

Finance News

 **Norfolk** County Council

Issue 43

April 2004

News and views for
everyone interested
in finance

HAPPY NEW YEAR . . .

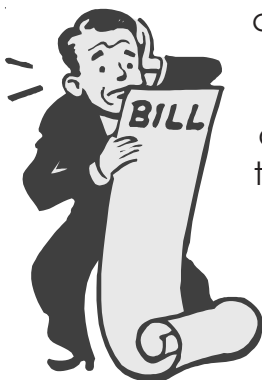
. . . or has the old man lost his marbles?

31st March. A significant day for Finance staff. The end of another year, but unlike 31st December, this doesn't mean that we can all go out drinking beer and eating haggis until the wee small hours. A pity but such is life.

In reality the financial year end generally means several weeks of intense work for all Finance staff both within service departments and the departmental and corporate teams within Department of Finance.

Hopefully, in late February, all of you within the Finance community received, or were given sight of, the annual guidance notes relating to the Closure of Accounts process, and by now should have already met some of the significant dates listed. The remaining ones are now looming large on the calendar, and I would ask you just to have another check of the programme to ensure that you are aware of what needs to be done and by when.

Where does this process lead? Initially to a report to County Council members on the Council's financial position for the year, and ultimately to the publication of the Annual Statement of Accounts. However, behind those simple comments lays a significant amount of work, the outcome of which relies heavily on the timely completion of the tasks listed in the closing programme.



After the payment of bills, raising of invoices, creation of debtors and creditors, year end transfers, recharges and reconciliation etc, the Corporate Finance team in the Department of Finance will prepare the 'Outturn' report for Cabinet showing the over/underspend position on both revenue and capital budgets.

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Spotlight on

Department of Finance

Corporate Finance Project Support Team

The Corporate Finance Project Support Team, Susanne Baldwin and Chris Upton, provides flexible support to the Department of Finance, which means responding to current needs and priorities as they arise. This gives the team a varied set of issues to deal with!

The team was set up in the spring of 2002 to assist the Head of Financial Management with the implementation of the Best Value review of the accounting and budgeting functions within the Council.

One of the original tasks was to assist in the review of the Council's Financial Regulations, and this has been completed – see October 2003's Finance News for details. The next stage of this work is to produce an electronic 'Finance Manual' – a series of procedures and guidance notes on all things financial that will be available on the Intranet. Watch this space!

The current role of the team is to provide assistance to the Director of Finance and the Head of Financial Management with project type work, as well as supporting the Financial Management Group and the Finance Officers Group.

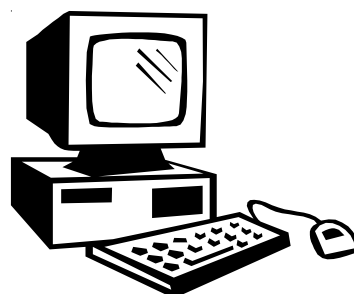
Major projects currently on the go are the Medium Term Strategic Planning process, where the team is providing much of the financial input into the development of the process, and of course FIMS. Susanne and Chris are involved in both the banking review that is feeding into FIMS, and providing ad hoc support for the project.

They also run training courses, especially finance training for Responsible Budget Officers. The Financial Management Group is currently developing a new training strategy, building upon feedback received from the RBO courses.

A series of training courses for Social Services has just been completed, as well as a number of more general courses for RBOs, and more are being planned. If you would like to attend one of these courses, please get in touch with Susanne or Chris.

If you have any queries about the work of the team, please contact either Susanne on ext. 8987 or Chris ext. 4373.

Paul Mason
(22)4427
Financial Services Manager
Department of Finance



FIMS latest

As the Go-Live date is being finalised, work on FIMS continues apace. Some of the current activity is shown below.

User Acceptance Testing

User acceptance testing (UAT), where key users from all NCC departments test the new system, is about to begin.

This is a critical phase of the overall implementation to ensure that the system delivers standard processes for NCC as planned before it is rolled out to the user community.

What, where and when?

Key users will be given test scripts, developed by the Implementation Team, to test each process from start to finish.

It will test the process of raising a purchase order through to creating an invoice and making payment, for example.

It will be an exciting experience for the testers.

The testing programme starts with NOML (general ledger) on 8 April, followed by:

- PAPG (Accounts Payable) - 14, 15, 16 April
- PAPG (Purchasing) - 21, 22, 23 April
- IICD (Accounts Receivable) - 5, 6, 7 May
- Cash Management - 11 May
- Budgeting - 17, 18, 21 June

All testing except Budgeting takes place in the Ethel Colman Room in the Annexe.

Business Transformation

The new FIMS processes for Accounts Payable (PAPG) and Accounts Receivable (IICD) have been approved by Finance Management Group and ownership has passed to the Director of Finance.

In practical terms, this means that ownership of PAPG passes to Peter Shackley and IICD to Bob Batterham.

The FIMS system is now being configured along these lines ready for Go-Live. Unless there are technical reasons for making changes at this point we plan to implement the processes as defined.

If departments have any concerns with the new way of working they should refer them to Peter and/or Bob, preferably through their departmental change agents (details in the Christmas issue of Finance News).

