

January 2010

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Queens Speech

The Queen's Speech at the official opening of Parliament has outlined the Legislation the Government will prioritise during the forthcoming Parliamentary year.

Labour have with the Queen's speech promised "guarantees not gambles" as it used the final Queen's Speech to draw dividing lines with the Conservatives ahead of the coming general election. The Queen set out the Government's agenda with thirteen Bills (and two draft Bills) with a key priority on Economic Recovery.

The new bills include:

- Bribery Bill
- Children, Schools and Families Bill
- Digital Economy Bill
- Equality Bill
- Financial Services Bill
- Fiscal Responsibility Bill
- House of Lords Reform Bill

In the wake of the Queen's Speech, Lord Mandelson denied the accusation of electioneering, suggesting all the measures were necessary for Britain.

The Conservatives will play a significant role determining how much of the legislation becomes law. Bills that have not yet reached the statute books by the time an election is called will only pass if there is agreement between the parties, in a process known as "wash-up".

Before the 2005 election, the wash-up negotiations resulted in the passing of gambling legislation wanted by Labour, although the price secured by the Conservatives for their support was to reduce the number of super casinos from six to one.

Michael Gove, the Shadow Schools Minister, said legislation to bring in pass aspirations on reducing child poverty or the budget deficit would reduce the Queen's speech to "partisan pettiness". He said:

"Simply using the issue of poverty to say to other political parties 'Look can we paint you into a corner? Can we paint you black? That's not good enough."

Lord Mandelson denied the accusation of electioneering, suggesting all the measures were necessary for Britain

The Queen's Speech did not include a proposal to legislate to introduce self-financing in the Housing Revenue Account as proposed in the July 2009 consultation paper

"The government are trying to say they can abolish child poverty, that they can guarantee a legal right to good education and also that they can guarantee equality by simply passing legislation, as though by simply appending the Queen's name to a piece of paper, somehow bad schools, inequality and poverty will disappear. We all know it's far more complicated than that."

However he added that the Conservatives would support such legislation:

"We're not going to play Gordon Brown's game. That would be to reduce the complicated and serious argument about how to deal with poverty simply to an exercise in political positioning."

Chris Grayling, the shadow Home Secretary, suggested that the public should not be fooled into thinking that any of these measures was urgently needed:

"This is a government which has had 12 years to do what it thought necessary"

AWICS has published a full briefing paper on the Queen's speech including a summary of all the new bills

The programme includes a number of previously-announced measures, such as giving agency workers equal rights on pay, holidays and basic conditions.

There will also be pledges to crack down on anti-social behaviour with compulsory parenting checks when youths are unruly.

However, the Queen's Speech did not include a proposal to legislate to introduce self-financing in the Housing Revenue Account as proposed in the July 2009 consultation paper issued by 'Communities & Local Government'.

In a move that will please Labour's Left, a ban on cluster munitions will be put before Parliament. On the environment, legislation will be tabled to support carbon capture technology and improve flood defences.

Jacob Zuma, the new President of South Africa, has been invited on a state visit next year, while government documents also reveal a royal visit to Bermuda and then Trinidad and Tobago for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

AWICS has published a full briefing paper on the Queen's speech including a summary of all the new bills. You can download a free copy on our website from:

http://awics.co.uk/BriefingPapers/ViewCategory/public_administration/

Adam M. Waite
November 2009

Training and Development, part of an effective business plan

Can you afford to fund training in an economic downturn? Can you afford NOT to do so? With budgets tighter than ever and services needing to achieve greater economies, it is easy to seek to make savings in the training budget. We often say that “our people are our most valuable asset”, but in these challenging times an organisation needs every member of staff to operate at peak performance, and this means keeping knowledge and skills up to date to stay ahead of the market.

Make the most of your training budget

Effective planning helps to make the most of every pound in the budget and by applying some simple techniques to the planning process you can ensure the money spent is invested in the areas that will reap the greatest return for the organisation.

Formalise the process

Make training an integral part of each staff appraisal and review meeting. Use the opportunity to review how training over the last year has gone, and also to identify training required to improve skills and performance over the coming year, recording this as a Personal Development Plan. Building learning and development issues into the review meeting will increase the focus on performance, and help both manager and staff to link training to both performance and business objectives.

Make it business-relevant

Consider all requests for training in the context of the business plan and encourage staff to make a business case for professional and technical training prior to approval. This makes prioritising needs across the organisation easier, and helps staff see their qualifications in context of organisational need.

