

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DRAFT SERVICE PLAN FOR CORPORATE SERVICES 2010/11 TO 2012/13

Corporate Manager: N/a

Executive Director: Alex Colyer (Corporate Services)

Portfolio Holder/s: Cllr S Edwards (Finance & Staffing)
Cllr Mrs S Ellington (re Member Development)
Cllr T Wotherspoon (Policy & Performance, re ICT)
Cllr T Bygott (Sustainability, Procurement & Efficiency)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Corporate Services directorate was established in September 2008, following Cabinet's decision to revise the Council's senior management structure. For the remainder of 2008/09 and for 2009/10, the services that make up Corporate Services have followed the previously prepared Finance & Support Services, HR/Payroll and Legal Services service plans.

This first Corporate Services service plan sets out the arrangements for the delivery and improvement of Corporate Services in 2010/11.

Corporate Services comprises eight distinct service areas:

- Accountancy
- Democratic Services
- Finance Project Team
- HR/Payroll
- Internal Audit (note: provided by RSM Bentley Jennison, a private sector company)
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- Legal Services
- Revenues Services

The range of services is diverse in terms of functionality and customers, which presents challenges in developing one integrated improvement plan. The improvement plans are therefore categorised by service area. However, the service plan overview takes account of key cross-cutting priorities for the Council such as Values, Equalities, Climate Change and Customer Service Excellence.

The Council's Objectives

The actions set out in this plan underpin the achievement of the Council's objectives with each specific action linked to one or more Aims.

Cross Cutting Themes

During 2010/11 Corporate Services will work on:

- Customer Service Excellence (successor to CharterMark)
- Values (strong link to CSE)
- Making Cambridgeshire Count

Workforce Overview

Corporate Services employs **130** people (**117.5** FTE). The key workforce issues for the service in 2010/11 will be working towards the higher level Investors in People accreditation and the roll out of the management competencies development programme.

Maintaining performance during periods of maternity leave will again be a challenge for the service. Reducing time lost due to sickness through effective sickness absence management will be important in maximising resources.

Performance Targets

Performance targets are set out in the operation plan for each service area. The targets will be reviewed once the final outturn for 2009/10 is known and where appropriate revised targets will be considered.

Key Issues for Corporate Services in 2010/11

- **Accountancy**
 - Learn from this year's experience of the accounts audit
 - Prepare for full implementation of IFRS
 - Payment of invoices <10 days (target 80%, to date 60%)
 - Opportunity to speed up payments by investing in electronic purchase order system at start of process, i.e. further roll out of eBis (but, resource implications ?)
 - Led by Making Cambridgeshire Count, investigate opportunities to co-terminate and jointly procure contracts for banking, insurance, or internal audit
 - Possible impact of Making Cambridgeshire Count in terms of requests for information
- **Democratic Services**
 - SMT/EMT: confirm the aims, objectives and frequency of meetings of each
 - Change of Government may allow return to former committee system ?
 - Lack of capacity in Democratic Services (and HR) to deliver Member training
 - New Member induction pack – what should be included in it ?
 - Need to explore savings such as reducing the number of Members (1 Member, one ward) and all out elections once every 4 years
 - Member development programme may drop off ? - but, one of the most important
 - Impact of shared Revenues & Benefits service with Uttlesford DC
 - Possible impact of Making Cambridgeshire Count in terms of new joint committees etc
- **Finance Project Team**
 - Procurement projects in 10/11: reviewing contracts list; prioritise known renewals; target specific areas/methods to obtain savings (note £20k from procurement included against the £1.6m)

