

CORPORATE RESOURCES DIRECTORATE

FINANCIAL SERVICES

In 2007/08 we:

Target 14.1

Approved a 2008/09 Budget that is sufficient to resource the aims and objectives set out in the Corporate Plan. The Council also received significant external funding (£4.943m) in the form of Area Based Grants, these will assist the Council considerably in achieving its priorities.

Target 14.2

Responded to the issues raised in the survey of users of the Agresso Financial Management System and established User Groups for internal HBC issues and with our Project Partners (Rother and Lewes Councils). Within HBC regular meetings have been held and have addressed issues as far as possible whilst using the current version of the system. At our partner level a first 'User Group' meeting has been held and broad areas of progress and development agreed. (see 14.3 for more detail)

Target 14.4

Achieved production of both the Council's annual accounts and budget within the agreed tight timetables. The annual Use of Resources Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission consolidated our position at 3 (Good) out of a possible score of 4.

Target 14.6

Worked with the Voluntary Sector and other local authorities to ensure a smooth transition from the current Housing Benefits Scheme to the new Local Housing Allowance scheme from April 2008.

Target 14.8

Successfully implemented the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Council Tax Collection and achieved a 96% in-year collection rate which exceeded our target of 95.5% and the 95.3% achieved in 2006/07.

Target 14.9

Undertook a marketing campaign to encourage local people to use the new pay-points to pay their Council Tax. The success of this campaign has meant that 92% of all payments received since April 2007 has been via electronic means (including Direct Debit). This represents an increase of around 30% from the previous year.

Target 16.2

Continued to regularly monitor tenant companies and where any potential problem tenants are highlighted (e.g. where arrears of rent are giving concern) we take pro-active action to bring rent payments up to date. Appropriate consideration is also given to the employment impacts of any formal action we may subsequently take.

Changes and Shortfalls:**Target 14.3**

We worked with our partners with an aim to undertake an upgrade to v5.5 of the Agresso Financial Management System. Unfortunately our partners are not ready to advance at the same speed as we would like, and further progress is dependent on our partners moving in tandem. We are however continuing to explore with them the benefits of the upgrade.

Target 14.10

Our plans to relocate our front-line services to provide more customer friendly accommodation and ensure greater resilience within our customer services section were delayed due to protracted negotiations with the landlords of the building. Although the planned relocation is well behind schedule, progress is being made. Once the lease is signed, the necessary works can be completed enabling a move date for late summer 2008.

Target 14.11

As reported in 14.10, we have experienced a significant delay to the relocation of frontline services. This move is key to the success of the service improvements identified as needed following the national Benefits satisfaction survey carried out in 2006/07. However, where possible, we are making changes to make the contact with our service as helpful, efficient and pleasant as current circumstances allow.

Target 14.12

Following a detailed review, the feasibility of providing a joint Revenues and Benefits service in East Sussex was found to be not viable. However a great deal of successful cross-authority work has been undertaken during this process. The benefits have included sharing of good practice amongst the 5 local authorities; joint working on plans for implementing Local Housing Allowance (see 14.6) as well as savings arising from joint procurement.

INTERNAL AUDIT AND INVESTIGATIONS

IN 2007/08 we:

Target 17.2

Further embedded our organisational approach to risk management by acquiring a new GRACE Risk Management Software System. We migrated our previous risk register to this new system and added newly identified risks. The 2008/09 Audit Plan is risk based wherever possible and we are already performing risk based internal auditing.

Target 14.13

Continued to work with the Regional Centre of Excellence and other local authorities to ensure our procurement improves value for money. Examples include working in collaboration with Arun District and Crawley Borough Council on a joint contract for insurance, which achieved significant savings, and improving value for money on our contract for wheelie bins in respect of the twin bin scheme.

Changes and Shortfalls:

Target 17.1

Despite our best efforts and full support, the project to create a shared East Sussex Fraud Investigation Service was terminated half way through after other partners withdrew. We have however instead progressed plans to provide a fraud investigation service to Rother District Council. These plans are well advanced and the new service is expected to be operational in summer 2008.

