

# Finance News



 **Norfolk** County Council

Issue 48

December 2004

News and views for  
everyone interested  
in finance

## Happy Christmas

As yet another year draws to a close, I welcome this opportunity through Finance News to thank you all for your commitment and support over what has been a very busy twelve months.

There have been difficult issues for us all to address during 2004 and some of these will continue into 2005. Throughout the year, as always, I have been impressed with the hard work and professionalism of the finance teams across the County Council, including Charles House Services who, when I penned this message last year, were about to return to the County Council.

So what have been the highlights of the past year. Firstly, on the 4<sup>th</sup> October FIMS went live. This is a big step forward for us all and I would again like to thank all of those involved in delivering the project; the project team; change agents; and users from all departments who contributed in all sorts of different ways to make it happen.

I would also like to thank the Council who have remained committed to delivering FIMS and provided the funding. Go live was celebrated in style at a party hosted by Oracle and DA Consulting and my thanks to them for their hospitality.

As with any new system, there are the frustrations of initial teething problems to overcome.

Processes seem to take longer as we get used to the new technology and new ways of working. I am aware that many of you are still working enormously hard to 'bed in' the new system and I really do appreciate all of your efforts in this regard. I would also urge you all to be positive and patient. Think FIMS and think of the ways in which it can be used to improve our service.

2004 has been a year in which finance and financial management has been at the forefront of discussions both locally and nationally. Locally, the financial position of the County Council is very tight indeed as the financial flexibility we have enjoyed in recent years has been gradually eroded.

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*Spotlight on*

# Scrutiny Support

## The Team

Scrutiny is possibly one of the most important changes in the way that Councillors can be involved in running local government. This vital democratic function is intended to hold the executive (i.e. the Cabinet) to account, an important part of the checks and balances essential to any organisation. The health scrutiny function has specific statutory powers over the whole of the health service in Norfolk.

The Scrutiny Support Team provides independent corporate officer advice and support to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, the Review Panels and the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and their respective Chairmen. We are also the corporate leads for scrutiny training for both members and officers.

The team is a diverse bunch of individuals, with wide experience: Mike Webb, Head of Audit and Scrutiny has many years of high-level audit and scrutiny experience and knows the council inside-out; Karen Haywood, Scrutiny Support Manager (County Council) is a skilled scrutineer with thorough knowledge of the mechanisms and processes of local government and is known in most departments; Chris Coath, Scrutiny Support Manager (Health) is relatively new to local government but has experience of the health service as a former non-executive director and was a freelance science editor/journalist for several years, meaning he knows a lot of irrelevant stuff; Tina Watson, Administrator, is the newest member of the team and is a vital part of it with a solid understanding of how best to get things done and brings with her all the necessary wiles to get the best out of the team plus a sound sense of humour.



**L-R: TINA WATSON, MIKE WEBB, KAREN HAYWOOD**

## A Matter of Life and Death

The Scrutiny Support Team has won an award to study attitudes towards death and dying in Norfolk. Information from the project will allow us, and the Health Service, to make better informed decisions about how we direct resources in the final stage of life as we approach what has been called 'the last common step.'

The £20,000 award was given by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to just nine innovative projects around the country, using money from the Department of Health. Our successful bid fought off strong competition from around forty other local authorities and was the only award made in the Eastern Region.

This twelve month project will start in December and look in detail at the sensitive and difficult topic of public perceptions of death and the delivery of care services offered both to those dying and to their carers. National figures show that over half of deaths are in hospital but that most people would prefer to be supported to die at home.

The review will test whether the national perceptions that people do not wish to die in hospital hold and that palliative care tends to be dominated by the needs of elderly people dying from cancer are true in Norfolk. It will also explore different cultural attitudes to death.

The project is an excellent opportunity to work in partnership with the health service and will gather views and experiences of the public and service users and their carers through consultation. The project will receive national exposure as good practices that we develop, or identify, will be passed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to other local authorities. Being in the first wave of 'action learning projects' will help Norfolk maintain its national profile in health scrutiny.