- Procurement will be a key area in contributing to the authority's climate change aspirations, e.g. consider appointing local suppliers/ contractors to reduce travel
 - Making Cambridgeshire Count: possible joint procurement projects across Cambridgeshire authorities (including re Accountancy projects as required)
 - Work with HR on recruitment advertising and temp & agency staff contracts and with ICT on printing and stationery projects
- **Human Resources / Payroll**
 - Will be impacted by Safeguarding Children, housing and new communities restructures, and planning review
 - Lack of capacity to deliver Member training (and in Democratic Services)
 - Impact of shared Revenues & Benefits service with Uttlesford DC
 - Make ResourceLink available (impact on ICT) so staff access own data
 - Reviews of policies
 - Flexible retirement policies
 - Centralise recruitment process
 - Possible input resource requirement re automated transfer of HR data → phone list
 - Champion homeworking (technology will be available from the end of this financial year)
- **Information and Communications Technology Service**
 - Impact of shared Revenues & Benefits service with Uttlesford DC
 - Impact of Housing ICT procurement
 - Making Cambridgeshire Count: discussion of ICT arrangements, including jointly commissioned disaster recovery
 - Records management ? (but SCDC is ahead of the game)
 - 2 teams – service improvements, efficiencies
 - Increase use of MFD's; auto-direct large print jobs to the Print Room
 - Automated transfer of data (e.g. HR → phone list)
 - Move from PC's to "dumb" terminals → facilitates homeworking
 - Impact of making ResourceLink available (see HR above)
 - Stationery savings e.g. not hoarding supplies; not buying off-contract; sending docs as non-printable pdf
- **Internal Audit**
 - Improved timetabling and communication of forthcoming audits
 - Improved sharing of information between auditors
 - Making Cambridgeshire Count, possible co-termination and joint procurement of internal audit contract
- **Legal Services**
 - Members' expectations need to be realistic
 - Need to persuade Members to reject planning advice less often and thus reduce costs of appeals
 - Change of Government may abolish Standards for England
 - Impact of shared Revenues & Benefits service with Uttlesford DC
- **Revenues Services**
 - Shared services (with Uttlesford DC) - service plan needs to concentrate on making that a success
 - Safeguarding Children } while maintaining
 - Customer Service Excellence } customer focus
 - Housing ICT impact } and service

SERVICE PLAN OVERVIEW

1. About Our Service

Corporate Services supports the Council's overall delivery of corporate objectives and services to the taxpayers of South Cambridgeshire District Council in an accessible, effective and efficient manner. Corporate Services covers a wide range of disciplines and ensures that elected Members and staff are able to deliver their responsibilities and members of the public receive their services.

The service covers the following areas delivering statutory and non-statutory functions.

Accountancy

- Statement of accounts
- Budget planning
- Financial monitoring
- Treasury management
- Training to council staff on finance
- Payment of invoices
- Financial advice to budget holders
- Tax returns
- Council tax and housing rent determination
- Insurance

Democratic Services

- Facilitate Council's decision making process
- Support scrutiny processes
- Lead on new legislation relating to decision making structures
- Support and develop Members of the Council
- Support political management structure and lead reviews of the Constitution
- Communications between Members and Officers as first points of contact for enquiries
- Help maintain high standards of Corporate Governance through support for the Standards Committee, Corporate Governance Committee and Member Toolkit
- Administer Members' allowance scheme

Finance Project Team

- Co-ordinates and advises on risk management
- Co-ordinates Use of Resources assessment
- Promotes efficiencies and savings
- Undertakes ad hoc financial projects
- Provides procurement advice and support

Human Resources / Payroll

- Recruitment and retention of employees – ensuring policies, practices and processes
- Policies and practices to support organisational development – in particular, identifying
- Payment of salary and allowances to employees and Members

conform to relevant employment and equalities legislation and follow best practice

- Management of sickness absence and capability issues

corporate learning opportunities and effective training provision so that employees can perform to their full potential

- Provision of pay and allowance information in accordance with HMRC and statutory requirements

Information and Communication Technology Service (ICT)

- Support the effective use of ICT systems
- Development, implementation and management of technologies
- Manages voice communication technology
- Provide operational computing service to staff and Members
- Geographic Information Systems
- Street Naming and Numbering
- Local Land Property Gazetteer
- Systems Support
- Application Support
- Contact Centre contract management
- Office Services
 - Printing / Stationery
 - Graphics

Internal Audit

- Independent, objective assurance and consultancy activity to improve organisation's operations
- Evaluate and improve effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes
- Annual reviews of key systems and controls

Legal Services

- Legal advice to the whole authority and legal support for the Council's regulatory committees and Full Council
- Expert support in all aspects of service delivery and ensures that all Council decisions are lawful
- Act as Deputy Monitoring Officers provide advice and training to Members and Parish Councillors and support the Standards Committee and liaise with the Standards Board for England on the Code of Conduct and ethical governance
- Represent the Council at all levels before courts and tribunals and negotiate on behalf of the Council when necessary
- Undertake property survey work for all corporate areas, manage the Council's Terrier and land and property asset register

Revenues Services

- Collects
 - Council tax
 - Non-domestic rates
 - Housing rents
 - Sundry debts
 - Overpayments of housing benefit
- Administers
 - Housing benefit
 - Council tax benefit
 - Concessionary travel passes
- Investigates
 - Fraudulent claims for benefit

2. The Context for Our Plan

a) External Drivers

The following external factors will influence the services:

