

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Director of Corporate Services
and Director of Finance

REPORT NUMBER: **H125**

TO: COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING: 21 October 2008

THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report recommends that the Council publishes an Annual Report for 2007/08 in line with the Audit Commission's Use of Resources Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE). It summarises our expenditure, income and performance.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the 2007/08 Annual Report, attached as an Appendix, be approved and published as set out in this report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Because the Annual Report will be publicised in Babergh Matters and will then be made available on the Council's website, there are no additional financial implications.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Opportunity lost to bring together all the Council's information that it is statutorily required to publish. The Council does not achieve the best Use of Resources score it could	D	3 - marginal	Annual Report is being produced based on consultation and the Audit Commission's KLOE.

5. KEY INFORMATION

- 5.1 An Annual Report enables us to bring together the backward-looking, statutory information on the Council's expenditure, income and performance into one short, easy to read document and informs residents and stakeholders where more detailed information could be accessed, for example, on the website.

- 5.2 The Use of Resources KLOE advises that the Council publishes an Annual Report.

- 5.3 Consulting on the decision to publish an Annual Report is a requirement of the KLOE and a focus group was held where residents and stakeholders were consulted on the proposed provision and content of an Annual Report. The consensus was that an Annual Report should be produced and be:
- Short and jargon free, with simple explanations;
 - Clear with a simple layout;
 - Cost effective - for example, sent out with other Council information and/or provided via the Council's website.
- 5.4 An Annual Report was drafted and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee who asked for a number of changes to be made to the content of the document. The Committee resolved that the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee be authorised to make these changes for submission to the Council.
- 5.5 It is proposed that the 2007/08 Annual Report, attached as an Appendix, be approved
- 5.6 The next edition of Babergh Matters will be used to publicise the Annual Report. The Annual Report itself will be available on the website.

6. **APPENDICES**

Appendix – Babergh District Council Annual Report 2007/2008

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None

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Babergh District Council – 2007/08 Annual Report

Introduction

This is Babergh District Council's first Annual Report, covering the period from April 2007 to the end of March 2008. Earlier this year we consulted with residents and stakeholders about how best to present a summary of our expenditure, income and performance. This report takes on board those views and presents our successes and areas where we still need to improve against the backdrop of the challenges we faced during the year for each of our corporate priorities. Further detailed information on the Council's work can be found at www.babergh.gov.uk.

Babergh District Council is determined to deliver excellent, cost effective services. To make the progress we have would not have been possible without good working relationships with our partners such as local businesses, community and voluntary organisations, the health sector and the police.

We hope you find this report informative and interesting.