Consider training under four main categories:

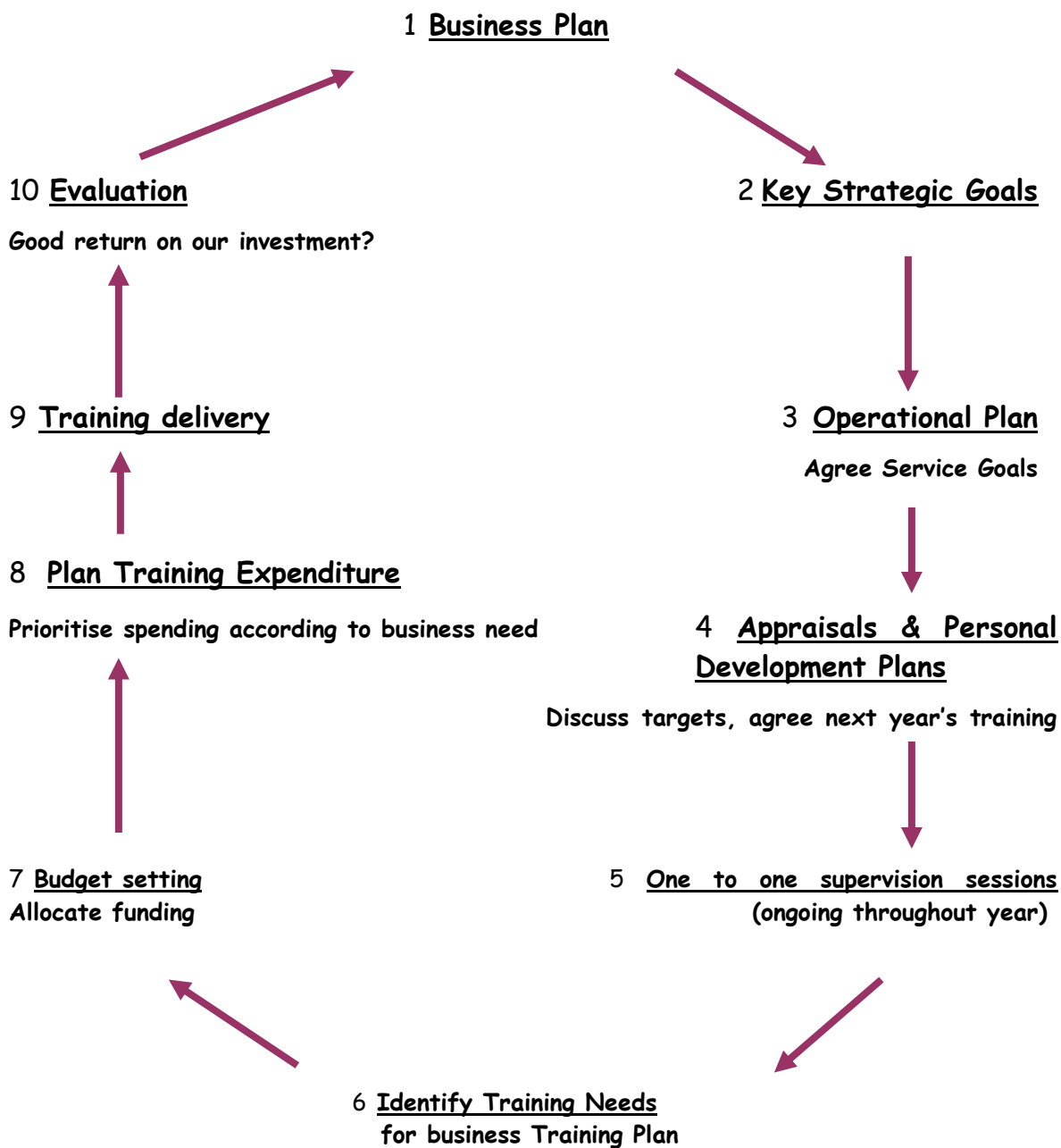
- Professional/technical
Professional qualifications or technical courses leading to professional qualifications or technical competence
- Skills development
Core training linked to core business objectives, e.g. induction training, customer care, communication skills, performance management, and supervisory skills. These should directly link to the business plan.
- Management development
Role-specific development on performance and leadership competencies
- Organisational/Corporate development

Briefing on business-crucial areas, e.g. preparation for new legislation, relocating premises, moving to a shared-service model.