- Statutory requirements to set the Council's budget and Council Tax and Housing Rent levels
- Statutory requirement to produce a statement of accounts
- Poor three year financial settlement
- Unpredictable grants, e.g. supporting people
- Current economic climate
- New LABGI scheme
- Growth within the District impacting on service delivery and supporting other services within the Council
- Local Area Agreement changing the way the Council receives funding and prioritises expenditure
- New Comprehensive Area Assessment from April 2009
- New Use of Resources assessment
- National Indicators (especially NI14, NI179, N180 and N181)
- Expected efficiencies
- Local Government and Public Health Act 2007
- Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill – [and duty to promote local democracy](#)
- 'Communities in Control' government white papers
- Increased access to and use of technology by residents of South Cambridgeshire
- Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry for Benefit Services
- Change in external audit service provider
- [Changes to employment legislation – statutory dispute procedures, extension to flexible working rights, new immigration system](#)
- [Extension to the Equalities duty placed on Local Authorities](#)
- [Outcomes of stayed ET cases – Age discrimination challenges](#)
- [Equal Pay – outcomes of cases](#)
- [New employment vetting system and overhaul of CRB checks](#)
- [Changing economy/credit crunch](#)
- [Downturn in private industry](#)
- [Issues with the housing market – making it more difficult for individuals to relocate](#)
- [Changes to lifestyle trends](#)
- [Changes to demographics](#)
- [Housing costs and availability](#)
- [Transport issues](#)
- [Changes in the use of technology in advertising](#)
- [New legislation and changes to existing legislation particularly around:](#)
 - [the ethical framework in local government and the link into the Annual Governance Statement; and](#)

- information and knowledge management, data protection and freedom of information
- The need to ensure timely responses to legal challenges against the Council from external sources
- Ordnance Survey data, some of which is inaccurate
- Opening up of the local land charge market to competition.
- The introduction of Home Information Packs (HIPS) - opportunities to local land charges and further competition from personal search agents.
- Possible implications of a change in national government e.g. Standards framework, political systems
- Government Connect project (and acceptance of technology and associated training needs)

In addition, the services have a number of internal drivers. The Council continues to undergo substantial change. A number of corporate initiatives will have a significant bearing on the way the services are delivered. These will include:

- The Corporate Governance Improvement Plan
- Service First customer service initiatives
- Investors in People Accreditation
- The Comprehensive Equalities Policy
- New performance reporting and management arrangements
- The medium term financial strategy, efficiencies targets and achieving value for money
- The Communication Strategy
- The service review programme
- Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee Finance Task and Finish Group
- Need to improve financial management across the Council
- Travel for Work
- Member Development Strategy 2008-2011
- Council budgets and financial position
- Skills shortages
- Ageing workforce
- Systems development to enable roll out of further Resourcelink modules
- Move to on-line recruitment processes
- Fluctuating levels of instructions to the legal team and property surveyor
- Respond appropriately, balancing legal constraints against the political ambitions of the authority
- Respond quickly to give clear and unambiguous legal advice to SMT, Cabinet and other Members
- Improve corporate awareness of legal implications of decisions by giving early warnings
- Absences in other departments may impact turnaround times for producing searches
- Departments dealing with third party access to answer property enquiries means less time overall to deal with land charges enquiries
- Land Charges is reliant on ICT support for the systems which collate and produce the final reports
- The Northgate system has not delivered any improvement in the turnaround time for searches
- Possible political instability; changes in Cabinet make-up
- Growing political 'maturity' in terms of administration and opposition
- Seek more effective, while still cost-efficient, methods of engagement with electorate
- Address the culture of taking items to meetings (objectives, outcomes, effectiveness)
- Increased working from home provision through IT enhancements
- Positive sustainability implications of fewer meetings, shorter agenda, increased home working

The outcome of the tenants' vote against a transfer to South Cambridgeshire Village Homes is likely to continue to have an effect on Corporate Services during 2010/11.