2007- 08 Headlines

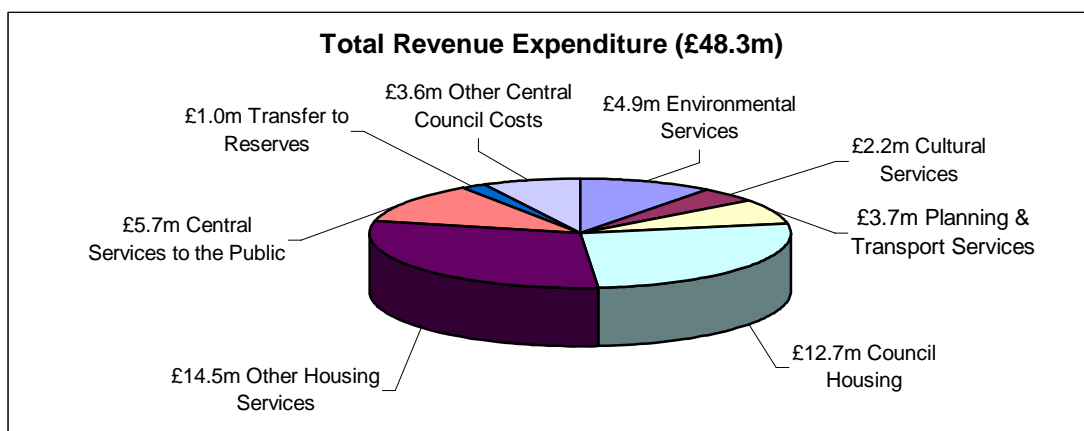
- ❖ Council tax increases have over the last four years been kept below the rate of inflation, maintaining our position of having the second lowest council tax of any district in Suffolk. Nationally, we remain in the lowest 20% for borough and district councils.
- ❖ The shape of leisure facilities in Hadleigh was clarified and, with the cost of a new pool rising beyond the means of the district, attention switched to keeping the existing pool open and deciding on what new facilities could be provided.
- ❖ There are 975 new affordable housing units either completed or planned. This compares with a target of 700 by 2009. However, the slowdown in new housing developments poses a risk to the number of houses being completed.
- ❖ Having invested time and money to improve how we handle enquiries, we have started to reap the benefits with 81% of telephone enquiries being fully answered at the point of contact.
- ❖ The time taken to process housing benefit claims improved from 20.5 days to 17, although this was below the target of 14. We intend to achieve this in 2008/09.
- ❖ The new joint contract with Mid Suffolk for the kerbside collection of waste and recyclables was implemented smoothly. This joint approach achieved significant savings and won a national procurement award as an example of innovative and cost effective working.
- ❖ We issued 13,500 concessionary bus passes (this is expected to rise by 20% this year with the introduction of the National Travel Scheme) and funded a 25% discount on 1,000 railcards for senior citizens.

Key Financial Information

Babergh spends around £50m every year on providing services and investing in projects that benefit communities and council tenants. Details are set out below.

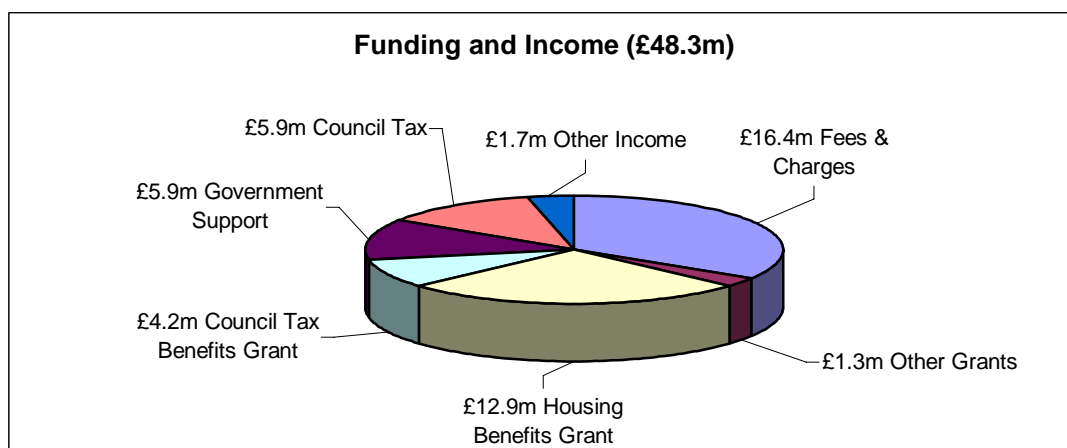
Services - where we spent the money

The chart below shows how much was spent on providing services to council taxpayers and on council housing. Council housing is not funded through council tax.



Where the money came from

This chart shows how Babergh's services are funded.



Business Rates

In 2007/08 Babergh collected £17.4 million from business ratepayers. The amount payable by individual businesses is determined by the Government and the rateable value is set by the Valuation Office. This money is paid over to the Government and is redistributed to Babergh and Suffolk County Council on a population basis.

Capital Investment

Babergh spent the following money on providing or improving facilities and maintaining our land and property. This included giving grants to individuals and organisations.

