

FINANCE

Portfolio Holder Statement Update October 2012

1. What have the measures in the Portfolio Holder Statement been telling you about how things are going in service during 2012/13?

The collection rates for the first 6 months of the year were:-

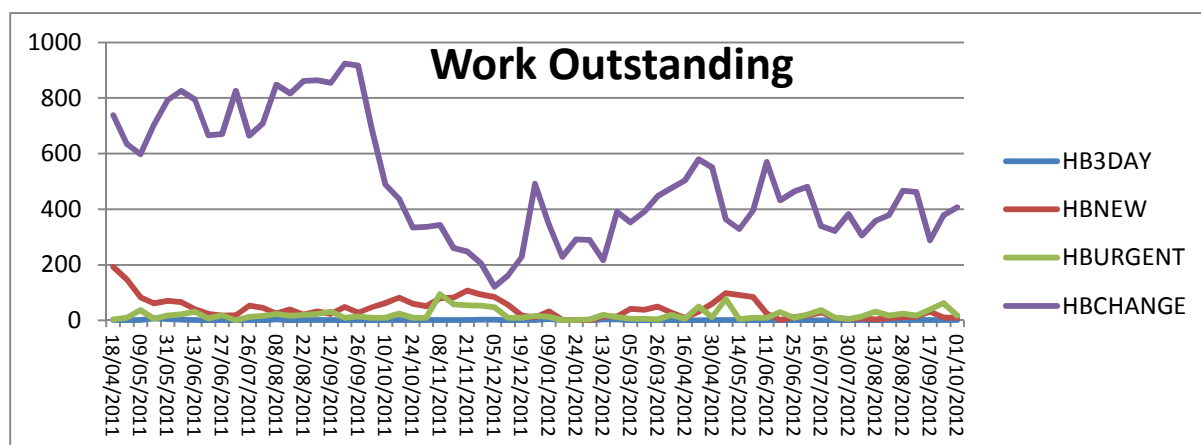
Council Tax 58.0% (58.1% for 2011/12)

Business Rates 57.4% (57.3% for 2011/12)

These figures are in line with those for 2011/12 which is the highest year on record. Whilst there is no scope for complacency, it does suggest that similar high collection rates should be achieved in 2012/13.

2. Which measures have been of particular interest or concern during the period and what have you learnt about your systems from these measures? Please attach the final version of your SAP customer & operational measures for the year.

Benefits work outstanding is monitored weekly. This is subject to seasonal peaks and troughs, notably around Billing (March).



Work has been on-going to improve processing times (as discussed in the previous Finance Portfolio Statement in June in respect of 2011/12). Whilst there are still peaks and troughs, the work outstanding has been below 2011/12 levels.

3. What have you done to date as a result of learning from these measures?

Telephone calls to the Customer Service Centre in respect of Council Tax increased substantially from 2009/10 to 2010/11 as set out below:-

- 2009/10 38,736
- 2010/11 48,886

Due to this increase the Council Tax and Customer Service Centre staff have been working closely using Leans Systems thinking to improve the position. With this closer work and more staff training, the numbers of calls have reduced:-

- 2011/12 43,655
- 2012/13 17,782 six months, full year projection 34,000.

Alongside this, the number of abandoned calls have also reduced.

4. What has been the impact of what you have done to date?

The continued impressive collection rates in respect of council tax and NNDR is believed to be partly down to changes to the reminder letters. These changes have encouraged prompter payment before tax payers are summonsed and so charged court fees. As a consequence, the Council is seeing a reduction in court fee income which has been fed into the Budget Review process.

5. What else do you plan to do as a result of learning from these measures?

The Financial Management system intervention is not able to be easily measured as objectively. However, the work here has presented improvements in the way that budgets are reviewed across the authority. A more holistic approach has been rolled out across the organisation. This seeks to ensure in monitoring the current year budget, full regard is had to past performance, and most notably the impact of this on the council's financial projections. Hopefully the value of this work will be reflected in more accurate budgets so ensuring the optimum use of the Council's resources.

6. Of your key projects (as identified in your portfolio holder statement) how many were completed and how many are not? Of those that were not completed please indicate what the revised dates are.

Project	Progress	Original milestones	Revised milestones
Finance Staffing Restructure	Following consultation with staff in accordance with the agreed consultation process, the recommendations were agreed by Employment Committee in September.	Employment Committee report – September 2012	Payroll/HR proposals to be presented to Employment Committee in January 2013.
Budget Savings "post final accounts review"	£30,000 specifically identified, with other savings identified as part of on-going Budget Review.	July 2012 Budget Review	Further savings should be identified as part of on-going

Project	Progress	Original milestones	Revised milestones
			Budget Review, but these are often difficult to relate to being prior year "underspends".
Discretionary Budget Review	Many of these budgets have been reviewed as part of the on-going Budget Review. Further specific work planned for the Autumn.	August 2012	December 2012
Local Council Tax Support Scheme	Progressed in line with SAP, with formal consultation commencing August.	Final scheme to be publicised February 2013	Report to Executive/ Council November 2012 to agree final scheme.
Universal Credit	Minimal specific details of how UC will impact directly on WDC are known, other than housing benefits will cease to be provided by local authorities at sometime after October 2013. Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Real Time Information and the new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) all affect WDC, and are part of the changes in the lead up to UC.	On-going watching brief	
Benefits Fraud – Business cases for resources for more pro-active working.	Detailed "matches" for claimants in work requested. These proved to be less productive than referrals from other channels (Benefits Officers primarily). Also, with many cases, whilst a fraud may be proven, the recovery of the overpayment of benefit is frequently difficult. With shift to SFIS (see above), this is not the time to be	May 2012	2013/14 - Planning resources required for fraud work post Universal Credit 2013.

Project	Progress	Original milestones	Revised milestones
	taking on additional HB fraud staff.		
Financial Management	New Budget Review process rolled out across organisation from April.	June 2012.	
Transactional Review (Systems Thinking Initiative)	Whilst there has been some dialogue across the Council with officers to reduce transactions, this has been slowed down by the Finance Staffing Review.	On-going	Once the new FASTeam is in place (October 2012) as part of the Finance staff changes, greater emphasis will be able to be given to this.
Insurance renewals 2012	Renewals followed EU procurement process. New contract in place to commence November 2012, broadly in line with budget.		
Review Code of Financial Practice	Progress delayed due to work on other Service Plan priorities, notably the Staff Review	July 2012	January 2012 Executive
Officer Training - Budgets and Code of Financial Practice.	Budget Training provided to budget managers as part of Financial Management Review.		Code of Financial Practice training targeted for February/ March after new Code has been agreed.
Procurement – progress in line with action plan and to make financial savings	On track. Monitored by procurement champions. Annual reported to Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee June 2012.	On-going	On-going

7. Does your Service Area Plan/Portfolio Holder Statement need to be amended? If so, please describe the changes.

Changes to milestones detailed in section 6.