

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

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Portfolio Holder/s: Cllr S Edwards (Finance & Staffing)
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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 Service
- Finance Project Team
- Human Resources (HR) / Payroll
- Internal Audit (provided by RSM Tenon, a private sector company)
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Service
- Legal & Democratic 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 (CSE, successor to CharterMark)
- Values (strong link to CSE)

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 Service**
 - Managing increasing demands for financial advice and information to be met from reduced staffing resources arising from the £1.6 million budget cuts for 2010/11 onwards
 - Consolidating, in conjunction with other services, on the improvements in asset information and data quality arising from the audit of the 2008/09 accounts by monitoring the action plan arising from the Annual Governance Report
 - 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 ?)
 - Explore opportunities for joint working, e.g. co-terminate and jointly procure contracts for banking, insurance, or internal audit
 - Possible impact of requests for information in support of exploring opportunities for joint working
 - Respond to areas for improvement identified in the Annual Audit Letter
- **Finance Project Team**
 - Procurement projects in 2010/11: 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
 - Possible joint procurement projects across Cambridgeshire authorities (including re Accountancy projects as required) in support of exploring opportunities for joint working
 - Work with HR on recruitment advertising and temp & agency staff contracts and with ICT on printing and stationery projects
- **HR / Payroll**
 - Managing increasing demands for employment-related advice and information to be met from reduced staffing resources arising from the £1.6 million budget cuts for 2010/11 onwards
 - Will be impacted by Safeguarding Children agenda, including implementation of the new legislative framework for Vetting and Barring
 - Will be impacted by housing, planning and new communities restructures
 - Will be impacted by the implementation of the Job Evaluation project, including any single status provisions (new pay structure (Payroll and potentially ICT), contractual change letters, appeals etc)
 - Capacity to deliver organisational development initiatives such as Management Development, liP and e-learning initiatives
 - Make ResourceLink available (impact on ICT) so staff access own data
 - Development of new and reviews of existing policies / strategies, including Equality Impact Assessments
 - Flexible retirement policies

- Centralise recruitment process
 - Possible input resource requirement re automated transfer of HR data → phone list
 - **Champion homeworking**
 - Will support services in the TUPE transfer of Recycling and Responsive Repairs services
 - Impact of wider organisational restructurings
- **ICT Service**
 - Line of business systems improvements/procurement i.e. Housing, Revenues & Benefits, Planning, Building Control
 - Improved systems reporting capabilities
 - Improved public access including internet @ Cambourne offices
 - Discussion of ICT arrangements, including jointly commissioned disaster recovery, in support of exploring opportunities for joint working
 - Information and Records management
 - Consolidation of ICT restructure following the ICT Service Review
 - ITIL driven process and procedures
 - Increase use of Multi Function Device - high volume printers; auto-direct large print jobs to the Print Room
 - Opportunities for improved intranet (InSite) use
 - Resilient services in support of home and remote working for both staff and Members
 - Expansion of 'virtual infrastructure' in support of improved services
 - 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
 - Possible co-termination and joint procurement of internal audit contract, in support of exploring opportunities for joint working
- **Legal & Democratic Services**
 - Members' expectations about speed of advice 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 – will SCDC still have a local ethical framework to administer ?
 - Improve turnaround times for refresher searches to provide the service at no cost to the Council
 - Exploring potential for shared legal services with other Cambridgeshire authorities
 - Confirm the aims, objectives and frequency of meetings of SMT and EMT
 - Change of Government may allow return to former committee system and further changes to the Councillors' standards regime
 - Lack of capacity in Democratic Services to deliver Member training
 - Threat to the team's capability to be proactive in bringing forward proposals for structural and Constitutional changes
 - New Member induction following local elections
 - Member development programme may drop off ? - but, one of the most important
 - Possible impact of formulating new joint committees etc, including implications of project governance, in support of exploring opportunities for joint working
 - Ensuring the Council meets its Duty to Promote Democracy as required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill

- **Revenues Services**

- Safeguarding Children } while maintaining
- Customer Service Excellence } customer focus
- Housing ICT impact } and service
- Maintain performance while delivering efficiencies in the service by exploring shared service opportunities
- Implement new procedures and working practices to achieve savings targets
- Concessionary bus pass – possible move to Cambridgeshire County Council
- Possible move of Rents Team into Housing
- Resilience of NNDR Team especially with business property revaluation with effect from 1 April 2010
- Continuing economic downturn leading to increased workloads – more benefit claimants and impact on collection rates
- Proposed Housing Benefit reform
- Possible legislative changes if new government elected

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 Service

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

Finance Project Team

- Co-ordinate and advise on risk management
- Co-ordinate Use of Resources assessment
- Promote efficiencies and savings
- Undertake ad hoc financial projects
- Provide procurement advice and support