b) Our Key Partners

- Cambridgeshire Direct
- RSM Bentley Jenison
- Zurich Commercial & Municipal
- Cambridgeshire Procurement Group – working with:
 - Cambridgeshire County Council (e.g. framework agreements for advertising, agency staff and occupational health)
 - ESPO
 - Office of Government Commerce
 - Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Neighbouring Local Authorities (e.g. shared services projects, joint procurement of an integrated HR/Payroll system)
- New technology/Enterprise Ltd (Modern.Gov committee management system)
- IDeA
- ICT suppliers
- Bailiff service providers
- [Addenbrookes Occupational Health team](#)
- [Ministry of Justice](#)
- [Land Registry](#)
- [Parish Councils and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils \(CPALC\)](#)
- [Information Commissioner's Office](#)
- [Standards Board for England \(SBE\)](#)
- [Local Government Ombudsman](#)
- [Local MPs](#)
- [Ordnance Survey](#)
- [Cambridgeshire County Council as highway authority](#)
- [Local Land Charges Institute](#)
- [Land Data cic](#)

c) **Our Strengths and Weaknesses**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team work• Mutual respect, within team, with colleagues across the authority and with Members• Enthusiasm and positive attitude• Professionalism, commitment and motivation• Highly skilled and experienced workforce across all services• Breadth of knowledge• Excellent performance in service areas• Good working relationship with Members• Accounts have been produced to the statutory timetable and are unqualified• Efficient services with low costs• Adept at balancing priorities in the face of competing demands• Strive for continuous improvement and proactive in identifying and implementing solutions• Performance culture embedded through annual service plan targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenge on organisation to<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ meet statutory deadlines○ follow risk management processes○ meet report deadlines, leading to incomplete and badly formatted/ laid out reports• Ownership of forward plans• Communication• Age profile of staff in some services areas• Inability to arrange meetings in a timely manner due to member and officer availability• Lower staff satisfaction in comparison to other services• Lack of capacity for business support and service development• Large number of complex corporate projects and initiatives to support• Lack of technical systems expertise to enable better use, support and development of systems• Response times for advice and production of documentation where there are particular pressures of competing work• Potential for high profile cases to absorb significant officer time that may impact on service levels• Lack of investment in infrastructure, so hampered by lack of integration with corporate systems containing information required• Limited corporate understanding of the role support services play in underpinning the delivery of the Council's 3A's• Misunderstanding of the role of the public PFH meeting, i.e. not for informal early-stage policy discussions• Too many information items, especially at SMT• Failure by officers to use the weekly bulletin to convey info to Members; leads potentially to duplication and information overload

Opportunities

- Improve public access to services
- Action plan in place to improve direct communication with staff and Members
- **Improvement in Member training and development; carry out targeted and co-ordinated work programme in future years.**
- Efficiency review across Council
- Co-operation / co-ordination between services
- Focus on corporate Aims, Approaches and Actions
- Embedding financial and performance management culture across Council
- Partnership working
- Improve communication
- Improve customer focus
- Maximising use of financial management system across Council
- Shared services with neighbouring authorities and joint working
- Improve use and exploitation of ICT initiatives
- To further improve policies and procedures relating to procurement
- Service reviews
- Management Development programme
- Succession Planning
- Equalities agenda/EIA's
- Investor in People project
- Work with partners to change perception of non District Council services
- **Work with other services on decisions which could impact support services**
- **Strengthened quality of decision-making process via changes to report approval process**
- **Further enhance opportunities for public involvement in meetings**
- **Increased flexible/home-working from technological advances**
- **Streamline processes to reduce the cost of meetings**
- **Opportunities to review and improve how SCDC promotes local democracy via new statutory duty.**
- **Achieve Member Development Charter status.**

Threats

- Efficiency and other saving requirements
- Age profile of staff in some services areas leading to loss of expertise and knowledge
- Resource levels could impact the attainment of Corporate Aims and / or services plans
- **Reduction in capacity if DSM post is frozen or deleted – can no longer be a proactive service**
- **Failure by the organisation to prioritise and resource Member development;**
- Challenge to demonstrate and evidence Comprehensive Area Assessment and Use of Resources requirements and to meet the harder test for Use of Resources
- Tougher national standards for benefit services with introduction of Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry
- Increased demands on the benefits and collection services due the economic downturn
- Potential equal pay claims
- Lack of budget to deliver organisational development initiatives
- Political change/balance of authority
- Services exposure to competition
- New national indicator set and performance management framework
- Loss of momentum on improvement programme
- **Lack of Member buy-into training and development.**
- **Workload caused by weekly SMT meetings; knock-on effect for rest of team; exacerbated if capacity reduced**
- **Lack of Member engagement in government connect project means info no longer gets through.**
- **Growing evening meeting/out of hours culture has negative effects on work-life balance**
- **Lack of resources may mean flexible working advantages cannot be realised.**
- **Planning Committee getting unmanageably long again (made worse by the removal of CHDM meetings)**

3. The Council's Objectives

Corporate Services will continue to underpin the delivery the Council's Aims, Approaches and Actions and further key issues across the Council.

