

Annual Report

2011/12

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Section 1: Introduction

Message from the Leader and the Chief Executive

Looking back it is clear that it has been a year of change and challenge. Despite a severely reduced government grant, sound financial management finds us in a strong position to maintain our track record of good service delivery.

We have also developed some excellent projects further investing in those areas which our residents' surveys said were your priorities. Those investments will help deliver good services for our residents and save money for the council taxpayer in the longer term.

Going forward and following the local elections in May 2011, we have reviewed our focus for the coming four years. Everything we plan to do from 2012/13 onwards will be led by three priorities or our 'three Ps' – People, Place and Prosperity.

Whatever happens to the country's economy we will continue to spend wisely and plan for the future so that we can keep our efforts on what we know matters most to you – keeping East Herts clean, tidy and safe.

Section 2: Profile of the District

The Area

East Herts is the largest of the 10 districts in Hertfordshire. It covers 184 square miles, around a third of the county, and offers a blend of rural and town living. The benefits of this mixture are greatly appreciated by the 137, 700¹ people who live in the district.

The majority of the people who live in the district live in one of the five towns. Bishop's Stortford has the largest population at 24,180, followed by Hertford (24,180), Ware (17,133), Sawbridgeworth (7,666) and Buntingford (4773).²

Although the district is mainly comprised of farmland, five busy market towns (Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware) and more than 100 villages and hamlets are scattered across the area.

East Herts is a beautiful and historic area. It has 42 conservation areas, over 4,000 listed buildings (including curtilage listed buildings), 31 scheduled monuments, 450 sites of archaeological significance and 11 registered historic parks and gardens.

Areas of nature conservation are equally abundant. Rye Meads and woodland in the south of the district at Wormley West End and Brickendon are internationally recognised, and there are a further 16 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 582 Wildlife Sites.

East Herts is regarded as an attractive rural location for those moving out from (and commuting into) London because of its excellent transport links. However, increasingly the district is finding that development is encroaching closer to its borders.

The Economy

The people of East Herts are predominantly employed and enjoy higher than average earnings (£31,679 for full-time workers³). Unemployment is very low (1.8%⁴).

¹ 2011 Census - Population and Household Estimates for England and Wales, ONS

² 2001 Census

³ 2011 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - Resident Analysis, ONS

⁴ June 2012, Total Claimant Count, National Statistics (NOMIS)

Information on the level of commuting to be added.

Although East Herts has a significant agricultural base, its economy is dominated by the service sector. Almost a quarter of people are employed in financial and business services and a fifth in public services⁵.

House prices are among the highest in the country; in 2011 the average property price was £327,500⁶ while the average salary was £31,679. There is a shortage of affordable housing.

Whilst it is true that East Herts has low levels of deprivation, ranking 313 out of 326 on the Indices of Deprivation 2010, this disguises pockets of relative deprivation.

The People⁷

A fifth of people are under 16 or over 60. The average age in the district is 38.

More than half of people (aged 16 and over) are married and a quarter are single. 9% of people are separated or divorced and 7% are widowed.

Over 90% of people were born in England. The main religion is Christianity but almost a fifth of people have no religion.

East Herts has a low ethnic minority population of just 2.8%. The largest ethnic minority groups are Indian and Chinese.

The people of East Herts enjoy very good health. 12% of people have a limiting long-term illness and 9% provide unpaid care.

A quarter of people are educated to degree level or higher. But a fifth have no qualifications.

Car ownership is high, with over a third of households owning two or more cars. Two-thirds of people travel to work by car and 10% travel by train. Less than 2% of people travel by bus. 10% of people work from home. However the rural nature of the district

⁵ 2001 Census, ONS

⁶ Average Property Price, HM Land Registry Residential Property Price data, April – July 2011

⁷ 2001 Census, ONS

means that those that do not have access to a car or other means of transport face difficulty accessing services.

Almost a third of properties in East Herts are detached. East Herts has more detached properties than anywhere else in the county.

Three-quarters of properties are owner-occupied, with only 13% of properties classified as social housing (defined as renting from the council or Housing Associations).

A quarter of households are one-person households and 12% are pensioners living alone. Almost a third of households have dependent children.

