

# SHARING SERVICES: Communications Plan for partnership with South Somerset District Council



## Background:

There are growing financial pressures affecting the public sector and an expectation that councils will address these pressures through increased sharing of services, amongst other initiatives.

The concept of shared services has developed from sharing the occasional individual service to a more systematic approach where a district council may decide to share not only its Chief Executive with a neighbouring local authority but also its senior and middle management team.

EDDC's Use of Resources Assessment, published in December 2009, included recommendations that the Council considers and develops further arrangements for working with local partners to provide and procure services jointly, and continues to work with other councils through joint workforce planning.

At Executive Board in February 2010, Members recommended that EDDC should investigate the sharing of services with South Somerset District Council and this was approved, along with the appointment of a joint Chief Executive, by Members at Full Council on 24 February.

In April 2010 a Joint Integration Committee (JIC) will be set up, with five councillors from each council, to look at opportunities for efficiencies and savings to be made from sharing senior managers. Working in parallel, EDDC will be setting up its own internal Member panel to look at other areas of savings that do not fall under the remit of the JIC.

In addition, EDDC will be sharing Corporate Director, Karime Hassan, with Exeter City Council on a 3/5ths 2/5ths basis. This new interim appointment will be effective from 1 April 2009, when Karime replaces John Rigby, Director of Economy and Development, who is retiring. The arrangement is for an initial nine-month period. At the same time, Karime will revert to his previous role at EDDC, responsible for Planning and Economic Development, whilst Peter Jeffs will take on the StreetScene remit.

Any major change such as this is dependent for success on the support of the public, of Members and of Staff. Winning the hearts and minds of these three groups will depend heavily on timely, accurate and sensitive communication of plans and developments.

The run-up to the decisions by both councils to work together was communicated well. We must ensure we maintain this high standard of joint communication planning and delivery in the coming weeks and months to minimise staff disruption and to protect the reputations of both authorities.

### **Communications aims:**

- To ensure that all stakeholders, business partners, members and staff in the two districts are kept fully informed about progress with the shared working approach, such that they feel comfortable about both the process itself and the way it is being managed
- To tailor messages and channels to offer the best chance of reaching the various audiences
- Setting out clearly what our joint commitment to a shared services arrangement actually means – which areas are likely to be affected and then, as the process is rolled-out, informing people in more detail about what this will mean to them individually or as a group
- To help Staff and Members understand the benefits that such change can bring to the Council, including medium-term financial stability, protecting front-line services and, hence, greater job security for the majority of our employees
- To ensure that the public understand that the shared service arrangements are designed to maintain or improve services at current levels without the need for cuts in other areas or large increases in Council Tax.

### **Audiences:**

- Staff of EDDC and SSSC
- Members of EDDC and SSSC
- Residents and other members of the public in both districts
- Media outlets and commentators.

### **Channels:**

- Intranet sites at EDDC and SSSC (including links from one to the other)
- Staff briefings and meetings of Manager groups
- The Knowledge at EDDC and InForm at South Somerset District Council (Members' publications)
- EDDC and SSSC website news sections (maybe a dedicated section needed on both)
- Press releases and Press briefings
- Residents' magazine(s). Successor to East Devon Talk, plus South Somerset News. Next editions June 2010
- Outreach sessions – SSSC hold these through their Area Offices. EDDC could consider through its Engagement Officer.

**Key messages:**

- Need to balance the budget to ensure that EDDC and SSDC continue to thrive and deliver the front-line services that people want
- Reassurance that, whilst there may be changes to senior and middle management, it is business as usual for most staff
- Exciting opportunities to learn from opposite numbers in neighbouring council, and to expand roles
- Sharing best practice with another high-performing council (in both cases) can only benefit both partners
- Savings in the pay bill for both councils will help to balance the budget – see Bullet 1

**Officers responsible for communications and other activity:**

**Dawn Haydon – DH**

**Nick Stephen – NS**

**Jane Voller – JV**

**Adrian Marsden – AM**

**Bob Darbourne – BD**

**Karen Jenkins – KJ**

**Mark Williams – MW**

## Draft schedule of activity

Date	Audience	Action	Responsible	Comments
25 February	Residents via the media	Reactive statement following previous evening's Executive Board when decision to support shared services agenda will be ratified.	NS	To be used when managers brief their staff (see below). Short, bullet-point format covering the main issues and likely questions to be asked.  Potential benefits for staff under the new system should be highlighted. Whilst there will be changes, these are not necessarily detrimental to staff's employment opportunities.
Early March	EDDC staff	Staff Intranet homepage to include a standing item on partnership with South Somerset. Direct link to South Somerset's website from the "Our Council" tab.	JV/AM	Done
Early March	Residents via the media	Interview with Chief Executive to be offered exclusively to Archant Group.  Interview with Western Gazette Yeovil/South Somerset editions (on request).	NS/JV to arrange Mark Williams  DH	To explain the role of a Chief Executive and draw parallels with commercial organisations. Discuss budgets, responsibilities at both councils etc with the aim of giving members of the public a better understanding of a CE's role in the current local government climate. <b>This idea not followed through in East Devon.</b>  Interview with Western Gazette now complete – a balanced and factual piece along the lines of the above.

Date	Audience	Action	Responsible	Comments
19 March	SSDC Staff and Members	██████████	DH	Intranet articles. Press release for local and trade media plus SSDC website. All-staff photo and member presentation to ██████████
22 March	Staff and Residents	Mark Williams takes up post of joint CEO at East Devon and South Somerset.		New item on Mark My Words slot on ED Intranet. SSDC put Welcome message on Intranet. Residents informed via the media.
Late March	Staff and Residents	Centre spread in East Devon Talk, announcing the agreement and comparing the two councils.	NS	Now published.
Late March / early April	All Staff  Residents	Details of Rationalisation Panel to be announced in Mark My Words and then published on South Somerset Partnership Working site on Intranet.	Karen Jenkins/NS/JV	Remit of Rationalisation Panel clearly explained and Members named in Team Brief. Also details of when they report back and to whom.  Details also on EDDC website at: <a href="http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/shared_services">http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/shared_services</a>
31 March		First meeting of Rationalisation Panel		No minutes
Early April	All Staff	Details of JIC to be announced in Mark My Words and then published on South Somerset Partnership Working site on intranet.	NS/JV//Mark Williams	Remit of JIC clearly explained and Members from both councils named in ED team Brief, including when they will report back and to whom?  Details also on EDDC website at: <a href="http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/shared_services">http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/shared_services</a>
8 April		First meeting of JIC		

<b>Date</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Comments</b>
21 April		ED Rationalisation Panel meets		No minutes
22 April		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
13 May		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
17 June		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
June	Residents	Formal introduction to Mark Williams in South Somerset News.	DH	A centre spread on the partnership, new Joint CEO, key dates for milestones. To introduce Mark and to communicate key points.
8 July		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
12 Aug		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
9 Sept		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
14 Oct		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
11 Nov		JIC meets		Minutes to follow

Date	Audience	Action	Responsible	Comments
9 Dec		JIC meets		Minutes to follow
Ongoing	All Staff	Regular updates in Team Brief and on Intranet	NS/JV/DH	
Ongoing	All Residents	Regular updates on Websites and in press releases as appropriate.	NS/JV/DH	

Jane Voller  
April 2010