What we spent	£000	%
Council Housing	2,468	56
Affordable/ Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans	446	10
Information Technology	826	19
Environmental & Community Facilities	379	9
Asset Management	249	6
Total Capital Investment	4,368	100
This was Financed by		
Capital Receipts	1,147	26
Government Grants/Allowances	2,449	57
Borrowing	631	14
Contributions from partners/reserves	141	3
Total	4,368	100

Council Tax

We have stuck to our Financial Strategy and aim of not increasing council tax by more than the rate of inflation. For 2007/08, the increase was 0.7% below the Retail Price Index. The total council tax for a Band D property in Babergh was £1,298 per annum. **Of this, only £126, or less than 10%, is for Babergh's services.**

Organisation	Total Received £m	Amount per Band D Property (£ p.a.)
Suffolk County Council	30.2	1,035
Suffolk Police	4.0	137
Babergh District Council	3.7	126
Town / Parish Councils (Average)	1.6	55
	39.5	1,298

Efficiencies and Savings

In 2007/08 nearly £0.5m was achieved through efficiencies and savings. The main areas were the new joint waste collection contract with Mid Suffolk District Council, staff savings and the more efficient processing of transactions through the use of IT and new ways of working. This helped to deliver low council tax increases, whilst maintaining and improving services.

In addition, we have considerably exceeded the Government's annual efficiency target, reporting £2.2m in efficiency savings for the last 3 years compared to a target of nearly £1m.

Full details of the Council's Statement of Accounts can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Council+and+Democracy/Statement+of+Accounts>

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES 2007/08

Promoting healthy living and reducing health inequalities

After a thorough examination of the options and their associated costs, Babergh took the difficult decision not to commit £7m of funding (there was a shortfall of about £4m in available funds) to the building of a new swimming pool in Hadleigh. After asking local people for their views on future leisure services for the town, Councillors reaffirmed their support for both the continued maintenance of the existing pool and a new facility next to it.

During the year South Suffolk Leisure Trust successfully increased usage of the Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury and the Hadleigh Pool to approximately 380,000 customers in the year.

Babergh's award-winning *Be Active* initiative, with its vision of sports, arts and leisure activities for all, was successfully promoted at an open day held at Great Cornard Upper School, receiving praise from local authorities and sports organisations across the country.

We built on this success by funding a community coach to improve access to sports and other diversionary activities for vulnerable young people. Sporting activities including: sporting workshops, basket ball, Samba soccer skills, multi-sports and a mobile skate park attracted over 500 youngsters, from 6 -18 years old, during the summer holidays.

An event, held at Shotley Gate, in partnership with the Babergh Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership combined fun and healthy activity with a chance to learn more about community safety and issues affecting young people today.

Babergh agreed its first Play Policy in 2007 and used this as part of its successful bid for lottery funding to develop play in the district. The £200,000 will fund our first play worker, with a remit to get more children playing through 'turn up and play' sessions; a play area in Hawkins Road, Sudbury is to be replaced; and three villages that currently have no play provision at all will be provided with facilities

Further details of our leisure, tourism and arts service can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Leisure++Be+Active++Tourism++Arts/>

The Government has set a target that all council housing must achieve the Decent Homes Standard by April 2010. Elements that are assessed to make a home 'decent' include: state of repair, its facilities and thermal efficiency. Babergh has currently achieved 89%, 3% off our 2007/08 target. We were behind target due to the late start on a kitchen renewal contract. However, the target of 100% 'decent' homes will be met by April 2010.

We also adapted 30 homes, against a target of 29, to meet the needs of older or disabled people.

Overall 89% of council tenants were satisfied with the housing service, which puts the service in the top 25% of authorities in the country.

Our environmental health officers' target of inspecting all the 46 high risk food, and health and safety premises was missed by just one outlet because gaining access proved very difficult.

During the year these officers have also been heavily involved in enforcing the new 'smoke free' legislation in public places.