Did you know?⁸

East Herts Council in 2011/12:

- Cleaned 35,957,935 linear metres of roads and streets – That's nearly once round the circumference of the earth.
- Emptied approximately 5.4 million bins and recycling boxes.
- Cut 338.91 hectares of grass – That's the same as cutting approximately 313 football pitches.
- Processed 2,223 planning and related applications.
- Carried out 11,833 building control inspections – That's 46 inspections (on average) every working day of the year.
- Processed 2,627 land charge search enquiries.
- Processed 27,674 new housing and council tax benefit claims and changes in circumstances – That's 106 cases processed (on average) every working day of the year.
- Carried out 380 food inspections.
- Recorded 172,284 casual swim visits and 302,993 gym visits at council venues – That's just about enough to fill the Olympic Stadium six times over.

⁸ 2011/12 Unit cost data or service data

Section 3: Our Vision for the District

East Herts Council's vision for the district is:

To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that is best in East Herts

This overriding aim was underpinned in 2011/12 by five corporate priorities which reflected local needs as identified through public consultation and feedback.

These priorities were:

- Promoting prosperity and wellbeing; providing access and opportunities
- Pride in East Herts
- Fit for purpose, services fit for you
- Shaping now, shaping the future
- Leading the way, working together

Each priority was further defined by a series of objectives which were set out in our four year Corporate Strategic Plan for 2011 - 2015. These priorities and objectives were shared with many of our partner organisations to enable a joined-up approach in service delivery, helping to eliminate service gaps and duplication whilst promoting efficiency.

This annual report cannot include everything we have achieved. However, it does identify those achievements which we believe will be of most community interest due to their impact and benefits.

Section 4: Progress against 2011/12 Corporate Priorities

Promoting prosperity and wellbeing; providing access and opportunities

Our priority is to enhance the quality of life, health, and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.

In 2011/12 we:

- Agreed an investment of £84,000 in gym equipment at Fanshawe Pool and Gym in Ware and agreed a further £29,000 in 2012/13 for new equipment at Leventhorpe Pool and Gym in Sawbridgeworth. Some of the new equipment at Fanshawe is specifically designed for wheelchair users and people with disabilities, putting the leisure centre among the best in the region for people on exercise referral schemes from their GP. In return our contractor, SLM – Everyone Active, has agreed to reduce the management fee, saving the council a further £154,700 over the contract's seven remaining years.
- Maintained the overall quality and satisfaction with pools and gyms for the third year running by achieving a 'Good' rating across all five sites. The contract as a whole also performed well with its Net Promoter Score (NPS) maintaining a score that kept it in the 'Excellent' band. The NPS is a management tool that can be used to gauge the loyalty of an organisation's customer relationships. It serves as an alternative to traditional customer satisfaction research and is used to get a clear measure of an organisation's performance through its customers' eyes.
- Enhanced environmental aspects of Southern Country Park in partnership with other organisations, to help improve habitats for the local wildlife, stabilise the bank and improve the footpaths around the park.
- Raised awareness and use of open spaces by holding a range of activities including 'Love Parks' week, at Southern Country Park and 'Meet the Animals' events at Pishiobury

Park and “Red White and Blue” Open Space. All of which were well attended.

- Retained our two ‘green flags’ for The Ridgeway in Hertford (for the second year running) and Southern Country Park in Bishop’s Stortford (for the third year running).
- Awarded an £8,000 community capital grant to the YMCA in Bishop’s Stortford to make it easier for young people to search for jobs. The grant paid for three computers and has helped the young people to find jobs online and work on their CVs. Overall the council awarded 125 capital and revenue grants in 2011/12 to voluntary and community organisations, village halls, parish and town councils, as well as specialist services provided by Hertfordshire Community Meals, Papworth Home Improvement Agency and Papworth Handyperson Services.
- Made a further commitment to provide ongoing support to the local East Herts Citizens Advice Service (CAB). Recognising its importance to many of the district’s most vulnerable residents, the Council has made provision for a grant of £129,000 per year in its Medium Term Financial Plan. This secures the ongoing delivery of this important service to the public until at least 2015. Overall 10,967 residents accessed the service in 2011/12, this is an increase of 9.9% when compared to 2010/11. The highest issue was benefits at 40% followed by debt (21%) and employment (10%).
- Agreed £1million fund to help first time buyers who can afford their mortgage repayments but not an initial deposit. The council was the first authority in Hertfordshire to sign up to the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme (LAMS) that supports people who have at least a 5% deposit but don't have the 25% that many lenders now require.
- Provided land for a £1 to support the Young Person’s Housing Scheme that Aldwyck Housing Group have been granted planning permission for. The project in Hertford will provide accommodation and support for young people aged 16-25 years. A dedicated support worker will also ensure that each young person gets the required training and

employment support they need to allow them to become self supporting throughout their tenancy.

