

Finance News

 **Norfolk** County Council

Issue 46

July 2004

News and views for
everyone interested
in finance

FIMS news

Go Live

FIMS Go Live is fast approaching. In a little over 3 months, NORBAS will be closed down and our new financial management system will be switched on.

The Project Team are working extremely hard on our behalf to make it all happen and, as they will tell you, there remains much to do before October 4th. For the rest of us, there is a lot we can do to help them prepare for the day.

I would urge as many of you as possible to attend the FIMS Roadshows. A lot of preparation has gone into making these both informative and fun, so please do support them with your attendance.

The County Council is investing heavily in technology to improve both the way we work and our delivery of services to the people of Norfolk. That investment demands that we have well trained users who are able to get the most out of the system.

A comprehensive programme of training courses tailored to our needs is being developed. The logistics of training some 700 users in over 250 FIMS transactions (on-line business tasks) as close as possible to the Go Live date are huge.



Again, I ask you to do your very best to help by being as flexible as possible in your attendance at the courses and, once committed to a course, making sure that you attend.

Finally, I ask for your support more generally in helping the Project Team to complete their work. Whilst the success of Go Live depends on the work the Team have done on our behalf to get the system ready, the success of the project will be dependent upon the commitment and expertise of the wider finance community in securing maximum benefit from the new system. Please get involved and provide your support. FIMS is just around the corner.

Paul Brittain

Head of Financial Management

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Spotlight on

Department of Finance

Strategic Funding and Technical Section

Welcome to the creative side of accountancy! Not for us the routine of invoices, journals, monitoring and year-end. So what do we do?

We have three main interests:

Government funding team

Peter Roe and Phil Barber analyse the implications of the government's allocation of Revenue Support Grant for NCC in December/January each year. This becomes the basis of the budget.

They liaise with ODPM, in association with Somerset CC, the lead county council in the annual funding process. They attend meetings with ODPM and other authorities to present and discuss options for improving the funding formulae. This can involve commissioning our own research, and co-ordinating local authorities' input to that research.

They ensure that NCC departments provide correct data for the formulae to calculate grants.

Peter is also developing training programmes for the NCC finance community.

Projects team

Karen Betts works on a variety of "one off" financial problems. These can include:

- ◆ Financial assessment of options for services;
- ◆ Advice on the viability of a proposed service initiative (reviewing or writing business cases and business plans);

- ◆ Advice on setting up a new venture (eg company); analysing costs of existing services;

- ◆ Undertaking the Best Value Review of Fees and Charges.

Kim Grewcock has been assisting Karen, but will shortly be leaving for a new leisurely life in France. Rachel Beswick is starting in Karen's team in his stead.

Karen and Craig Visser have also been closely involved in the development and negotiation of a second three-year Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) and Craig monitors and co-ordinates the progress of departments in achieving targets under the LPSA.

PFI/ External funding team

Adrian French is our expert on projects seeking funding under the Public Finance Initiative (PFI). Roland Rivington and Howard Jones (who also has a wider interest in external funding generally) assist him.

The team prepare financial analyses to support PFI funding bids and advise and assist departmental PFI project managers on guiding their projects through the PFI process.

If you think any of our teams can help you, the good news is we do not charge for our services! We do have limited capacity, however, so talk to us early on to avoid disappointment.

Anna Allison 01603 222816
Head of Strategic, Funding and Technical

FIMS latest

Roll Up! Roll Up!

We have had a fantastic response to the FIMS Roadshows now showing at a number of venues around the county.

If you haven't yet booked but would like to attend we have spaces available on:

13th July in Great Yarmouth

27th July in Kings Lynn.

We also plan to organise some additional sessions at County Hall on 14th, 21st and 29th July.

For more info and/or to book a place contact Doris Piper on 01603 495815.



Time for a change (agent)!

With FIMS go live rapidly approaching, don't forget to use your change agent. There is a change agent in each department to support you and help you understand what FIMS will mean for you. But, try as they might, they may not always be able to pre-empt your needs or catch up with everybody individually, so make sure that **you** contact **them** if you have any questions, concerns, issues or ideas.

The change agents are:

Lisa Mathieson	Education	01603 224425
Katherine Attwell	Education	01603 223397
Bev Woods	Social Services	01603 223442
Gerry Baker	Finance	01603 223824
Graham Tennant	P&T	01603 228904
Howard Collins	CEX	01603 228899
Paul Mason	Corporate	01603 224427
Jenny Browne	CHS	01603 495702
John Child	NPS	01603 228971
Marina Simmonds	Fire	01603 819744
Robert Testro	Cultural Services	01603 223484



FIMS latest

FIMS Transition

You may have been wondering exactly how the transition from our old friend Norbas to the new Oracle system is going to take place. Will it be switch off Norbas, switch on FIMS, will they run together for a while, or what?

Phil Ballard, the FIMS Transition Manager, explains below.

A group has been set up to oversee the cutover from the old, to the new, system.