Target 17.3

We undertook the planned audits of fundamental systems as programmed, with reports issued or fieldwork completed by the end of December 2007. There was however some slippage with the remaining discretionary audits to accommodate other unexpected high priority work. These audits have now all been rescheduled for completion at the earliest opportunity in 2008/09.

LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

In 2007/08 we:

Target 15.1

Continued negotiations with the Foreshore Trustees and signed a settlement agreement on the breach of trust claim. Work is progressing to agree transfers of land into the Trust in part settlement of the claim. Dialogue is also continuing with the Trustees and the Charity Commission on the terms of the proposal for the Trusteeship to be returned to the Council in the future.

Target 15.2

Continued work with other East Sussex authorities on moving towards a shared legal service. Whilst we are making progress on some helpful areas of joint working (e.g. information sharing, joint procurement of supplies etc), the likelihood of a shared service remains some way off.

Target 15.3

Enabled further improvements to the decision-making process by reviewing and subsequently making amendments to the Council's Constitution to take account of the senior management restructure, the revised Code of Conduct and other matters.

Target 18.1

Supported elected Members to undertake a varied programme of Scrutiny and Policy Reviews on issues such as Public Realm Maintenance; the Empty Homes Strategy; Public Contact Arrangements with the Council and Area Co-ordination Arrangements. Reviews of our Climate Change Policies, the Use of CCTV Monitoring, the Seafront Strategy and Trading Services and Joint Working with other Bodies are all well underway and will report in 2008.

Target 18.3

Implemented a joint East Sussex Members Training Programme on topics such as Licensing Reviews, Planning and the Gambling Act. We will continue this approach in 2008 with topics including Equalities, Code of Conduct for Councillors, Shared Services and Community Leadership.

Target 18.4

Inputted to the East Sussex County Council Health Scrutiny Committee ensuring we were able to review and comment on developments that impact on health services in Hastings.

Target 18.5

Implemented new electoral legislation including measures designed to increase postal vote security and improving access to polling stations. Measures taken included, undertaking a full review of polling stations (including access) by a cross-party group of councillors. All legislative measures designed to increase

postal vote security have been implemented and we remain vigilant for abuse of the process.

Target 18.7

Supported the Council's democratic processes by ensuring, (with one minor exception) all documents were published in accordance with legal requirements and the constitution. Processes are in place to ensure that these requirements continue to be met.

Changes and Shortfalls:

Target 18.2

We planned to undertake a review of new scrutiny arrangements using guidance and regulations for Scrutiny expected following enactment of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. The regulations and guidance are now expected to be released at the end of 2008 and we will use these to undertake a review at that time.

Target 18.6

We were unable to assist Rother District Council with their elections as part of a reciprocal arrangement due to unexpected by-elections in Hastings. However Eastbourne Borough Council had no elections or by-elections planned for May 2008 therefore assisted us with the Hastings elections.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 2007/08 we:

Target 13.1

Negotiated and entered into an enterprise licensing deal with Microsoft for our software applications.

Target 13.3

Continued to maintain the Council's IT network and provide appropriate IT support to enable the smooth running of the Council. Examples of activity include 97.29% of the 5,163 calls to the IT helpdesk were dealt with and 'closed' within target (against a target of 97.0%), and network availability was 99.95% (against a target of 99.90%).

Target 13.4

Put in place further technological solutions to support a wide range of flexible and field working options including true real-time mobile email, calendar and web access through smartphones; real-time mobile access to the Environmental Health system (M3) thereby enabling staff to access the back-office system when working remotely; all HBC-only councillors are supplied with equipment at home enabling them to access the HBC network and all staff are enabled to access the HBC email system from any internet-enabled PC.

Target 13.5

Continued to work with partners in Access East Sussex on joint working projects including shared web kiosks, the A to Z of services, the common Fault Reporting system, text messaging and shared fraud investigation service. We also participated in a number of knowledge sharing and joint topic research groups where common interest was identified.