Can you afford to fund training in an economic downturn? Can you afford NOT to do so?

Consider all requests for training in the context of the business

Training and the Business Planning Process



Benefits to the organisation and its staff

Having a robust appraisal system which links training plans to the business and operational planning process is a key element of achieving Investors in People status. In a stringent economic climate, holding business accolades such as Investors in People can enhance morale and send a positive message to prospective customers.

Be creative in finding learning solutions

Traditional courses run in-house for one organisation might not always be the most viable solution in times of recession. Look for creative opportunities that can meet the need without breaking the bank. Could you jointly host a course with a neighbouring organisation and share the cost and venue? This can not only reduce up-front costs but also adds value to the learning as participants have the chance to network with other agencies and share best practise.

Online learning is convenient and relatively cheap but sometimes a structured surfing session on the internet can reap similar rewards without attracting a fee, just make it SMART with a clear objective and well defined outcome to keep boundaries clear for the task. Lend training DVDs, journals and books to colleagues so that others benefit from your learning investment too.

Cascade learning to others

If a team member attends a presentation skills course, invite him or her to deliver a presentation on presentation skills at a team meeting. Not only will they gain from putting the learning into practise soon after the course but the learning can be shared to enhance the understanding of other team members at the same time.

Turn every day into a learning experience

Simply asking a question can add value and learning to the day. At debriefs, ask, "What can we learn from this? Encourage staff to be creative in generating ideas and solutions to bring a "can do" culture that can build resilience into a pressured team.

Think frugal, act local

No venue for a meeting? If you need to call and impromptu meeting and it's a sunny morning, why not suggest a walk to the local park? A team meeting in the open air can really lift the spirits and energise staff ready for a productive afternoon. Likewise a team event can be back on the agenda with a little creativity and an open mind. Ask each team member to prepare a short scenario to discuss en route, and make the travelling time part of the learning journey too.

Katie Coupe MIPS M

Organisational and Employee Development Officer, Ipswich Borough Council

*Turn every day into a
learning experience*

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Local Authority Capital Finance

During 2009 AWICS have been providing seminars across England on local authority finance. Communities & Local Government asked 'AWICS' to provide feedback from these seminars on local authority capital finance. This was achieved by asking participants to complete a questionnaire. What follows is a summary of that feedback.

Questionnaire on Capital Finance Issues in Local Government (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account)

1. Capital Expenditure

- 1.1. Do you have any issues surrounding the definition of expenditure that can be capitalised?

There appear to be no strong views on this.

- 1.2. Has the bringing forward of funding for capital projects during the recession had any beneficial effects in your area?

The bringing forward of capital projects is seen as having an initial beneficial effect but as the money has been brought forward and is not new money there is scepticism about whether there will be a beneficial effect in the long-term.

- 1.3. Does the Decent Homes Standard represent an appropriate standard for social housing or should a higher standard now be adopted?

It is considered that the Decent Homes Standard is not very ambitious and that a higher standard should be adopted. However, to achieve a higher standard, local authorities would need access to increased capital resources.

- 1.4. Do the current arrangements for funding new build of council houses enable the Council to build the new homes that are required? Are any changes needed to facilitate new build?

Few local authorities are contemplating new build and where they are the schemes are usually small. Recent changes to rules on housing subsidy and capital receipts are likely to be helpful but it is too early to tell how many new council homes will be built as a result.

2. Borrowing and Debt

- 2.1. Should the government write off General Fund debt? If so, should it also cease to provide resources for capital financing in revenue support grant?

There appear to be no strong views on this.

- 2.2. Has the 'damping mechanism' and 'floors' in the revenue support grant prevented your authority from financing capital schemes that it (or central government) would consider desirable?

Some authorities consider that the 'damping mechanism' and 'floors' prevents them from carrying out capital schemes despite provision being made for them in the financing element of the revenue support grant calculation.

- 2.3. Does your authority find that it has resources 'headroom' in the General Fund to fund unsupported prudential borrowing? If not, does this inhibit your ability to provide desired levels of service?

Authorities generally find there is sufficient 'headroom' in the general fund to carry out the prudential borrowing that is required.

- 2.4. Should the government write off Housing Revenue Account debt? If so, should it also cease to provide resources for capital financing in housing subsidy?