If the concerns can be answered readily they will be, but if not they will be logged for investigation and possible action. In practical terms this will not be until we have implemented the new system and it has had chance to 'bed in'.

iProcurement

The technical build work for i-Procurement is underway! A copy of the FIMS system has been taken and loaded in to "Oracle eStudio". The iProcurement system will then be configured and tested. Once this is signed off, a copy will be taken and loaded back into the main system to produce a fully integrated FIMS/iProc system.

FIMS latest

The work will include building a link to a 'Marketplace', which is where ESPO will place their catalogue for us to access. We are also encouraging other ESPO suppliers to make their catalogues available here.

The first stage of user testing for iProcurement will be a conference room pilot where NCC representatives work through the system to see if it is acceptable. Any amendments will be made and a second conference room pilot will be held. This work should be completed by the end of May. The next phase will be full user acceptance testing.

Tony Howard has now rejoined the Implementation Team to work on general ledger.



Rob Bales is now working on the security of the system. He will be writing about this in our next issue, so watch this space!

Norfolk - Procurement Centre of Excellence

Dramatic money-saving improvements made by Norfolk County Council in the way it buys all kinds of goods and services have been recognised at national level through the designation of the authority as the Procurement Centre of Excellence for the whole of Eastern England.

Norfolk County Council's seven-strong Corporate Procurement Unit was established after the council carried out a Best Value Review of Purchasing in 1999-2000. One of the unit's targets was to pay for itself and find £1million in savings in the first three years. This target was exceeded by £200,000.

The unit has involved Members of the Council and purchasing officers within departments in developing a new approach to procurement, underpinned by a new corporate policy and strategy. Progress is overseen by a Corporate Procurement Panel. Change has been supported by a strong communication and training strategy. Electronic methods of purchasing are well developed.

If you would like this newsletter in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the helpline, 01603 223488.



Two new faces in Corporate Finance

Catherine Dennis and **Dawn Filtness** recently joined the Corporate Finance team and both are studying hard for their CIPFA qualifications. Dawn's previous job was as a debt counsellor for a charity based in Leeds. Catherine's was as benefits advisor; so if you're in debt or lose your job, speak to them!



L TO R: CATHERINE AND DAWN

Before entering the wonderful world of full-time work, Catherine spent several years at Durham University studying Politics, then did a master's in Violence, Conflict and Development at the School of Oriental and African studies in London. These have all prepared her well for a career in Accountancy!!

During and prior to her university career, Catherine has been a Nanny in California, worked in Italy as a cocktail barmaid, and while in France was part of a stage performance of Riverdance!

Dawn studied at Leeds University for a degree in Maths and Music, which complement each other perfectly! If she looks knackered on Monday mornings this is generally due to travelling too much between Leeds and Norwich, which is where she still officially lives, has a house, a dog and a husband.



Both have numerous interests. Catherine enjoys playing football and is joining Hethersett ladies team. Dawn enjoys the alternative form - TV football! Both enjoy eating (lots), as well as having interest in some of the following - guess which: line dancing, badminton, quilt-making, snow boarding, squirrel watching, podium dancing, account writing, swimming, planting trees, bingo, etc. ...
Answers on a postcard please

Both are musical. Catherine plays the piano and guitar (although she bought that for the colour rather than the sound!). Dawn plays violin, viola and piano (although a little out of practice!). She was playing in a newly formed orchestra before moving down to Norwich, and is looking for a new one to join.

A little known, but important fact - Catherine can ride a unicycle. Between them, the department has their very own circus, as Dawn can also juggle.



New face on the Editorial Board

The Finance News editorial team welcomes Paul Mason, Financial Services Manager in Corporate Finance, who joins them on the Board.

If anyone else from any other department wishes to join us, please contact Angie on 3488, or email angie.yeomans@norfolk.gov.uk

HAPPY NEW YEAR . . .

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There should be no surprises at this stage given the regular monthly monitoring reports which are presented to Cabinet, based on the M1 monitoring forms (Did you ever wonder what happened to them?). At this stage Members will make decisions as to the treatment of over/underspends.

Behind the scenes other significant work goes on including checking and collating figures in preparation of the published Statement of Accounts. Our external auditors are very much in evidence, checking and verifying both the detail behind individual transactions and the summarised information for the Statement of Accounts.



This is particularly important as an audited version of the Statement of Accounts has to be presented to and approved by County Council Members by 31st August, including being 'signed off' by the Chairman.

Just to add a bit of spice to the process, that date is being brought forward to 31st July next year and 30th June the year after. That is a legal requirement and we will have no option but to meet those deadlines, so things could get interesting. Who said being in Finance was boring?

Finally, if you're interested, last year's 'Outturn' report can be viewed on the July Cabinet Committee papers available on both the County Councils Intranet and Internet sites.

Have you ever seen a copy of the Statement of Accounts?



If not you can also check that out on the Intranet and Internet sites. That's what all this work ultimately leads to. You may find it an interesting read, especially if you have insomnia.

Finally, finally, thanks for all your efforts to date. If you want any help or further information regarding the closedown process please initially contact your Departmental Finance Officer otherwise myself, Stephanie Mullarney (ext 3322) or Harvey Bullen (extn 3330) will help where we can.

HAPPY NEW YEAR . . . absolutely marbleless

Alan Lincoln - (22)4374
Corporate Accountant

SCHOOLS: Please note that you should have received guidance notes from Education Finance at County Hall, and should direct any queries or requests for assistance to your individual Finance Support Officer in that section.