- Approved new standards for caravan sites and agreed a caravan inspection plan to help improve the conditions of the mobile home sites in East Herts.
- Under the Herts Essex Energy Partnership, which offered a wide range of free and subsidised measures, from June 2009 to March 2012 some 1812 measures have been installed in East Herts homes, supported by £429,222 from the scheme funds. This saves an estimated 43,057 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions over the lifetime of the measures, at an average cost of just £9.97 per tonne saved.
- Joined with Stevenage Borough Council to provide housing benefit, council tax, business rates and benefit fraud investigations. This shared service will provide savings of £133,000 in 2012/13 and £173,000 every following year.
- Processed Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events in 10.3 days against a target of 10 days, despite an increase caseload and workload.
- Provided £1,000 to Hertfordshire Probation for up to eight Community Payback clean ups when people on probation are ordered by the courts to complete community tasks. Graffiti scrawled on walls and underpasses in Bishop's Stortford were focused on.
- Increased the percentage of residents who feel safe during the day and after dark in their local area to 94% and 70% respectively.

Fit for purpose, services fit for you

Our priority is to deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation

In 2011/12 we:

- Enhanced our Hertford Customer Service Centre to provide a self service foyer and improve our response to customer enquiries. These changes have proved successful as overall satisfaction with face to face contact has improved, with 77.2% of customers rating the contact as 'Good' compared to 75.9% in 2010/11. The highest reason cited for this was the response time, with four in ten customers choosing this option.
- Retained the British Standards Institute Quality Assurance in Building Control.
- Won silver in the South East (North) Regional award and bronze in the Best Club in the UK with 2,000 members or more for the Everyone Active Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre in Bishop's Stortford and bronze in the South East (North) Regional award for Everyone Active Fanshawe Pool and Gym in Ware. These awards are unique in the health industry as they are decided by centre members, rating their gym on the level of service, facilities and value for money.
- Received the Employer of the Year award from Hertford Regional College in the business administration category for our support of the national apprentice scheme.
- Responded to 91.2% of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within 20 working days despite receiving the largest volume of FOI requests to date in 2011/12.
- 39% of performance measures improved during the year despite the economic downturn, with 49% meeting their targets.

- Honoured the hard work and dedication of our staff who have continued to deliver a high standard of service in a challenging financial situation by holding our annual staff awards ceremony, which was fully sponsored by our partners.
- Re-tendered our insurance cover within the set timescales, producing a saving of £91,000 and enhanced our cover in some areas.
- Appointed new parking contractors on a contract which will save more £1 million over the next five years. East Herts is the lead authority in the contract that also provides parking enforcement for Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield. The saving will allow members to invest in elements of the parking service in line with the council's new Parking and Transportation Strategy.
- Joined the Public Law Partnership in order to secure best value when procuring legal services.
- Pooled our resources with Hertfordshire County Council, Hertsmere, North Hertfordshire, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield Councils to create a Shared Internal Audit Service. This shared service is anticipated to save around £300,000 a year across all six authorities.
- Agreed a strategic business case for partnership working with North Herts and Stevenage Councils in respect to ICT, Human Resources and Payroll, Facilities Management and Print Services. A report detailing the final business plan will be available in October 2012.
- Delivered a balanced and diverse programme of arts and entertainment at Hertford Theatre, in accordance with the agreed invest – to – save business plan. In a report presented to Community Scrutiny in June 2012, it was reported that Hertford Theatre had exceeded its financial targets since its opening in December 2010 in regard to show programme income, hire income and booking income.

- Have taken robust action against fraud and in 2011/12 prosecuted 16 people, issued 18 administration penalties and 68 cautions. This means that the council is recovering a combined total of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit overpayments of £224,344.92 against these 102 sanctions.

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Pride in East Herts

Our priority is to improve the standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.

