

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 29 NOVEMBER 2011

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL SERVICES

SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report provides an up dates for the Committee on the progress of the shared service

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION that :

the Committee notes the progress to date and bring to the attention of the Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee any issues it would wish that committee to consider.	
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1.0 Background

1.1 The Committee requested this report at its meeting on 4 October. Subsequent to that meeting the first meeting of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee took place on 19 October 2011. Two reports considered by the Joint Committee which are attached as ERP B and ERP C are relevant and this report provides an update on subsequent progress.

2.0 Report

Change Management

2.1 Selection and appointments to the new structure have been completed and no compulsory redundancies were required. A single voluntary redundancy was accepted and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting if there is any rejection of a job offer.

There will be some recruitment required and in the first instance existing staff working less than full time are being offered an opportunity to increase their hours. Ex - Stevenage staff who became East Herts employees on 1 August will relocate on a phased basis from December in part dependent on the timing of BT connecting home workers.

Technology

- 2.2 Subsequent to the report to the Joint Committee there were delays in installing a new release of the Capita software used by both Councils to deliver the service. The upgrade has necessarily had to be progressed concurrently with the integration of the systems to provide seamless working across the separate data bases for each Council. Critical year end processes are time dependent on the upgrade. Unfortunately, Capita have identified significant problems with the release and requested a halt by all users to its live application until corrective patches are tested. As at 16 November, work is therefore behind plan and achievement of the date of 5 December for the switch to an integrated system remains dependent on the new release being readied for the live environment. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.
- 2.3 Secure data links between the sites are in place as planned and home working equipment ready for installation subject to BT setting up the broadband.

Finance

- 2.4 The partnership agreement sets out how the equal sharing of benefits and set up cost will be achieved. No unforeseen costs have emerged during implementation to date.

Go Live

- 2.5 The 5 December remains the target date subject to resolution of the technology issue above.

Risks

- 2.6 No additional risks have emerged. Staffing risks have lessened following the recruitment process but ICT risks heightened. Contingency plans will mitigate these risks but at potential cost of diverting ICT resources from lower priority projects.

Beyond Go Live

2.7 No change since the Joint Committee report.

Further Updates

2.8 Benefits case load continues to show an increase. The current cases load is manageable within existing resourcing and productivity will increase once the disruption of setting up the service is overcome. The reduction in weekend working while ICT was taken off line during the relocation from Bishop's Stortford created a back log which is now being reduced. Year to date performance on benefits and tax collection is at para 2.4.3 of ERP C and a verbal update will be provided on later figures.

2.9 Information requested at the last meeting on costs and ICT security is as follows

- The cost of collection is roughly 2 pence of cost for each £1 of tax collected
- We use software applications of national repute of which security is a key feature and access is tightly controlled by need to see and need to update with strong password protection. All data transferred electronically is protected by encryption with firewalls at both ends of the transfer such data is "pushed" rather than "pulled". The use of EDRM (Electronic Document Management) has reduced the risks attached to paper records. Home workers use "thin client" technology so that no data is held remotely and all printing initiated by home workers takes place in the office. The Council's general ICT protocols apply and no personal or sensitive data may be downloaded to portable storage devices and thin client technology removes the capability for this. Lap tops are not issued extensively and require dual authentication to access.

Summary

The absence of any significant implementation issues to date reflects the detailed planning and hard work of numerous staff across all work streams not only in the service but in support from HR, ICT and Finance in both Councils.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'** .

Background Papers

None

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives	The payment of benefits relates primarily to People by permitting a better quality of life and in particular better affordable housing. The additional spend by families arising from these payments has a wider economic impact adding to the community's overall Prosperity. The efficacy of the collection of council tax and business rates further impacts on Prosperity .
Consultation:	No decisions are required by this report
Legal:	None
Financial:	None
Human Resource:	None
Risk Management:	The report alerts the Committee to a heightened risk in respect of completion of ICT work by the 5 December target date.