Council's Aims

1. We are committed to being a listening council providing first class services accessible to all;
2. We are committed to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for you and your family;
3. We are committed to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live;
4. We are committed to assisting provision for local jobs for you and your family;
5. We are committed to providing a voice for rural life.

Values

Corporate Services' actions to embed Values will be closely linked to actions to meet Customer Service Excellence (see section 5 below). Included within these actions will be consultation with service users (external and internal).

4. Our Service Objectives

Set out the objectives of your service – taking into account the Council's 3As, the functions of your service and external drivers and partners. These will be used in the Operational Plan.

All relevant services will need to include objectives which reflect cross cutting service priorities such as growth areas, community engagement, equalities and customer service.

Corporate Services will (the number in brackets indicates the relevant Aim):

- Provide efficient, effective and accessible support services to the Council and its residents underpinning the Council's Corporate Aims, Approaches and Actions (1);
- Enable the Council to manage its risks effectively (cross cutting);
- Identify areas for potential efficiency savings, rationalisation of products or suppliers through proactive procurement initiatives (1);
- Manage an effective, efficient, open and transparent decision-making process, which meets statutory requirements, enables the Council to make informed decisions, develop its community leadership role and promotes public awareness and involvement in the democratic decision making process (cross cutting);
- Support the training and development of Members (cross cutting);
- Ensure residents get the correct bills and all benefits and discounts that they are entitled to and take prompt and effective action against those who do not pay (cross cutting);
- Detect fraud and identify and punish those who commit fraud (cross cutting);
- Contribute to maintaining an appropriate Use of Resources score for the Council (cross cutting);
- Contribute to arrangements for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs (cross cutting);

- Effectively support the management of Council's revenue and capital budgets supporting the achievement of value for money and improved audit assessments (cross cutting);
- Through the use of effective ICT:
 - Support the delivery of services in the Council (cross cutting);
 - Provide an efficient customer focussed contact centre (1);
 - Provide members with the means to discharge their duties (cross cutting);
 - To support new and challenging initiatives (cross cutting);
 - Facilitate an informative and accessible web site (1).
- HR/Payroll will support equalities initiatives in the development and review of related policies.

[Note: These service objectives will be updated, added to and amended as necessary following finalisation of Improvement Plans.]

5. Our Customers

This section is about the people who use your service and whether their needs are being met – in particular summarise:

- *Information you have about the composition of the users of your service*
- *How their needs are changing*
- *Results of consultation/engagement in the last year*
- *Any customer service standards and how these are being delivered.*
- *Summary of complaints and how you have learnt from them.*

The Council has set the target to achieve the Customer Service Excellence standard and in 2010/11 all services will be contributing to the corporate project to meet this standard.

Identify your plans to improve customer service and meet the Customer Service Excellence standard in 2010/11. You may wish to draw upon the service by service assessment carried out by Service First in preparation for the Customer Service Excellence standard.

Corporate Services provides services to both internal and external customers.

Internal Customers

The Accountancy, ICT, Finance Project Team, HR/Payroll, Internal Audit and Legal Services teams mainly provide services to internal customers.

[Note: Details about internal customers, surveys, satisfaction and learning points will be included here.]

External Customers

Our external customers are mainly through Revenues Services, Democratic Services and Land Charges. For all (? ... **check**) of these areas, customer service standards have been established and are followed and monitored.

[Note: Details about external customers, surveys, satisfaction and learning points will be included here.]

Cambridgeshire Direct provides a contact centre service for Revenues Services customers between 8am and 8pm Monday to Saturday handling in the region of 55,000 calls per year. Customers wishing to make a payment are also to pay 24 hours per day seven days per week by automated telephone payment or through the Council's website. Quarterly satisfaction surveys are conducted by Cambridgeshire Direct and report a very high level of customer satisfaction.

The table below shows the approximate numbers of customers for the range of Revenues Services:

Council Taxpayers	60,600
Non-Domestic ratepayers	4,200
Council tenants	5,500
Concession travel pass holders	26,000
Recipients of housing benefit	5,100
Recipients of council tax benefit	6,100

Customer Service Excellence

The corporate Customer Service Excellence project is led by Service First, which the Revenues Manager, Benefits Manager and Head of ICT attend. Revenues & Benefits and ICT will be key participants in and contributors to the project.

[Note: Details about specific actions from Improvement Plans to support CSE will be included here.]

Customer Complaints

The formal complaints process is publicised by the Service and Revenues Services monitor complaints from customers in order to identify service failings and to take corrective actions to minimise future complaints. Revenues Services seek to minimise complaints through good customer service and aims to experience less than 20 justified complaints each year.