The write off of housing debt is seen as a good way to simplify the housing revenue account subsidy system although it would have a neutral effect on local authorities if debt were written off at the level assumed for housing subsidy purposes.

- 2.5. Does your authority find that it has resources 'headroom' in the Housing Revenue Account to fund unsupported prudential borrowing? If not, does this inhibit your ability to meet the decent homes standard or local housing standards?

Most authorities find that there is insufficient 'headroom' in the housing revenue account to allow them to carry out the level of prudential borrowing that they would wish to.

- 2.6. Do you favour 'securitisation' (borrowing on the basis of asset values rather than on revenue streams)?

There is some support for 'securitisation' although it is recognised that there is also a need to identify a revenue stream to fund the resulting capital financing costs.

3. Revenue Contributions

- 3.1. Does your authority find that it has resources 'headroom' in the General Fund to fund revenue contributions to capital outlay? If not, does this inhibit your ability to provide desired levels of service?

Authorities generally find there is sufficient 'headroom' in the general fund to make the revenue contributions to capital outlay that is required.

- 3.2. Does your authority find that it has resources 'headroom' in the Housing Revenue Account to fund revenue contributions to capital outlay? If not, does this inhibit your ability to meet the decent homes standard or local housing standards?

The write off of housing debt is seen as a good way to simplify the housing revenue account subsidy system although it would have a neutral effect on local authorities if debt were written off at the level assumed for housing subsidy purposes

Most authorities find that there is insufficient 'headroom' in the housing revenue account to allow them to make the level of revenue contributions to capital outlay that they would wish to and that this can prevent them from achieving the decent homes standard or local housing standards.

- 3.3. Do you consider that the government's proposals for a Supplementary Business Rate will enable your authority to fund capital schemes to support economic development?

It is considered that local authorities outside London are unlikely to make much use of the Supplementary Business Rate and that in London it will be used to fund 'Crossrail'.

4. Major Repairs Allowance

- 4.1. When it was first introduced it was said that the Major Repairs Allowance would provide sufficient funding for ongoing major repairs enabling authorities to maintain the decent homes standard. Do you believe that the major repairs allowance at your authority is currently sufficient to do this?

Most authorities find that the major repairs allowance falls significantly short of the level that would be needed to sustain the decent homes standard.

5. Specific Grants

- 5.1. Has your authority experienced any difficulty with overspending or any other aspect of 'Building Schools for the Future'? If so, can you suggest any improvements to the system?

Some authorities have experienced difficulties though no changes to the system were suggested.

- 5.2. Does the government provide your authority with sufficient Disabled Facilities Grant?

Most authorities consider that Disabled Facilities Grant is insufficient to meet needs.

- 5.3. Does the government provide your authority with sufficient PFI credits for Waste Management?

There appear to be no strong views on this.

- 5.4. Do you consider that the government should introduce specific capital grants in the Housing Revenue Account designed to help authorities to achieve the decent homes standard or local housing standard?

There is a view that the government should do something to enable authorities to achieve and sustain the decent homes standard and a specific grant would be an option.

It is considered that local authorities outside London are unlikely to make much use of the Supplementary Business Rate and that in London it will be used to fund 'Crossrail'.

6. Capital Receipts

- 6.1. Has your authority experienced a reduction in capital receipts due to the recession? If so, what effect has this had on your ability to deliver the capital programme or achieve targets for asset disposals?

Most authorities have experienced a reduction in capital receipts although many have re-profiled their capital financing plans to ensure that this has not had an adverse effect on capital programmes. If the recession is prolonged a greater effect would be seen.

- 6.2. Do you consider that all housing capital receipts should be retained locally rather than being pooled?

Most authorities would favour this although if it reduced other housing budgets there would be an adverse effect on other programmes.

- 6.3. Do you consider that housing revenue account capital receipts should be ring-fenced to the housing revenue account?

Many who are involved in housing would favour the ring-fencing of HRA capital receipts though this would have a limited effect at present as the level of capital receipts is so low.

- 6.4. Has your authority experienced a reduction in right to buy capital receipts due to the recession? If so, what effect has this had on your ability to deliver the housing capital programme?

All authorities have experienced a reduction in right to buy capital receipts and this preceded the recession. It has reduced resources available for the HRA and general fund capital programmes

- 6.5. Has your authority made use of the capital receipts pooling allowance? If so, what sorts of schemes have been funded?