In 2011/12 we:

- Expanded the range of plastics that residents can place in their kerbside collection blue box to increase the amount we recycle and reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.
- Maintained our recycling rate at 48% despite a national falling trend in the amount of waste residents produce due to the economic climate.
- Increased satisfaction with recycling and composting by 9% from 68% in 2009 to 77% in 2011.
- Maintained performance in the quality of the street scene in relation to litter and graffiti and improved performance in fly-posting, fly-tipping and the removal of abandoned vehicles.
- Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse rose from 59% to 63% and the number of residents who felt rubbish lying around was a big problem fell from 33% to 29%.
- Implemented clear up campaigns in Ware at King George V playing fields and in Bishop's Stortford at Dimsdale Crescent and Burley Road to remove illegally dumped rubbish. The restored areas will be monitored regularly to ensure that fly tipping in these areas do not continue.
- Implemented the Chantry Resident Permit Parking Scheme to help address persistent parking problems with commuters, shoppers and others who do not live or have businesses on these residential streets.

Shaping now, Shaping the Future

Our priority is to 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.

In 2011/12 we:

- Published an Urban Design Framework for the Mead Lane area, which includes Hertford East train station, Mill Road, Mead Lane, Marshgate Drive and the River Lea. Suggestions for future development include small businesses, new homes, a hotel and improved public transport. The framework will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, which means it forms part of the District's Local Plan and gives it extra weight in the planning process.
- Improved the River Stort towpath in Bishop's Stortford, in partnership with British Waterways, making it more user friendly, as well as improving habitats for the local wildlife. The work was undertaken after the council and British Waterways secured match funding of £90,000 and a £60,000 grant from the Hertfordshire Forward group.
- Led the bid, in partnership with North Herts and Uttlesford District Councils and Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, for £2.1 million funding to help rural enterprises. Since the start of the programme 15 projects in East Herts have been allocated funding (22 across the programme), totalling £982,646 (£1, 277, 078 across the programme) and 21.5 new jobs have been created to date.
- Invested £89,000 to provide a new business start-up facility called "My Incubator". The facility has been developed at the Hertford Regional College campus in Ware and provides aspiring business owners with a support service which is free for up to three months. The council provided £35,000 to help the scheme start up, as well as providing £18,000 a year for the following three years. The centre provides desk space, computers and a meeting room where entrepreneurs can

develop their business, get advice from experts and meet clients.

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Leading the way, working together

Our priority is to deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.

In 2011/12 we:

- Successfully held the Alternative Vote Referendum (in conjunction with scheduled District / Town / Parish Council elections) without legal challenge.
- Published a short guidance note to help town and parish councillors, local residents and businesses to make the most of their new housing and planning rights. In particular the guide shows how to produce a neighbourhood plan following the enactment of the Localism Act.
- Successfully supported East Herts Local Strategic Partnership in reviewing its priorities which resulted in three priority outcomes – Community safety, promoting economic well being and supporting the vulnerable being agreed. Working groups supporting the original themes have been brought together and three priority partnership actions have been agreed for each priority theme.
- Developed a Member training and development programme following individual consultation with all members. This led to approximately 20 in-house events being held in 2011/12 focusing on legislation updates for the main committees, induction for members, the Localism Bill and 'soft' skills. Members also attended development opportunities held by other organisations and authorities.

Section 5: Consultation

The council is committed to engaging with local people directly about key issues so they can help shape the future of the district. During 2011/12 the council consulted on its budget and key priorities, as well as undertaking its biennial Residents Survey.

To view all our current open consultations and results of closed consultations go to www.eastherts.gov.uk.

Section 6: Equalities

The Public Sector Equality Duty, part of the Equality Act 2010, places an obligation on the council to meet the needs of all individuals in the way we work, when shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to our own employees. The Equality Act 2010 states that the Council must have due regard to:

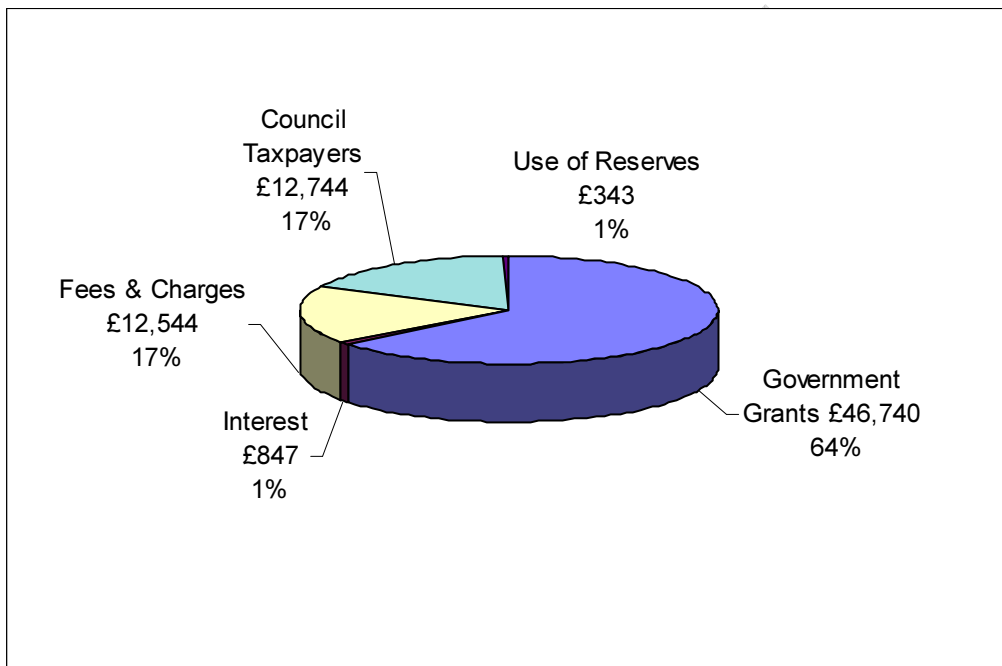
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics set out in the Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership. The East Herts Council Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy 2012-2015 supports and drives the Council's commitment to better meeting the needs of the district's diverse communities and delivering better services for our customers and ensuring access is fair and reasonable for all.

Section 7: Financial Information

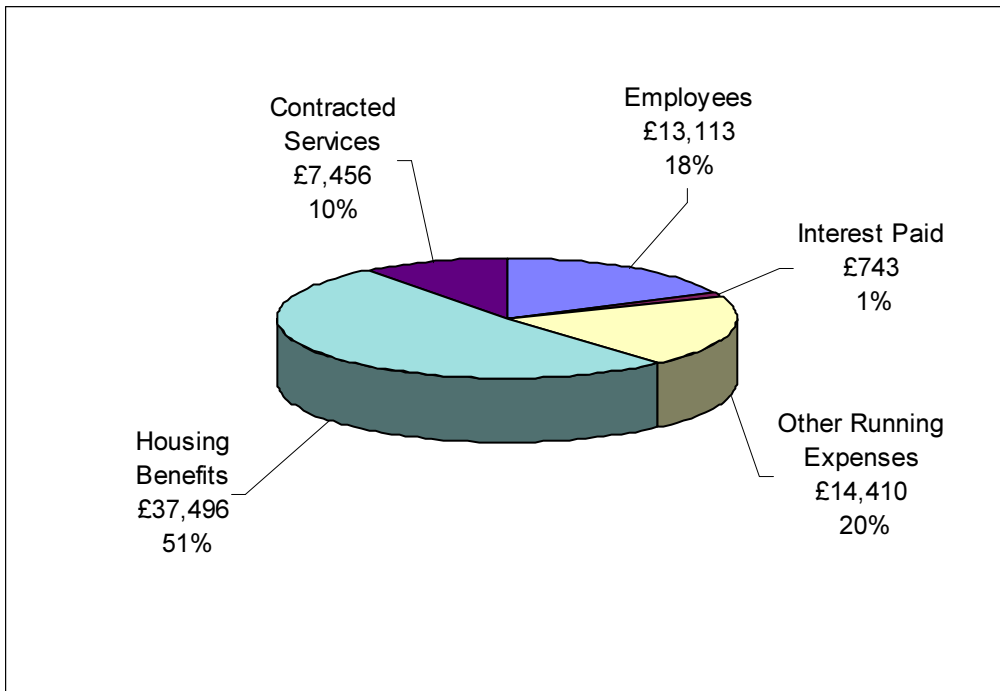
The following summarises East Herts Council's full statement of accounts for the financial year from April 1st 2011 to March 31st 2012.