[Note: Details about complaints will be included here.]

More information about customers is contained under the next section.

6. Are we meeting the needs of all our community?

What are the main equalities issues facing the service? Do you know the composition of the people who use your services and whether the needs of all service users are being met? What were the findings of EQIAs carried out in the last year? Did they point to any actions that need to be undertaken? What EQIAs will you carry out next year? Are there any other actions for your service in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy? the Gender, Race or Disability schemes? or the Gypsy and Travellers Community Strategy?

Identify actions to promote equality and diversity in 2010/11

Identify any safeguarding children actions in 2010/11

South Cambridgeshire is very rural in nature, with 101 villages, no urban centres and an area of approximately 90,000 hectares. The population is approximately 140,000 and population density is low at 1.6 persons per hectare. There are 60,600 households in the District, of which approximately 16,000 are single adult households. Approximately 300 households received council tax reductions due to a resident's disability.

There is little deprivation in South Cambridgeshire with the area ranked 5th least deprived in England using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. 6,100 (10.1%) of households receive Council Tax benefit and approximately 60% of recipients are of pensionable age. The 2008 Place Survey showed that 47% of respondents were employed in full time work, 12% part-time and 9% self employed. 32% of respondents were not working - 20% being retired; 7% looking after the home; 3% permanently sick or disabled and the rest in education or training. Employment is above both the regional and national averages; however, unemployment levels have increased due to recession, leading to increased numbers of residents claiming welfare benefits.

Educational attainment is high resulting in generally knowledgeable and well-informed customers who expect a high standard of service.

The population of South Cambridgeshire is predominantly white British (89.5%). The largest individual ethnic minority population in the district is the fluctuating Traveller population, estimated at 1,330 people (1 per cent of the population of the district) in the sub-regional Travellers Need Assessment survey published in 2006.

The Council's offices are located in Cambourne, which is towards the geographical the centre of the District, and are fully accessible to persons with a disability. Cambourne is easily accessible by road and is well served by public transport by bus from Cambridge. However, unless residents live on the Cambridge – Cambourne – St Neots bus route they will need to take two bus journeys to reach the offices. There is little call for residents to visit the village of Cambourne other than to attend to business with the Council and consequently most residents prefer to transact their business by telephone. The Contact Centre is open for calls 72 hours per week from 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday providing a high level of accessibility. Callers may use type-talk, language line or text-phone to contact the Centre. Revenues Services employ a Welfare Visiting Officer to visit at home those residents wishing to claim benefits that have difficulty in access the service through other channels.

Revenues Services are evaluating the take-up of benefits in growth communities and will develop a formal strategy in 2009 to ensure the Council is equipped to maximise take-up of welfare benefits in new communities. In particular the Service wishes to evaluate the differences between new growth communities and established communities to ensure the service adapts to meet the needs of those new communities.

The Council has recently achieved Level 2 of the national Equality Standard and has made a commitment to progress to Level 3. All services are reviewing policies and procedures so they can be prioritised and impact assessed over the next couple of years as part of the overall Council programme. Staff have been involved in equalities training and will be supported by the Equalities team to conduct equality impact assessments during the year. A Comprehensive Equalities Policy has been approved to give direction to the Council's equalities work for the period 2009 to 2012.

[Note: Details about actions from Improvement Plans to promote equality and diversity will be included here.]

[Note: Details about actions from Improvement Plans about safeguarding children will be included here.]

7. Our Performance and Plans to Improve

Please give a brief assessment of the performance of your service – i.e. areas where your service has improved and compares well with national or other comparisons or areas where service performance still needs to be improved. You are requested to use PI numbers throughout the text to ensure clarity as to which are being referred to. It is important to use benchmarking information where available – the Policy & Performance team can help you with this.

Identify your main plans for improvement in 2010/11 – this may be in relation to particular performance indicators or in terms of improving capacity for improvement.

Overall the performance of the service during the year has been positive and the direction of travel is in the right direction. However there have also been areas that need to be improved further to enhance and improve the services offered.