HR / Payroll

- Recruitment and retention of employees – ensuring policies, practices and processes conform to relevant employment and equalities legislation and follow best practice
- Management of sickness absence and capability issues
- Performance Management including performance & development reviews and probation
- Policies and practices to support organisational development – in particular, workforce planning, succession planning
- Corporate training and development programmes identifying corporate learning opportunities and effective training provision so that employees can perform to their full potential
- Employee relations including liaison with Trade Unions and staff
- Payment of salary and allowances to employees and Members
- Provision of pay and allowance information in accordance with HMRC and statutory requirements

ICT Service

- Support the effective use of ICT systems
- Development, implementation and management of technologies
- Manages voice communication technologies (landline and mobile)
- Provide operational computing service to staff and Members
- Geographic Information Systems
- Street Naming and Numbering
- Local Land Property Gazetteer
- Infrastructure Support
- Systems Support
- Application Support
- Information and data asset management
- Web site and Intranet
- 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 & Democratic Services (including Land Charges and Property Surveyor)

- 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
- To provide full legal support and advice on Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act responses
- To manage the Council's Information Governance Work (jointly with ICT) including the Council's Publication Scheme, Records Survey and updating the Fol policy
- 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
- To protect and safeguard the interests of Land and property within the District
- Work commenced on Information Governance Policy Handbook incorporating:
 - Data Quality Handling
 - Information Sharing Protocol
 - Records Management Policy
- 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
- Provide efficient Local Land Charges Service within improving timescales in response to applications to searches and CON29 enquiries
- Help maintain high standards of Corporate Governance through support for the

- Legal Services now actively working with procurement teams on all major procurement projects
- Facilitate Council's decision making process
- Support scrutiny processes
- Lead on new legislation relating to decision making structures
- Information Risk Management
- Policy Information Charter
- Support and develop Members of the Council
- Support political management structure and lead reviews of the Constitution
- Standards Committee, Corporate Governance Committee and Member Toolkit
- Communications between Members and Officers as first points of contact for enquiries
- Administer Members' allowance scheme

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:

- Poor three year government grant settlement, current economic climate and capping of council tax and rent increases resulting in the need to find substantial efficiencies and cuts in services
- Statutory requirements to set the Council's budget and Council Tax and Housing Rent levels
- Statutory requirement to produce a statement of accounts
- Unpredictable grants, e.g. supporting people
- 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 – specifically the 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 and barring system and overhaul of CRB checks
- 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
- 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 Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan both indicate the need for substantial efficiency savings and cuts (being £1.6 million on the General Fund) which will impact on both front line and corporate services
- The Corporate Governance Improvement Plan
- Customer Service Excellence project
- Investors in People Accreditation
- The Comprehensive Equalities Policy
- New performance reporting and management arrangements
- 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
- 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
- Need to respond appropriately, balancing legal constraints against the political ambitions of the authority
- Need to 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 Tenon
- 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 for England (SfE)
- Local Government Ombudsman
- Local MPs
- Ordnance Survey
- Cambridgeshire County Council as highway authority

- Cambridgeshire County Council as Pension scheme administrators
- Local Land Charges Institute
- Land Data cic
- Training providers

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 • Mature risk management arrangements • Good procurement advice and support service • Top quartile/decile Revenues & Benefits performance levels • Corporate efficiency savings achieved in excess of NI 179 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges 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 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 information 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 depending on the impact of the removal of CHDM meetings

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Governance now on the agenda of ICT Steering group re-named ICT & Information Governance Steering Group (ICTIG) with new terms of reference. Information Governance Working Group (IGWG) first meeting 2/11/09 (chaired by Legal Services) - will report to ICTIG on all aspects of Information Governance - more joined-up approach Impact of ICT Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGA obtaining legal advice on options available to LA's on charging for information supplied as part of local search & Con29 enquiries. Indication that many LA's will have to reduce their charges significantly to bring them in line with Environmental Information Regulations
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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.

New Council Actions for 2010/11

Democratic Services will develop, agree and implement an action plan which will deliver Member Development Charter accreditation by March 2011, so that Members are better equipped for their role, bringing benefit to decision-making and scrutiny as well as improving their ability to represent the electorate effectively.

The Finance Project Team will assist as appropriate with procurement aspects of the new Council actions for 2010/11, in particular regarding outcomes from the refuse and recycling service review and from the housing service review and restructure.

Major projects to deliver new Council actions will have their own project plans and risk logs (these latter, copied to the Finance Project Officer), so that risks associated with delivery of those new Council actions will be properly managed.