The money will be used to fund the consultation, run workshops and finance a temporary researcher who will be working on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor at County Hall. If you would like to know more, please contact Chris Coath, Health Scrutiny Support Manager 01603-(22)8912.



**CHRIS COATH**

# And it's goodbye Malcolm, welcome Alison...



The FIMS team were sorry to see the departure of the FIMS Project Manager, Malcolm Jones, who steered the system through to Go-live this October. Malcolm's positive attitude and drive contributed significantly to achieving this significant milestone for NCC.

Replacing Malcolm to manage the remaining stages of FIMS will be Alison Gilbert, an experienced County Council project manager responsible for implementing the Email/Ediary, Members' IT and Land Charges system projects. Her first task will be to oversee the bedding down of the system and make full use of the benefits it affords.

The future FIMS work programme includes:

- Full system testing of the end of year process
- Linking up to the new Human Resources system (IHRIS)

- Implementing a revenue budgeting module
- Setting up the system for the new Shared Services company
- Further development of management information/reports
- Handing the system over to the finance community



ALISON GILBERT

"I'm sure that the Finance community will appreciate how incredibly hard the team has worked so far" Alison said. "With such dedication I am confident that this work will continue to be delivered to the same high standards."

## Resounding Success for Scrutiny Conference



DR IAN WILSON  
SPEAKING AT THE  
RECENT SCRUTINY  
CONFERENCE

"No-one should feel safe from scrutiny!" was the message from Dr Ian Gibson, MP for Norwich North, Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology and keynote speaker at the recent highly successful Norfolk Scrutiny Conference organised by the Scrutiny Support Team.

Up to 100 Officers and Councillors from across the County attended to

take part in workshops designed to improve their skills as effective scrutinisers.

Dr Gibson went on to draw interesting parallels between parliamentary scrutiny by the select committees and the scrutiny that goes on in our own committees. He provided a fascinating insight into his work, although we all agreed that there were vast differences between the resources available to him in Parliament and those in local government!

We received excellent feedback and it's hoped that we will be able to run a similar event next year.

The conference at UEA Sports Park was organised with the help of colleagues in the Districts and aimed at Councillors from both the County and District Councils.

**Scrutiny Support Team**  
01603 228911

# Norfolk Audit Services (NAS)

## New Management Team

Since August 2004, key changes have taken place in Norfolk Audit Services (NAS). Adrian Thompson has been promoted to Chief Internal Auditor, and Jennie Griffiths and Rachel Spencer have been promoted to Principal Client Managers. Therefore, we thought we'd take a few minutes out of their busy schedules (and ours!) to ask them a few questions.



**MIKE WEBB WITH HIS NEW MANAGEMENT TEAM:  
ADRIAN, RACHEL AND JENNIE**

Firstly, we were curious how their duties have changed. Rachel and Jennie agreed that the scope now covers wider but more high level duties. Their work is now more about people management and less about audit. In addition, they have an overall responsibility for NAS now, not just their clients. Adrian has also recognised this and now looks ahead, in order to ensure that controls are as good as they can be.

Another key interest was how the Management Team are finding the changes, and their new roles. Rachel and Jennie are both pleased to have the opportunity to support Adrian in continuing the development of NAS.

Rachel finds her new role 'interesting and challenging'. Jennie particularly enjoys the new variety, especially the recruitment aspects. Adrian is learning more about his own capabilities, and feels he's making a difference already. As a result, he aims to get NAS back to full strength.

On a positive note for NAS, Mike Webb (Head of Audit and Scrutiny) was delighted to be able to promote from within because he says it shows the strength of our recruitment, development, and training. From this, he hopes NAS will be able to improve further on the existing high profile and good national reputation.

In addition, until February 2005, Graham Allison has joined NAS as an interim Principal Client Manager (pictured right).



Hannah Lake and Hayley Seaman (pictured below) also joined NAS recently as Audit Assistants.