In the last year a number of achievements have been made against the 2009/10 service plans. However there are also areas where limited progress has been made and actions are still outstanding. The key issues are summarised in the table below:

Achievements

- Statement of Accounts produced and unqualified within statutory timeframe
- Integrated financial information with performance
- Member training and development programme on track for implementation and strategy adopted by Council
- Managed risk management process across Council with regular review and robust challenge
- Contributed to improved performance in Contact Centre so contract requirements met
- Updated financial regulations and contract regulations
- Procurement procedures and flowchart available on Council's intranet
- Implementation of findings from the survey of Council tenants
- Procurement efficiencies and savings
- Introduction and operation of standards local assessment framework
- Efficiency target exceeded
- Collection rates comparable to previous year despite the economic

Areas needing action

- Further development of income management and e-billing
- Gaining further ownership from cost centre managers for their budgets
- Integration of CRM and back office systems
- Deployment of new desktop system
- Further improvements to the Constitution to increase its accessibility to the user
- Improvements to the Council's business planning mechanisms to improve the quality and transparency of decision-making
- Progress on ICT projects
- Better customer engagement particularly in respect of the Housing and Council Tax benefits service
- Targeted benefit take-up initiatives to ensure residents do not miss out on benefits they are entitled to
- Meeting the increased demand on services resulting from the economic downturn (e.g. increasing benefits caseload)
- [Reports to Democratic Services on time and in the correct template](#)
- [Absence rates still high](#)
- [Departure \(and non-replacement\) of Head of Revenues](#)

- downturn
- Benefit performance maintained despite increasing caseload
- Meeting targets in respect of Cabinet agenda, key decisions on forward plan, publication of decisions, publication of full agenda
- Managing Members' diaries, e.g. Portfolio Holder meeting dates agreed for the year
- Responding to all Members enquiries quickly and within target
- Portfolio Holder operating guidelines review report submitted; recommendations influenced development of combined PFHs' forward plan
- Delivered revenues and benefits training session in response to an identified need
- Led development of proposals to improve the report-drafting process for Cabinet
- Changes to vetting process
- On target to achieve ICT service review by 31/3/10; will enhance customer experience
- Revenues & Benefits PI's comparable with last year
- Use of Resources score dropped from level 3 to level 2 under the new assessment regime
- Member Development work programme: not delivering events within timescale, attendance poor, lack of co-ordinated feedback mechanism
- Low levels of public interest at community Scrutiny and Overview Committee meetings

In addition, the service has performed well in its performance indicators; no functions have been identified as performing poorly. The key indicators are summarised below:

Functions performed well

- Percentage of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days
- Average days to process new claims
- Percentage of Council Tax collected
- Percentage of non-domestic rates received
- Percentage of rent collected
- Percentage tenants evicted due to arrears
- Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered
- Percentage of key decisions taken by Cabinet which were previously published on the Forward Plan.
- Percentage of Council and Cabinet decisions published within two working days of the meeting.

Functions performed adequately

- Budget outturn forecast
- Percentage of Councillors attending at least one skills development training session
- Percentage of Contact Centre calls dealt with at first contact
- Percentage satisfied with Council website
- Average days to process notifications of changes of circumstance
- Number of prosecutions / sanctions per 1,000 caseload

This demonstrates that most aspects of the service are performing on average or above, however all services are striving for continuous improvement and maintaining levels of performance.

8. Our Resources

Your budget and estimated outturn for 2009/10 and budget for 2010/11 should be summarised. To be added into final service plan in March with info supplied by Finance.

Also give assessment of areas where your service is under/over resourced and any additional resources you need to deliver the service plan.

9. Do we provide Value for Money?

The recent Place Survey showed low levels of the public believing that the Council provides value for money.

Use national and local comparisons or unit costs to demonstrate VfM – for example use SPARSE, CIPFA or Audit Commission (from the vfm tool site) comparisons – or service specific comparisons.

Identify actions to improve or demonstrate provision of value for money for your service.

Accountancy

The Accountancy Service currently undertakes benchmarking with the CIPFA Benchmarking club for Accountancy, Creditors and Treasury Management. This data demonstrates that the cost of the Accountancy and Creditors Services was marginally above the average compared to other shire district councils due to the average staff cost per FTE being higher than other districts. This is believed to be due to the length of service of employees and a higher number of qualified accountancy staff compared to the average.

The Accountancy Service has continued to meet all statutory requirements and contributes to the overall use of resources score. The Treasury Management performance of the service, for 2007/08 showed that South Cambridgeshire achieved another creditable performance for the fifth year running, with a return of 5.75% on combined investments (less than and more than 365 days) compared to 5.65% for its comparator group, and 5.78% for the overall group. South Cambridgeshire was fifth highest in the comparator group of 12 other organisations and ninety-second highest in the overall group of 134 other organisations. The service will continue to use this benchmarking information to improve value for money in this area.