Increasing the supply of housing that local people can afford to rent or buy

We were on track to meet our target of 700 new affordable homes by 2009. By March 2008 we had 975 homes in the programme, of which 304 were completed (90 completed in 2007/08), 205 were under construction, 228 had planning permission and 238 proposals were being developed.

We continued to work closely with parish councils to identify potential sites where local needs housing can be developed, giving local people a chance to live near their family. During the year, village schemes were completed in Bures, Cockfield, Acton, Bildeston, Long Melford and Shotley, with other schemes completed in Sudbury and Hadleigh.

Babergh continued to use its assets for the benefit of local communities. For example, the Council's garage sites in Lawshall were identified as suitable for the development of eight affordable homes for rent and shared ownership. Similarly, a piece of garden land in Alpheton was earmarked for the provision of two affordable homes.

The Council is not in a position to build houses itself and collaborates with other parties, particularly Housing Associations and developers. With the rate of development slowing drastically we have a real concern over the rate of completions in the near future.

The number of households presenting themselves as homelessness rose from 63 in 2006/07 to 79 in 2007/08. This figure is expected to rise due particularly to the instability of the economy and financial markets. There will also be an impact on the private rented market. The Housing Panel will be reviewing the Council's Homelessness Strategy this year.

Over the year we have shortened the amount of time it takes to re-let council houses after they become vacant from 47 days in 2006/07 to an average of 41 days. Whilst this did not meet our target of 35 days, we have reviewed and improved our processes to ensure the delay is reduced significantly and, by the last quarter of the year, had improved the position to 27 days. One of the reasons for delays in re-letting a property is because we take the opportunity to upgrade and modernise the property and the re-let time can reflect the high level of work that is often required.

Further details of our housing service can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Housing+and+Rents/>

Giving easy, convenient, access to quality public services

We have improved and expanded the ways in which the public can receive and access information. For example:

- A new mobile phone texting service provides monthly reminders to encourage people to pay their council tax on time, allows builders to book appointments with Building Control and reminds residents to attend or cancel appointments with the Citizens' Advice Bureau.
- We make use of recorded information on our website ('web-casting') to improve access to information for those with a visual impairment.
- We launched a dedicated phone number (01473 826622) and online form for residents to better deal with community safety and anti social behaviour issues. Further details on this can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Community+--+people+--+living/Anti-social+Behaviour/>
- A 'Looking for Planning Applications' webpage (<http://planning.babergh.gov.uk>) allows people to view and comment on planning applications. By using this service, interested parties will be more involved and better able to understand the planning process without having to come to Hadleigh.
- We have improved the accuracy and availability of all land and property records kept by the Council which benefits residents by speeding up the time it takes to complete a land search.
- We are aiming to resolve all telephone enquiries at the point of contact. Our target for the year was 60% and we achieved 81%. This compares well against an industry standard of 80%. Within the overall figure two areas, Housing and Money Matters achieved over 90% with our General Enquiry Desk achieving 81% and Planning 76%.

We are dealing with housing benefit and council tax benefit claims more quickly. New claims are being processed in 17days, an improvement on 20.5 days last year. This places Babergh in the top 25% of councils. We were unable to meet our target of 14 days due to internal staffing issues, but this is a realistic target which has been retained for this year.

Further details of our benefits service can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Benefits/>

Maintaining a safe, clean and sustainable environment

Babergh is a safe place to live, with reported crime significantly below national averages. However, our Community Safety Partnership is far from complacent and has worked hard to achieve an overall reduction in crime of 4.5%, with the number of violent offences per 1,000 population down from 9.3 to 7.9 against a target of 9.1.

Initiatives during the year included the launch of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and 'Impact Days' where agencies target areas prone to anti-social behaviour. We also relocated CCTV monitoring of Babergh's cameras to a local base manned by staff with local knowledge.