In conclusion, you can clearly see that the team are working hard in order to guide NAS to a bright future, and by the sounds of it, are enjoying every minute!

You can contact Adrian on (01603) 222784 or email [adrian.thompson@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:adrian.thompson@norfolk.gov.uk)



# Continuing Professional Development Update

January 2005 (less a month away!) is a key date for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

## Are you aware of how it will affect you?

Many of the finance professional bodies are introducing new CPD schemes for their members - and most of these are compulsory. Some of the bodies (for example CIPFA and ACCA) are phasing in the compulsory element of the new schemes, but other bodies are not. January 2005 is when the schemes start to become compulsory.

So far, our appraisal and development scheme has been accepted by CIPFA, AAT and IIA, and good progress is being made with CIPS. Other professional bodies also have employers schemes, and we are currently liaising with them to ensure we meet their criteria.

### If this affects you, what do you need to do?

Each of the professional bodies has their own CPD scheme, although these cover very similar ground. You will need to make sure you know the rules that apply to you, and comply with them.

CPD is good practice, and the County Council strongly supports this approach. To simplify the paperwork, a revised Appraisal and Development form has been produced, and the County Council is liaising with the professional bodies to have this accepted as an Employers Scheme.

### So what is an “Employers Scheme”?

An Employers Scheme is an appraisal and development scheme that is used to plan and review an individual's training and development requirements.

Provided this meets the professional body's requirements, taking part in the employer's appraisal and development scheme - which we should be doing anyway - will automatically satisfy the CPD scheme.

### Where can I get a copy of the form?

There is now a CPD section on the Finance Intranet. This has links to the form, and to guidance on how it should be used.

A CPD Awareness session was held in July - a copy of the presentation can also be downloaded from this site. The site address is:

[http://intranet.norfolk.gov.uk/dfi/A-Z/Pro%20Development%20\(CPD\)/Continuing\\_Professional\\_Development.htm](http://intranet.norfolk.gov.uk/dfi/A-Z/Pro%20Development%20(CPD)/Continuing_Professional_Development.htm)

### Anything else I need to know?

To help everyone achieve their CPD requirements, we are planning to run regular update sessions. These started in October and November with some FIMS reporting updates, and more sessions will follow. If there are topics you would like to see covered, please send your suggestions to Paul Mason.

**Paul Mason**

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# Happy Christmas



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This places greater demands on the skill and professionalism of all of our staff, including our finance teams. Members, Chief Officers and Service Managers demand high quality financial management support to allow them to confidently manage and deliver services and it is my responsibility to ensure that happens.

Many of you will know that a review is under way into all of the Service Support functions of the Council. That review includes a review of financial support and, with the blessing of the Cabinet, I am now looking at financial management arrangements as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that the Council is best placed to respond to the financial pressures we face.

On the national scene, the Government has considerably toughened the financial regime for local authorities. Capping of our capacity to raise income from Council Tax Payers has been reinforced by the 'Gershon Report', which will result in the setting of target savings for each local authority to be found from 'back office and transactional services' and from 'improved procurement'. The current budget round to set the Norfolk's 2005/06 budget is the most difficult I can ever recall.

2004 has also been a year to celebrate. The Corporate Procurement Unit, the Risk Management and Insurance and the Pension's Teams have all won national awards in recognition of their outstanding work and, earlier this year, Norfolk was announced as host for the East of England Regional Centre of Excellence in Procurement.

In looking forward to 2005, the financial prospects remain tough and this will place increasing demand on the resolve and professionalism of all of our finance teams. Change will also feature high on the agenda, be it the establishment of a Shared Services Organisation; the Review of Service Support functions; or change and improvement arising from the Council's investment in new technology.

It is important, therefore, that we all use the Christmas break as a time to recharge batteries and relax with our families and friends. My thanks again for your support in 2004 and my very best wishes to you all for health and happiness in 2005.

**Bob Summers**  
Director of Finance

If you need this newsletter in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the Department of Finance on 01603 223488 (minicom 223833) and we will do our best to help.