Changes and Shortfalls:

Target 13.2

We implemented 'SharePoint' as a single point of storage for meeting documents, directorate documents and cross-cutting project documents as part of our on-going information management processes. We investigated our records management and information security controls and identified the need for a wider overarching Information Strategy to take this work forward. This document is in an advanced draft and forms the basis of a wider Corporate Plan Target for 2008/09.

POLICY & PERFORMANCE

In 2007/08 we:

Target 19.1

Made further cashable and non-cashable efficiencies in 2007/08 which when added to the on-going savings made since 2004/05 means we comfortably achieved our Annual Efficiency Targets as set out in the Gershon report.

Target 19.2

Undertook a range of activities to support the Council's annual strategic planning processes including a Value for Money statistical review, which compared the costs and performance of Council services with others groups of authorities. This information formed key evidence to support the Council's Priorities, Income and Expenditure reviews (PIER), which in turn contributed to development of the Council's Corporate Plan and Budget.

Target 19.3

Undertook a review of our existing strategies and plans and identified those which are still current and those that have been superseded. We also established a Cross-Cutting Policy Group to ensure there is synergy between all newly adopted strategies and plans. A key output of this group was the significant contribution made to the development of the East Sussex Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy, Pride of Place.

Target 19.4

Maintained our score of 3 in our annual assessment by the Audit Commission on 'Value for Money'. We particularly welcomed this score as the assessment criteria gets harder each year. The score of 3 carries the label "consistently above minimum requirements – performing well". In addition, we received a positive 'Direction of Travel' assessment .

Changes and Shortfalls:

Target 19.5

We had planned to report on our progress in implementing our Climate Change Policy, however, we decided to combine this report with the outcome of the Scrutiny Policy Review of Climate Change. The Scrutiny Review timetable was extended to ensure that members could consider fully the implications of the new National Indicators relating to Climate Change, the final definitions for which were not available until April 2008. The Review is now expected to report in mid 2008/09.

Despite this, we have taken a pro-active role in addressing climate change through a range of activities, examples include: schemes such as 'Heat Streets' where we secured funding for a targeted approach to tackle fuel poverty and energy efficiency; adopting and implementing a Biodiversity Strategy and Action

Plan and incorporating climate change objectives into the Sustainability Appraisal framework, which ensures the Local Development Framework policies reflect climate change issues.

We have also supported the Local Strategic Partnership's Environmental Regeneration Group which is looking to develop a 22nd Key target for the Hastings and St Leonards Community Strategy refresh in 2008/09.

PERSONNEL AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2007/08 we:

Target 11.2

Implemented a Disability Equality Scheme and adopted a Gender Equality Scheme (adopted Cabinet April '07) which sets out our approach to promoting equalities and addressing inequalities within the workplace and for our customers.

Target 11.3

Reviewed and amended our existing personnel and organisational development policies in collaboration with the Trade Unions to take account of emerging equalities legislation and screen them to ensure there were no adverse equality impacts.

Target 11.6

Enabled two members of staff to undertake the accredited Chartered Management Institute Diploma in Local Government as part of a rolling programme, and worked jointly with other local authorities to deliver training more efficiently as part of the Sussex Training Consortium.

Target 11.7

Supported staff through a management restructure, and introduced the model of having core administrative teams for each building as part of our ongoing Administrative Review.

Changes and Shortfalls

Target 11.1

Although we had aimed to achieve level 3 of the Equalities Standard by March 2008, assessment of our organisation by a 'critical friend' from the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) has highlighted the need to focus on gathering evidence prior to a formal assessment. Consequently, we have reviewed this target and amended the target to achieve Level 3 by September 2008.

Target 11.5

Although we continue to reward our staff for long service, we listened to feedback from our staff survey and have not held an awards style ceremony this year. We will continue to work with the Staff and Management Forum to review how we can show recognition for good performance.