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

Corporate Services will:

- Contribute to arrangements for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.
- Enable the Council to manage its risks effectively.
- Identify areas for potential cost savings, or rationalisation of products and suppliers.
- Contribute towards achieving the Council's efficiency savings forecasts.
- Assist colleagues with implementing procurement practices and systems (including e-procurement) in line with the Council's policies and procedures and with EU and other procurement legislation.
- Coordinate the corporate project to identify and implement efficiency savings across the authority.
- Coordinate the corporate arrangements to maintain an appropriate Use of Resources overall score.
- Work in partnership to provide efficient and customer focused services.
- Ensure that the Council implements employment best practice and the statutory requirements in the various employment, health & safety and equalities acts.
- Support the attainment of the Council's ICT Strategy 2009-2011.
- Enable the Council to make effective use of ICT systems and achieve its service objectives through the implementation, development and management of appropriate technologies.
- Ensure best value for money options for service delivery.
- Achieve improved customer satisfaction with our services.
- Work with the Standards Committee to raise the profile of ethical governance within the Council and all Parish Councils in the District.
- Work with colleagues to promote good information management across the Authority to achieve efficiencies in Records Keeping, Information Sharing, public access to and re-use of information, and data security ensuring the Authority meets its legal obligations in these areas.
- Manage an effective, efficient, open and transparent decision-making process, which meets statutory requirements and enables the Council to make informed decisions and develop its community leadership role, whilst providing the required support and first point-of-contact with elected Members to enable them to carry out their roles. To assist the Council in putting in place further improvements in political processes, conduct and leadership through proactive involvement in corporate governance reviews of the Constitution and decision-making mechanisms.
- Support and evaluate the training and development of Members, enabling effective training and development to contribute to the Council meeting its strategic aims.
- Work in partnership to provide an efficient and customer focused Revenues Service.

5. Our Customers

Corporate Services provides services to both internal and external customers.

Internal Customers

The Accountancy, ICT, Finance Project Team, HR/Payroll, Internal Audit and Legal & Democratic Services teams mainly provide services to internal customers, including 57 Members.

Legal Services are meeting its performance standards in council house and equity share sales.

Legal Services will conduct a survey on internal clients to identify aspects of the service that internal clients are not satisfied with and take appropriate action to improve satisfaction.

External Customers

Our external customers are mainly through Revenues Services and Legal & Democratic Services, including Land Charges. For all of these areas, customer service standards have been established and are followed and monitored.

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

The Land Charges section has carried out a survey of all personal search agents using the service and the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the service.

Land Charges will now conduct a survey of all Land Charges external customers (solicitors & estate agents) to identify aspects of the service that customers are not satisfied with and take appropriate action to improve satisfaction.

The Council is planning on enhancing self-service opportunities for its customers.

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.

The HR/Payroll service intends to procure and facilitate corporate training and development to support the Customer Service Excellence project. This will develop customer service skills within service areas, leading to improved service for residents, resulting in increased customer satisfaction.

There are individual actions within the Accountancy Service, ICT and Revenues & Benefits improvement plans, to improve services to both external and internal customers.

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.

SMT receives a quarterly report on complaint handling performance. The latest report shows that Corporate Services received 3 complaints in the first quarter of 2009/10, 5 in the second quarter and 7 in the third quarter. Of these, 2 (67%), 4 (80%) and 7 (100%) were responded to within target. Considering the range and complexity of the services provided, this is a remarkably low level of customer dissatisfaction. In addition, Corporate Services received 2 compliments in the third quarter (figures not available for the first two quarters).

More information about customers is contained under the next section.

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

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.

All Corporate Services service areas considered high priority have been equality impact assessed. Remaining service areas will be equality impact assessed on a priority basis.

The Revenues team will train appropriate Revenues staff, particularly visiting officers, to be alert to signs that children or young persons' safety or wellbeing is at risk. In addition, a minimum of two managers within the Revenues team will be trained to act as first point of referral for any concerns raised by employees, and to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children and young people will therefore be referred to the appropriate agency, leading to greater safeguarding of children and young people.

The Procurement Team will produce addenda to the Council's Procurement Strategy, Contract Regulations and procurement processes, as necessary, so that appropriate Safeguarding Children considerations are taken into account in relevant procurement exercises. Incorporate fully at next formal review.

7. Our Performance and Plans to Improve

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 being implemented
- 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

Areas needing action

- Further development of income management and e-billing
- Gaining further ownership from cost centre managers for their budgets
- Integration of 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

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 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
 - 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
 - Proposals to improve the report-drafting process for Cabinet agreed and implemented
 - Changes to vetting process
 - On target to achieve ICT service review by 31/3/10; will enhance customer experience
 - Revenue collection performance generally maintained despite the recession, especially council tax and rents
 - Legal & Democratic Services are meeting targets for processing complaints under the Members Code of Conduct as set by SfE
 - Legal Services ran two successful Parish Forums for parish councils in Sept/Oct 2009 covering topics such as parish planning powers and pre-determination and bias, the Code of Conduct, capacity building and how to deal with Freedom of Information Act/Data Protection Act requests
- 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; quality of reports and recommendations
 - Absence rates still high
 - Restructure of Revenues & Benefits service to achieve financial savings while maintaining performance
 - Need to ensure achieving sound Use of Resources scores of 2 and 3's where appropriate
 - 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
 - From 1 January 2010 land Charges will start to operate an electronic register instead of making paper copies for register