Democratic Services

Democratic Services has undertaken benchmarking work with all shire district councils around the country. This process has demonstrated that the service provides value for money in terms of the number of meetings serviced per officer on an annual basis; it will be repeated to ensure continuing value-for-money in future years.

Revenues Services

Revenues Services monitor the unit cost of a number of activities, including cost of council tax collection, cost of non-domestic rates collection and cost of administering benefit claims, over time. Key income streams for the service such housing and council tax benefit subsidy and income from legal costs are monitored on a monthly basis. The links between performance and cost are generally understood and an improvement in performance in the recovery of overpaid benefits has led to an increase in income and reduction in the cost of providing the service. Efficiency improvements have been made in 2008/09 as performance has been maintained with the same resources at a time of increasing caseload due to the economic recession.

An analysis of the service’s value for money performance has been conducted using the Audit Commission’s Value for Money tool. This analysis indicates that the Council performs well in comparison to geographical neighbours, but less well in comparison to the recommended ‘family grouping’ of similar authorities. However, it is recognised that the VFM tool utilises very broad data and further benchmarking is required to establish the reason for differences between costs at different authorities.

The Council is a member of the SPARSE benchmarking group, which provides annual benchmarking information on performance and value for money among rural district Councils. The annual performance profile for Benefit Services for 2007/08 indicates that the Council provides good value for money in comparison to other SPARSE members.

ICT

The ongoing review of the ICT service is scheduled to be concluded in early 2009/10 and value for money will be considered as part of the remit of the review.

General

Corporate Services facilitates the search for and achievement of efficiencies and savings across the authority. In 2008/09, the authority achieved ongoing cash-releasing value for money gains (National Indicator [NI] 179) of £1.244 million, exceeding its target of £1.089 million by £155,000.

10. Workforce Overview

What are the factors affecting the capacity of your workforce to deliver your service aims? This might include:

- *Recruitment or retention problems*
- *Potential loss of skills and capacity through retirements and the need for succession planning*
- *Skills shortages*
- *Absence issues*
- *The need to improve effectiveness or team working*
- *An unbalanced workforce in terms of gender, age or other factors.*

Identify actions to enhance the capacity of your workforce in 2010/11

Corporate Services employs the following numbers of employees:

	Number of Employees	Full Time Equivalents

Accountancy	15	12.96
Democratic Services	6	5.62
Finance Project Team	2	2.00
Human Resources / Payroll	10	8.32
ICT	25	23.61
Legal Services (inc. Land Charges)	14	12.11
Revenues Services	58	52.88
Total	130	117.50

NOTE: Figures to be checked with Peter Harris / Graham Smith

A key workforce planning issue facing the service is the age profile of staff. In some service areas there are concentrations of employees of similar ages with key knowledge and experience. This creates a risk that several key staff could retire within a short period of time, which could affect the delivery of key activities. A further risk may arise if it proves difficult to recruit employees of the appropriate calibre, qualification and experience. A review of this risk to the service will be undertaken as part of the Council's wider succession planning project.

There were periods of maternity leave across the service during 2009/10 and it can be anticipated that further maternity leave will be taken during 2010/11. Maintaining service levels is likely to require the employment of temporary staff, which can create budgetary pressures where rates for experienced or qualified temporary staff are higher than savings accruing due to maternity leave.

The Service is committed to staff development and has contributed to the corporate bid for Investors in People accreditation. Representatives from the Service have participated in the Management Competencies Development project and the resulting pilot programme. Staff development will continue to be a core aspect of the delivery of the Finance and Support Service and it is anticipated that further improvements will be implemented as part of the Investors in People improvement plan

Minimising productive time lost through sickness absence is key to maximising the human resources available to the service. Managers have received training in managing sickness absence and managers ensure that employees suffering serious illness are given help and support in returning to work. In the first three quarters of 2008/09 **a.b%** of working days have been lost through sickness (figure to be provided in due course) – equivalent to more than **x.y** FTE posts – and an increase on previous years. Exactly half of the time lost due to sickness resulted from long-term sickness and half from short-term sickness in this period. The effective management of sickness absence will continue to be a priority for the service.

11. Risk Overview

Identify major risks for the service or actions in the service plan.

**What actions will you take in 2010/11 to minimise and manage major risks?
John Garnham will be available to help you on this.**

Corporate Services have compiled a risk register for the whole service that summarises the major risks that could affect the service over the next 12 months. The greatest risks ... Actions have been included in operational and improvement plans to manage these risks, as referenced in the table below:

Risk No.	Short title/description	Action/Improvement proposed

[Note: This table will be compiled from the Corporate Services Risk register.]