

**REPORT NO. 2**

**REPORT TO THE SCRUTINY PANEL - PEOPLE  
MEETING OF 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

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**Status:** Information  
**Title:** PUBLISHING LOCAL AUTHORITY SPENDING  
**Originator:** Kamal Mehta, Deputy Chief Executive  
**Where from:** Scrutiny Commission – Work Plan  
**Where to next:** N/A

Objective: To inform the Scrutiny Panel of the government's transparency agenda and the actions taken and being taken to publish the required data.

1. Outcome sought from Panel

1.1 The Panel to comment on the transparency agenda and to note the actions that have been taken and are being taken to publish data and information to satisfy the government's transparency agenda.

2 Background

2.1 In June 2010, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government wrote to local authorities informing them they would have to publish expenditure on items over £500 by January 2011. This included tenders, contracts and actual payments. Government has also committed to publishing certain information on salaries and contracts by this date. This is not a statutory requirement.

2.2 The transparency agenda is wider than publishing expenditure on items over £500 or details of senior officers' remuneration or tenders and contracts. The Government's statement on the scope of the transparency agenda is reproduced in Appendix A.

2.3 The Local Government Group working in collaboration with the Local Public Data Panel has published a series of practitioner guidance for local authorities in order that the data is published in a standardised and comparative format and content. The guidance also covers implications of the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act on the Transparency Agenda and how these should be handled in order to meet the agenda and examples of what would be considered personal or commercially sensitive information. They provide practical advice on redaction of information and exemption from publication.

2.4 The Deputy Chief Executive has been leading on the transparency agenda to date internally as most of the data/information is extracted from the Council's financial management systems in the first instance with other systems of the council supplementing, adding to or filling in any gaps.

2.5 The Council met the requirement to publish expenditure on items over £500 by the 31 January 2011. The information can be found at:

[http://www.harborough.gov.uk/site/scripts/news\\_article.php?newsID=216](http://www.harborough.gov.uk/site/scripts/news_article.php?newsID=216)

The Council publishes the information on a quarterly basis on its website and uploads it to the Department of Communities and Local Government website which is also then linked to the Local Directgov website.

2.5 The data on senior officers' (Management Board) salaries will be similarly published with the first quarter of this financial year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011. For 2011/12 it will be the salaries as at the beginning of the financial year i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April. It is important to note that the Accounts and Audit Regulations as applying to local authorities have for a number of years required the inclusion of remuneration of senior employees in their financial statements to increase transparency and accountability in Local Government. The requirements include provision of:

- individual data on all senior employees earning more than £150,000 by job title and name
- individual data on all senior employees earnings between £50,000 and £150,000 by job title only
- banded data in multiples of £5,000 on all other employees earning over £50,000.

2.6 The requirement to publish data/information on tenders and contracts is currently met through the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) websites. However, with the RIEPs' being wound up, the Deputy Chief Executive with the support of the Welland Procurement Unit is working towards the Council publishing the data/information directly.

2.7 There is a staffing resource implication in satisfying the transparency agenda. Data has to be extracted from the council's systems each quarter and the verified and vetted for sensitive and personal information and redacted as appropriate. For the senior officers' remuneration information additional contextual information has to be included which requires drafting and signing off. The publication of tenders and contracts will require coordination and control to collate the information to a single point in the organisation.

2.8 Publication of the data/information under the transparency agenda can lead to requests for further information under the Freedom of Information Act.

3 Points for discussion

- 3.1 The Panel notes the council's actions to date and the progress on the transparency agenda.
  - 3.2 The Panel notes the wider scope of the transparency agenda.
  - 4 Equality and Diversity
  - 4.1 The publication of data and information in a standard for will allow comparability between local authorities and central government.
  - 4 Meeting the objective
  - 4.1 Access to information and being accountable to the public not only locally but nationally.
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**Previous report(s): None**

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: No**

#### **Appendices**

- A Areas identified by the Government to increase transparency
- B Example page of Invoices over £500, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011

## Appendix A

Areas identified by the Government to increase transparency.

- Breaking down central government spend at local level
- Councillors' allowances and expenses: greater clarity on councillors' costs
- Council minutes and papers: consistent publication of what is being discussed and what has been decided
- Council job vacancies: making sure these are published online and in an accessible format - to save money and give wider coverage
- Frontline service data including rubbish and recycling rates, council tax collection rates and details of major planned projects
- Licensing applications and decisions – giving early opportunity to raise concerns or objections
- Planning applications and decisions: making it easier for residents to influence emerging development ideas
- Food hygiene reports for food outlets – standardise format making it more accessible and comparable

Some of the information is already in the public domain but not always in an easily accessible or comparable format or capable of being reused without issues of copyright or charges for its use arising.

The government goes on to state that 'a key part of making spending and data transparent will be to get information in the public domain in a standardised format.'