

## Next year's budget

### *Words of wisdom . . .*

*"If you're failing to plan . . .  
you're planning to fail"*

So said Will Carling –  
sometime captain of the  
England XV.

That's good advice for us too – as  
the Norfolk County Council's  
performance is coming under  
increasing scrutiny by the public  
and the government.



The Council is committed to developing a more  
corporate and medium term approach to its  
financial and policy planning.

A first step will be the Director of Finance's  
report to the July meeting of the Cabinet.

That will paint a picture of the potential financial  
position over the next three years using the  
best possible information we currently have on  
our spending commitments, the outlook for  
inflation, grant changes etc.

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During July, the Government is also expected to  
publish details of its latest spending review for the  
period 2003-6.

We are working with colleagues in the Chief  
Executive's Policy Unit and service departments  
to develop some new approaches to the  
financial planning and budgeting processes.

One particularly exciting strand of work is  
focussing on the Council's key objectives – both  
in terms of the associated performance  
indicators and the underlying activities that are  
needed to improve performance.

The challenge is to develop a financial model,  
identifying the  
costs of those  
activities, and the  
relationship  
between those  
costs and levels  
of performance,  
that can be used  
by members to  
inform  
their budget  
decisions each year.



This is very much work in progress – we are also  
exploring a number of other ideas too, for  
example Zero Based Budgeting – on which we  
will also be reporting to Cabinet in July.

Watch this space!

**John Neilson** 01603 224427  
Head of Financial Management



## **Spotlight on**

# **The County Council at the Royal Norfolk Show**

Like many organisations, the County Council knows that the Royal Norfolk Show – which is being held as we go to press – is an excellent way of communicating with people. However, taking part isn't cheap and it can be hard to assess value for money.

With thousands of people passing through the gates, the Show is a shop-front for the best of Norfolk, attracting everyone from families to royalty!

It's difficult to put a value on this kind of public profile, but there are benefits, some of them financial, in raising awareness of our services at prestigious events like the Show.



Services represented this year:

- Education/Early Years/Cultural Services/ Youth and Communities
- Road Safety
- Waste Management
- Countryside Access and Conservation
- Fire

Overall co-ordination is by Christine Birchall, Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager. "There are costs involved in participating – a typical pitch might cost around £1,500, but this does not include the cost of staff and equipment, which will vary. Each department decides how much it wants to spend, but part of the process is setting targets which help us assess value for money."

There's no central budget for the Show but some corporate costs are met by the Communications Unit, including putting up flagpoles and hiring fire extinguishers! This year there was a sponsorship tie-in for a Chairman's hospitality event to welcome the arrival of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Baton Relay to Norfolk. The Baton Relay sponsors – Cadbury's and the BBC – contributed to the cost.

We asked Alison Cunningham, who co-ordinated the Education and Cultural Services stand - *A Journey Through Lifelong Learning* - for her view.

"Historically, there has been no agreed budget for the show, and this is the first year that the services have come together in this way to share a stand. Costs of hiring the marquee,

and for providing the services within it will be apportioned amongst the participants. Each participant is responsible for the cost of mounting his/her display and for releasing staff from other duties to staff the stand on the days of the show," said Alison.

"We hope that our investment in the Show will result in positive outcomes such as more recruits to teaching and increased enrolments on adult education courses - as well as being an important public relations exercise. We have built in a system for evaluating the public response, which involves people putting stickers on smiley (or not so smiley) faces as they leave!" she said.

**Alison Smith** 01603 224222

# The Youth Bank

## Banking on Youth

Work with young people in Norfolk has been given a boost by £20,000 of government funding to help set up a new Youth Bank. The money will come from the Transforming Youth Work Fund.

The Youth Bank is a national initiative which involves young people in making decisions about giving grants to other young people. These have to be for projects to benefit groups or individuals.

It's all about giving young people a more active role in decision-making about finance, something they can often be excluded from.

Another £17,000 has also been secured for voluntary bodies to enable more involvement of youngsters in decision-making.

Norfolk County Council has been made a pilot authority for the Local Government Association Standards for Active Involvement of Young People in Local Democracy.

The standards give a framework for councils to look at how they currently engage children and young people in local democratic processes and how to improve this.

**Alison Smith** 01603 224222

## Another great result

An important aspect of our work in the Department of Finance these days is the research we undertake for the County Council Network (CCN) on Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) issues.

Next year, 2003/04 will see the government introduce many changes to the SSA formulae. It is extremely important that local government uses this opportunity to identify changes that we think the government should make.

The Department of Finance is involved in two ways. I act as lead adviser to the government for the CCN on formula changes. We also undertake SSA research for all the counties. The latest chapter here is a project which updated previous work on sparsity on Social Services Domiciliary Care and also examined the potential for a new approach to the Mental Health element within the SSA.

Anna Allison led a Steering Group with representatives from not just counties, but also many other different authorities. Not to be underestimated was the extent to which we developed, through this work, excellent working relationships with many other authorities and significantly key government officials. I have spoken several times about this research to senior county politicians from around the country and the research has been warmly commended by the CCN.

So, what could we gain from all this hard work in cash? Well, we can't quantify this - any changes which the government makes will be in addition to other possible changes. We won't be able to isolate our effect, but we are able to say that our work has the potential to benefit Norfolk by nearly £1m a year. A great result!

**Bob Summers** 01603 222400  
Director of Finance

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## ***E-Government Data collection***

As you may remember, around half of all interactions with the public were mapped during a week in March. This resulted in 25,000 contacts.

These have been analysed against how the public contacted us, the type of service requested, how long it took to deal with the query, the level of staff involved etc. The data has been "reality checked" extensively, so for the first time we have an accurate picture across all services of demand.

The final report on the data collection exercise carried out this Spring is due to be delivered by the end of June. However, the information gathered is already proving valuable in taking forward the Change Programme in Norfolk County Council.

At the same time as the data collection, we commissioned a public survey which looked at how the public contacted the county and district councils, and how they would like to in future, split into different groups by age, location, socio-economic status and so on. This will enable us to predict with some accuracy what might happen if we change the way we give access to our services.

This survey, and other face to face work done in market towns and by a number of Norfolk districts, reinforces the idea that what the public wants most is a simple way of contacting *all* council services (and indeed all public services) by phone or face to face without having to go to lots of different places.

All of this data collection work is now being used as part of the affordability study for the contact centre, but also to review face to face provision, our internet and intranet and how we might improve the information about our services as well as access channels.

**Tim Anderson**      01603 224279

## ***PRACTICE BEING GOOD . . .***

### **Unlocking Procedures!**

Here is some practical advice from Adrian Thompson, Norfolk Audit Services (NAS).



One of the first things that auditors look for when they arrive to do an audit is the procedure manual. Why is this?

The procedure manual should contain all the key information on what should happen to achieve the services' goals. So, is it just a record for the auditors, after all things seem to be running smoothly enough? No it's not!

Some recent audits have shown that in cases of new staff, staff absences or systems change, then processes can quickly go off track. This can lead to errors, inefficiency, financial loss and/or poor service.

By setting down and agreeing the key tasks, responsibilities and deadlines, both managers and staff can be confident about what is expected.



Procedures do need some investment but if you concentrate on your key processes you can keep the paperwork to a minimum. NAS are always happy to offer advice if you need it.

**Adrian Thompson**

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