Some authorities have made use of the capital receipts pooling allowance usually by using receipts from the sale of former sheltered housing schemes to fund regeneration schemes.

Most authorities have experienced a reduction in capital receipts although many have re-profiled their capital financing plans to ensure that this has not had an adverse effect on capital programmes. If the recession is prolonged a greater effect would be seen

All authorities have experienced a reduction in right to buy capital receipts and this preceded the recession

Adrian Waite

AWICS is holding a series of seminars on 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance' during 2010. Further details are included in this newsletter below.

AWICS Regional Seminars 2010

AWICS has announced its programme of regional seminars for 2010. They are as follows:

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in England 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of local authority housing finance in England. The 2010 series is fully updated and seminars will be held in every region of England.

- London: Wednesday 17th February 2010 – Novotel Hotel, Waterloo.
- West Midlands: Tuesday 2nd March 2010 – Novotel Centre, Coventry
- Northwest: Tuesday 23rd March 2010- Thistle Hotel, Haydock.
- Southwest: Wednesday 14th April 2010 – Angel Hotel, Chippenham.
- Northeast: Thursday 6th May 2010 – New Northumbria Hotel, Newcastle-on-Tyne.
- Cumbria: Wednesday 23rd June 2010 – Stone Cross Manor Hotel, Kendal.
- South: Thursday 1st July 2010 – Novotel Central Hotel, Southampton.
- East: Tuesday 28th September 2010 – Gonville Hotel, Cambridge.
- East Midlands: Tuesday 19th October 2010 – Walton's Hotel, Nottingham.
- Yorkshire & Humber: Tuesday 9th November 2010 – Headingley Rugby Lodge, Leeds.
- London: Thursday 9th December 2010 – Ibis Hotel, Euston.

Further information and a booking form are available on our [website](#).

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in England 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of local authority finance in England. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- London: Tuesday 16th March 2010 – Ibis Hotel, Euston.
- Cumbria: Tuesday 4th May 2010 – Hallmark Hotel, Carlisle.
- Midlands: Tuesday 14th September 2010 – Walton's Hotel, Nottingham.
- North: Monday 22nd November 2010 – Novotel West Hotel, Worsley

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance in England 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of housing association finance in England. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- London: Tuesday 20th April 2010 – Ibis Hotel, Euston.
- North: Tuesday 8th June 2010 – Headingley Rugby Lodge, Leeds.
- Midlands: Tuesday 26th October 2010 – Novotel Centre, Coventry.

Further information and a booking form are available on our [website](#)

All You Want to Know about Budgets and Financial Management 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of budgets and financial management in the public sector that is especially suitable for non-financial people.

- London: Thursday 13th May 2010 – Ibis Hotel, Euston.
- North: Wednesday 9th June 2010 – Headingley Rugby Lodge, Leeds.
- Midlands: Tuesday 30th November 2010 – Novotel Centre, Coventry.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of local authority housing finance in Scotland. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- Tuesday 25th May 2010 – Best Western Park Hotel, Falkirk.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Wales 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of local authority housing finance in Wales. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- Tuesday 29th June 2010 – Novotel Centre, Cardiff.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England 2010

This popular series provides an in-depth analysis of developments in local authority housing finance in England (including the government's proposals for self-financing) and is suitable for people who already have a basic knowledge of how housing finance works.

- London: Wednesday 7th July 2010 – Novotel Hotel, Waterloo.
- Midlands: Wednesday 27th October 2010 – Novotel Centre, Coventry.
- North: Wednesday 1st December 2010 – Headingley Rugby Lodge, Leeds.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of housing association finance in Wales. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- Tuesday 5th October 2010 – Novotel Centre, Cardiff.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

All You Want to Know about Scottish Housing Association Finance 2010

This popular series provides an introduction and overview of housing association finance in Scotland. The 2010 series is fully updated.

- Tuesday 2nd November 2010 – Best Western Park Hotel, Falkirk.

For further information and a booking form please contact enquiries@awics.co.uk

Other Services

In addition to our in house and regional seminars AWICS also provide a range of other services including:

- Management Consultancy including:
 - Business and Best Value Reviews
 - Advice on Procurement
 - Housing Finance
 - Business Planning
 - Housing Stock Options Appraisals
 - Housing Association Finance
 - Performance Management
- Independent Tenants' Advice
- Publications

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