

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT
REVENUES AND BENEFITS COMMITTEE – 24 JANUARY 2012

REPORT BY HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE

6. IMPLEMENTATION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All.

Purpose/Summary of report

- To advise Members on the progress of the implementation of the revenues and benefits shared service.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION:</u> that	
(A)	Arrangements and timescales for implementing the revenues and benefits shared service be noted.

1.0 Background:

1.1 Progress with implementation was reported to the joint committee on 19th October 2012. At that time a transition to an integrated service had been planned for the period August to December.

1.2 During this period it has intended to have the following key service features in place:

- All posts filled in the new staff structure
- Homeworking rolled out for all appropriate staff
- A single IT solution tested and operational
- Seamless telephony for staff and customers
- Critical business processes standardised

1.3 In order to achieve transition, the implementation project is managed through key phases, each with its associated risks.

2.0 Report:

- 2.1 Since the last report to the joint committee, the implementation project timescales have needed to respond to issues arising from the 'efficiency version' of the software released by Capita. This new release has been fraught with implementation issues, in particular a significant increase in ICT capacity that could have a deleterious impact on the whole of the Councils ICT infrastructure. Solutions have been identified for completion by 30th January 2012.
- 2.2 Whilst those issues have been resolved, the time taken to achieve full resolution had the knock-on effect of delaying system testing and staff training.
- 2.3 A wholesale re-planning exercise was completed, which took account of the knock-on effects, and planned staff absences, and other operational demands. With the need to maintain good performance in mind, a realistic implementation plan was produced and approved by the Project Board.
- 2.4 The key phases in the project remain unchanged. A summary on the status of those phases is given below:

3.0 Key phase – Change Management:

- 3.1 This phase brings together all the issues, statutory and policy obligations relating to the revenues and benefits workforce.
- 3.2 The transfer of staff from Stevenage Borough Council to East Herts Council has been completed, with no outstanding issues. Whilst a small number of staff decided to voluntarily leave the service, there have been no compulsory redundancies.

4.0 Key phase – Technology:

- 4.1 This phase includes all matters relating to IT, telephony and staff home working.
- 4.2 The complex set of tasks involved in harmonising the technology for the shared service continues to be managed by a full time external consultant.

4.3 Whilst the current slippage in going-live is attributable to unexpected issues with the Capita software and the readiness of East Herts IT, it has created an opportunity to plan and complete additional system testing and to deliver more staff training on the Electronic Document Management system which is used by East Herts.

5.0 Risk:

5.1 A significant risk exists around the readiness of the EHC IT infrastructure to receive the system data migration from SBC, following identification of the ICT requirement of Capita's new release. This risk has been carefully managed through the detailed IT implementation plan, agreed between both councils.

5.2 The management of this risk is made difficult by vulnerability which can arise when an essential upgrade to software is scheduled by system suppliers. Experience shows that even following the completion of extensive testing, such upgrades can present problems on implementation.

5.3 Such an instance has arisen following the installation of an upgrade to the Revenues and Benefits system at EHC. In this case, the increased demands placed on EHC servers by the upgrade have required the SBC data migration to be deferred, whilst the capacity issues are considered.

5.4 EHC and SBC IT specialists have worked in partnership and with the supplier, to identify a solution. That solution must be tested thoroughly, in order to give confidence that the SBC data migration can be completed and made ready for the Revenues and Benefits staff to use in live operation. The outcome of testing may require the completion of data transfer to be deferred should the solution not work as envisaged.

5.5 For example, the results of testing may indicate that a hardware purchase is needed to ensure stable operation of the system in future. In which case, full 'go-live' will be further delayed, whilst the procurement and installation of hardware is completed.

5.6 Meantime, a contingency plan has been developed which will allow the roll out of staff home working to continue, on schedule.

5.7 Work to mitigate this risk is in progress at the time of publishing this report. A verbal update on the position will be given by officers during the committee meeting.

6.0 Key phase – Business processes:

6.1 With hundreds of separate business processes in operation, the task of harmonising them into one standard set and then training the staff on the changes will take many months. The approach being taken is to initially focus on those tasks which are essential for 'go-live'.

7.0 Key phase – Governance:

7.1 The joint committee has been established, with clarity around its work programme focussed on service performance, service planning and budgets.

7.2 The joint management boards has agreed its membership and a standing agenda. Its first monthly meeting is scheduled in February.

8.0 Key phase – Finance:

8.1 From April 2012, a standard agreed budget management protocol takes effect and will run on each year thereafter. Proposals for the first full year shared service budget are the subject of a separate report to the joint committee.

9.0 Implications/Consultations:

9.1 The 'go-live' plan is characterised by a phased approach, with the intention of rolling out home working and staff training during December and January. This approach should be completed by 30th January 2012.

9.2 Risks remain around the technology, in the data migration, systems testing and home working. Risks have been identified around the telephony for customers as well as staff. Dependencies between the availability of IT systems and the completion of staff training also give rise to risks of delay.

9.3 Should implementation experience any further delay in achieving the key service features necessary for 'go-live', the impact will be to

delay the start of year end processes. This in turn, would delay annual billing for council tax and business rates, and the up-rating of all Benefit claims.

9.4 A delay to the start of year end processes would be unacceptable. Therefore, if the shared service implementation timescales slip again, there may be no alternative but to postpone the completion of 'go-live' until sometime after main billing has been completed by both councils.

9.5 The Project Board continues to monitor and direct progress with implementation during weekly project meetings.

Background Papers:

None.

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives (delete as appropriate):</p>	<p>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Caring about what's built and where <i>Care for and improve our natural and built environment.</i></p> <p>Shaping now, shaping the future <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>None</p>