member attendances across 7 events since April 2014 equates to 13.7 members at each event. 71% of St Edmundsbury members have attended at least one event. The Front-line sessions achieved the best level of attendance, followed by the Development Control session in December 2014 at West Suffolk House with attendance of 16 members.
- 9.5 At the request of members, another Development Control session to deal specifically with Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) Regulations was delivered on 27 January 2015. February 2015 will see a session on Local Government Finance and in March 2015, David McGrath, an external trainer, will be delivering a session on 'Handling Challenging People and Situations'. The last Member Development session prior to the election will be a Front-line style session at the Athenaeum covering issues raised by Overview and Scrutiny.