The new joint contract with Mid Suffolk District Council for the kerbside collection of waste and recyclables proceeded smoothly, winning a national procurement award and achieving significant savings. We also entered into a seven-year contract with English Landscapes for the provision of horticultural services and street and public toilet cleaning with a view to providing more co-ordinated services.

Recycling levels continue to rise year on year. This is largely due to much lower bin contamination rates as there is greater public awareness of recycling requirements.

- percentage of waste recycled was 30.6% at the end of 2007/08 against a target of 32%;
- percentage of waste composted reached 8.6% against a target of 10%.

Further details of our refuse and recycling service can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Environment+and+Health/Rubbish+Waste+and+Recycling/Introduction.htm>

Our performance in the time taken to deal with planning applications has been below par, but we are determined to improve on this in the current year. In particular we did not meet our targets in relation to 'minor' (target 75%, achieved 57%) and 'other' (target 85%, achieved 75.5%) planning applications determined within 8 weeks. We did, however, meet our targets in relation to 'major' planning applications determined in 13 weeks (target 65%, achieved 72.2%).

Threats to the environment have risen and become more important in recent times. We are facing challenges brought about by climate change ranging from drought on the one hand to flooding on the other. In addition the need to conserve the earth's finite natural resources is now recognised as vital.

Together with other organisations in the CRed (Carbon Reduction) Suffolk Partnership, Babergh is raising awareness of this important issue. Householders and businesses can take action to limit climate change, particularly by reducing their use of fossil fuels and, in so doing, can often save money by, for example, installing insulation to save on rising energy bills.

Babergh is continuing to make the district greener and more sustainable in line with Suffolk's ambitions of 'Creating the Greenest County' (www.greensuffolk.org).

Raising individual and community ambitions and encouraging active citizenship

The Council continues to consult with residents and partners in a variety of ways including meetings with parish and town councils, focus groups, surveys and through the twice-yearly Babergh Matters publication. The results of these were taken into account in the formulation of the Council's ten year Strategic Plan covering the period from 2008 to 2018. <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/About+us/How+we+work/Strategic+Plan/>

We worked closely with town and parish councils on local issues such as planning and affordable housing.

A major issue last year was the Post Office closures and Babergh helped parish and town councils to challenge these and become involved in the development of outreach arrangements for villages affected.

Babergh continued to work on initiatives with partners regionally and county wide - for example, the development of the Suffolk-wide Community Strategy and, more locally, with the West Suffolk and Babergh East Local Strategic Partnerships.

The Council has been part of a successful joint bid with Haven Gateway for European funding to develop Dryport facilities in the district to support Felixstowe port.

Our engagement with young people continues to develop through the Council's Youth Strategy. This year's Youth Conference focused on the environment.

We have supported the development of the University College Suffolk and the South West Ipswich and South Suffolk (SWISS) Centre that will provide education for young people over 16 in the area.

Transport and mobility is an issue in Babergh. The council issued 13,500 concessionary bus passes this year and has funded a 25% discount on 1,000 railcards for older people. Further information on these services can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Transport+and+Streets/Travel+concessions/Concessionary+travel+summary+page.htm>

Around 340 businesses or non-profit making organisations received rate relief, which amounted in total to around £1m in 2007/08. The £110,000 funded by Babergh draws in nearly £900,000 from the Government.

We have carried out a review of the capital and revenue grants awarded by the Council and provided over £500,000 in grants to more than 50 organisations. These included funding for the Rural Cinema Project, the Amplifier Project and Pinewood's Community Hall. Further information on our grants schemes can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Community+-+people+-+living/Community+Grants/>

We carried out a project to publicise the availability of postal voting in five selected Wards which traditionally had a low turnout. On election day nearly 24,000 electors, 5% more than the previous local election, went to the poll to vote in the 43 women and men who now serve as your Babergh District Councillors. Information about your local District Councillor can be found at <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/Babergh/Home/Council+and+Democracy/A-Z+of+Councillors/>