In addition, the service has performed well in its performance indicators; no Corporate Services functions have been identified as performing poorly. However, corporately, the Council failed to achieve its stretch target of 10 days to pay undisputed invoices. 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 of tenants evicted due to arrears (recovery action taken earlier, including serving notices to quit, resulting in tenants paying arrears and hence a low number of actual evictions)
- 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.
- Average number of days taken to process complaints under the Code of Conduct
- Average number of days taken to turnaround a Land Charges search
- Percentage of full agendas published, without late reports 'to follow'.

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.

The Council's budget delivers the improvements proposed in the improvement plans.

The Council will be under pressure in some areas due to staffing reductions as part of the savings package.

9. Do we provide Value for Money?

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 below the average compared to other shire district councils.

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 2008/09 showed that South Cambridgeshire achieved another creditable performance for the fifth year running, with a return of 5.61% on combined investments (less than and more than 365 days) compared to 5.36% for its comparator group, and 5.26% for the overall group. South Cambridgeshire was third highest in the comparator group of 13 other organisations and nineteenth highest in the overall group of 128 other organisations. The service will continue to use this benchmarking information to improve value for money in this area.

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

Supporting the needs and aspirations of all our users, ICT underpins all service delivery at South Cambs. ICT was recently subject to a comprehensive Service Review looking at all aspects of the service, relationship with the customer and use of resources. Several recommendations have been made and implemented; other longer-term initiatives will continue to be developed during 2010. The ICT service continually looks for efficiencies and opportunities to provide best value through the use of appropriate technology.

Legal & Democratic Services

Legal Services has not carried out a benchmarking exercise but remain confident that the service provides value for money for the Council. Clients prefer working with an in-house legal support team rather than external legal advisors because of the convenience, availability and knowledge of corporate business that comes with being on-site and closely involved with the client. An in-house land and property surveying service is highly cost effective and means the Council does not need to engage external surveying expertise. Exploratory talks are being held with Heads of Legal Services at the other councils in Cambridgeshire to consider what savings and efficiencies could be made via shared legal services.

Land Charges have to charge fees set by central government for Personal Search Agents and Personal Search companies. The Land Charges service is subject to commercial competition and can therefore be demonstrably benchmarked against private sector providers. A fee for refresher searches was introduced from November 2009.

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.

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

Corporate Services employs the following numbers of employees:

	Number of Employees	Full Time Equivalents
Accountancy	15	12.96
Finance Project Team	2	2.00
Human Resources / Payroll	10	8.32
ICT	25	23.61
Legal & Democratic Services (inc. Land Charges)	20	17.73
Revenues Services	58	52.88
Total	130	117.50

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 Corporate Services 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 half of 2009/10, 2.56% of working days have been lost through sickness (figure to be provided in due course) – equivalent to 3.0 FTE posts. Nearly two-thirds of the time lost due to sickness resulted from long-term sickness and just over one-third 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

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:

- **Reduction in HR/Payroll team to meet savings target**
- **Inadequate resources allocated to Revenues & Benefits business support:** Workload demands / Resignation / Sickness / Difficulty in recruitment.
- **HR/Payroll system:** Lack of system administration and development skills and expertise.
- **Impact of market conditions on conveyancing:** Collapse/downturn of the housing market.
- **Knowledge / experience in Accountancy service:** Retirement / resignation / restructuring and redundancy / long term sickness of key senior staff / difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified staff.
- **Late approval and receipt of audit opinion on 2009/10 and later years' accounts,** arising from significant changes in accounting requirements increasing the length and complexity of the Statement of Accounts, tight deadlines.
- **The EU Remedies Directive** means a major shift in the balance of power from the authority to suppliers, if staff do not comply with procurement procedures and legislative requirements.
- **Recruitment & selection:** Non conformance with recruitment & selection legislation and best practice, including safeguarding checks.
- **Data Transfer Security:** Loss of residents confidential data due to inadequate security for transfer of data.
- **Loss of connectivity to 'outside world':** Recognising Government Connect, Communications and data links fail / degrade.
- **System upgrades**
- **3rd party dependencies:** 3rd party does not deliver to timetable.
- **System hardware failure**

- **Information Governance:** Failure to process or protect information in accordance with legal and regulatory obligations and best practice.
- **Limited management capacity in Revenues & Benefits:** Increasing demands from corporate core / Increasing demands from customers.
- **Job Evaluation & Equal Pay project:** Insufficient resources or slippage against project plan affect the Job Evaluation & Equal Pay project.