At the end of the cutover period the Norbas system will have been retired and FIMS will provide the County Council's operational ledger, accounts payable and accounts receivable functions. At the cutover a large number of tasks around moving data, replacing interfaces and making the new systems operational will take place.



TRANSITION TEAM L-R: (BACK ROW) PHIL BALLARD, PAUL MASON, BEV WOODS, PETER SHACKLEY, TIM SIMPSON (FRONT ROW) JO QUARTERMAN, JENNY BROWNE

The job of the Transition Group will be to ensure that the transition goes to plan. There will be a point in time when all the components of FIMS have been tested and will be waiting for us to make the transition from Norbas to FIMS. The group will be ensuring that this transition goes smoothly, and will have procedures in place to ensure that the business can continue to operate in the event of a problem occurring.

Prior to transition extensive testing of the system will have taken place. The machines that the new system runs on have been put together to ensure that they have far greater resilience than we have on the current system.

The technology allows us to have a degree of re-routing within machines to deal with component failure and to have back-up facilities should a machine or communications network fail. Norbas will be kept running in background for a short period of time as a back-up system. The need for further back up procedures are also being investigated.

You may have already had your desk top machine upgraded or had the new software loaded onto it ready and waiting for the October Go Live. Whatever the case, you will receive training on the new software. This may be by attending short courses and/or by using the on-line lessons that will guide you through the new processes and allow you to assess your progress at the end of the lesson.

All of this preparation should enable us to give you a working FIMS system at Go-Live.

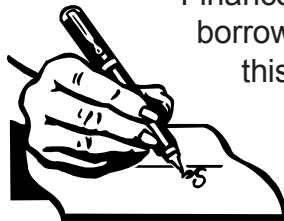
Property

Please re-lease me

Following on from the article in May's Finance News, this article looks at the changes that the Prudential Code has brought in for property leases.

Previously, any property leases for 10 years or more required 'Credit Cover', as did extensions to leases that took the total lease period beyond 10 years. Credit cover meant that these leases had to form part of the capital programme, and that less money was therefore available for other capital schemes.

As a result, many leases undertaken by the Council were for less than 10 years - and extending leases was a problem.



The introduction of the Prudential Code from April has changed all this. The test now is whether a lease is an operating lease or a finance lease. Sound familiar?

More guidance is available from the DF Capital Team or your NPS contacts, but generally leases of land (and leases of buildings for less than 10 years) will - in most cases - be classed as operating leases.

Leases of more than 10 years, will be looked at in more detail, with (among other things) the value of payments being compared to the value of the property.

These leases may be operating leases, but in some cases they are likely to be finance leases.

So what's the difference? In practice, not much (at least for departments)!

Operating leases won't count against our borrowing limits, so the only real issues are whether the property is suitable and whether the department can afford the lease payments.

Finance leases do count against our borrowing limit, but because we now set this ourselves, this isn't so much of a problem! Again, the issues are whether the property is suitable and whether the department can afford the lease payments.

Where these criteria are met - which shouldn't be a problem where a lease is being extended - there should be no impact on the rest of the capital programme, or on the revenue budgets.

Please remember that all property leases must be arranged through NPS - and if the lease is large, let the DF Capital Team know so that we can make sure our borrowing limits can accommodate the new lease.

Paul Mason
Financial Services Manager

01603 224427

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



Training alert...!!..... Help with managing grants

Are you managing an external grant?
Finding all the terms and conditions
confusing?

You may have read Karen Betts' article in the last edition of Finance News highlighting the new corporate procedures about retaining original project records. Well don't worry, help is at hand.....

The Department of Finance will be working with the European team in Economic Development and Norfolk Audit Services to run a half-day seminar in early September to support people who are already managing grant-funded projects or who are thinking of applying for grant funding.

The seminar will take you through a range of finance issues associated with grant applications and administration. Such as the sorts of things you need to think about when preparing the project budget, how to set up appropriate systems to monitor and report on spend and which records you will need to keep to back up the grant expenditure.

Norfolk Audit Services will give an insight into what the auditors will look for, including keeping the right records, creating a strong audit trail and getting grant claims and supporting documents ready for audit.

We will then have some practical examples of how some existing projects have been set up and are being managed. Whilst these examples will be directly related to European grants, the issues will be equally relevant to all externally funded projects.

Full details on the seminar in early September will be available nearer the time, but to register an interest, please contact Adrienne Jolly in Economic Development on (01603) 223035, or e-mail adrienne.jolly@norfolk.gov.uk

Karen Gibson
European Funding Manager
Tel: (01603) 222598

Karen Betts
Department of Finance
Tel: (01603) 222807

CPD Awareness Session

12 July 2004 - 12:00 - 14:00

Green Room, Archive Centre
County Hall

If you haven't booked your place yet - don't worry! It's still not too late - please ring Paul Mason on extension 4427 or email paul.mason@norfolk.gov.uk to book.

The session will cover why Continuing Professional Development is important and look at the practical issues, such as maintaining a portfolio and recording CPD information in the appraisal forms.

Paul Mason
Financial Services Manager