Where the money comes from Sources of income to the council £000

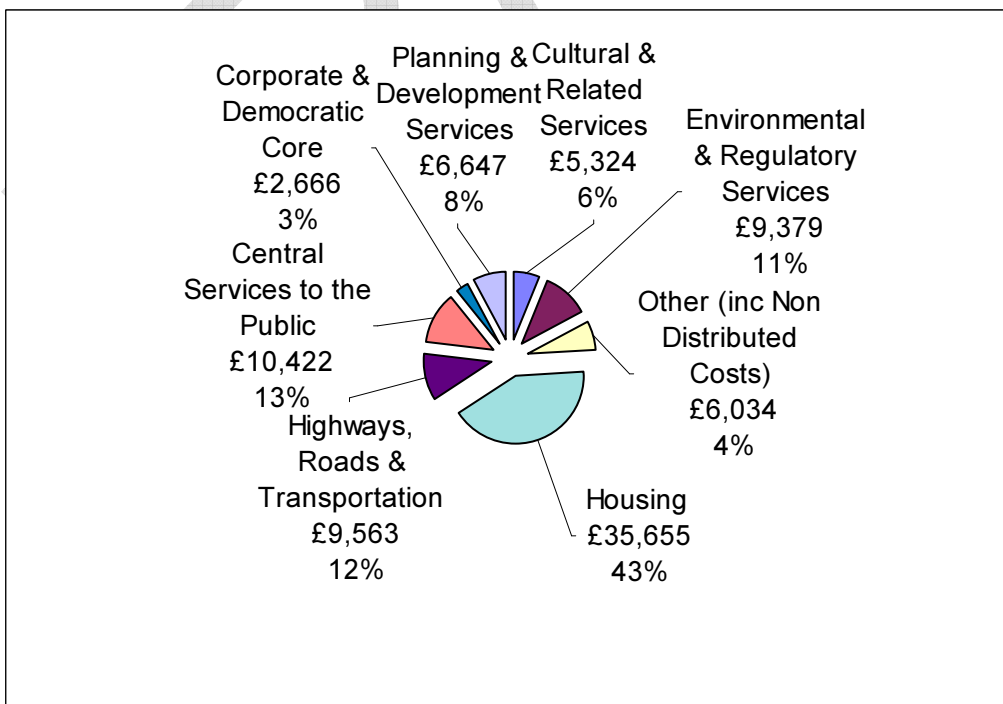


It can be seen that the largest source of the council's income is from Government Grants.

How the money is spent £000



The services provided £000



The cost of "The Services Provided" includes capital charges, impairments, revenue funded from capital under statute and capital

government grants totalling £12,472k which have been excluded from the chart "How the money is spent". It also includes expenditure on investment properties not included in the "Net Cost of Services" shown in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure statement.

The full statement of accounts and the un-audited accounts can be found at www.eastherts.gov.uk along with a full set of previous years audited accounts.

Section 8: Statement on Contracts

In making changes to the way in which services are delivered, there will be times when the council awards contracts that involve the transfer of employees out of council employment. In 2011/12 there was one contract that involved such a transfer of employees, as the Parking contract re-tender involved "second generation TUPE" where staff were transferred across from the original contract to the new contract. There were also shared services initiatives across councils to provide Internal Audit and Revenues & Benefits services. Staff were transferred through TUPE to the appropriate councils.

Section 9: Performance Indicators

In previous years, the independent watchdog, the Audit Commission, provided us with a scored assessment of our overall performance. Although the Audit Commission (along with various inspection frameworks) no longer exists, some inspections around key services continue to be undertaken. As there is no longer a set of performance indicators that we must measure ourselves against we have undertaken a review and collated a basket of indicators that are most relevant to our priorities in East Herts. This reduces the burden of unnecessary data collection.

For information the following data will be provided:

Code	Indicator	Past performance	Current performance				Lead Service
		2010/11	2011/12		Performance		
		Outturn	Target 2011/12	Outturn	Short term trend	Status	
Indicators then sorted by priority							

Appendix A Contact your councillor

All 50 councillors will be listed with their contact details.

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Inserted on the back of the report

We welcome your feedback on this Annual Report.

Getting in Touch

Telephone: 01279 655261

Email: performance@eastherts.gov.uk

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Hertford Office: Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ

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