

**PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 14 AUGUST 2008**

Present:- Councillor H S Rolfe – Chairman.  
Councillors S Barker, J Davey, M L Foley, A J Ketteridge, J  
Salmon and P A Wilcock.

Also in attendance:- Councillor R M Lemon.

Officers in attendance:- S Bronson (Audit Manager), Paula Evans  
(Business Improvement Manager), M Cox (Democratic Services  
Officer), Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager) Ron  
Pridham (Head of Street Services) Colin Rockall (Interim  
Change Manager), Geoff Smith (Head of Environmental Health)  
and Adrian Webb (Interim Director of Central Services).

Also present:- Ian Davidson (Audit Commission).

**PS13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T P Knight.

**PS14 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2008 were received, confirmed  
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**PS15 BUSINESS ARISING/ACTION LIST UPDATE**

The Chairman raised the following issues to be added to the list of committee  
actions.

**1 Minute PS4 – Draft Audit and Inspection Plan 2008/09**

- i) The Chairman asked for progress on the provision of a tick list  
regarding efficiency and effectiveness.
- ii) The Interim Director of Central Services said he was still talking to  
Essex County Council regarding seconding an officer to assist in the  
listing of assets.
- iii) Councillor Wilcock asked when the Housing re inspection was  
likely to take place. Mr Davidson said that it would be  
after Christmas but this could be clarified at the next meeting.

**2 Minute PS7 – Corporate Risk Register and Risk management  
Update**

The Audit Manager would be presenting the first review of the Corporate and Operational Risk Registers to SMB on 9 September.

PS16

## **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

The Committee received details of a recent audit report of Grounds Maintenance and a completed management action plan. No significant problems had been identified during the audit and the systems of control were functioning satisfactorily.

Members asked how they could be assured that all areas of land in the District were being covered. Councillor Foley referred to a parcel of land at Vicarage Mead Thaxted that was very overgrown. The Head of Street Services said that both the Council and the contractor had detailed maps of all the council owned land and detailed specification for the work to be carried out at each location. He would receive complaints if the work wasn't carried out but it would be helpful for Members to report any areas of concern.

The Chairman said that Members might be interested to see the maps and it was suggested that a copy of them should be placed in the Members' room and an email alert be circulated to all members.

Councillor Wilcock said that because of their different responsibilities contractors from the District Council and the County Council were at times carrying out maintenance work at the same location. He asked whether it might be possible to realign the contacts to avoid this duplication. The Head of Street Cleaning explained the practical problems associated with this, but did feel that it might be possible to look at passing some of the maintenance work to parish councils. However, no action was required at the present time as the Council had just renegotiated a favourable contract which still had two years to run.

The audit had picked up that there was a significant interval between the receipt of invoices by the council and their being presented to Exchequer for payment. This situation would be helped by the new purchasing system but this was yet to be implemented.

RESOLVED that the Grounds Maintenance Internal Audit Report and Management Action Plan be noted and the following points be agreed for further action.

- 1 Within the next two years the Head of Street Cleaning to review the most effective way of dealing with the parcels of land.
- 2 Officers to advise the Committee when the new purchasing system is likely to be up and running.

PS17

## **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – ELDERLY PERSONS**

The Committee considered the Internal Audit report and resulting action plan for the elderly person's service. The audit had confirmed that the key

objectives of the Lifeline service had been met but weaknesses had been identified relating to financial controls and the absence of a clear audit trail. However, Members were informed that plans were already in place for a complete review of the lifeline and sheltered housing service.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Internal Audit report and Management Action Plan.

PS18

## **PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE REQUEST DATA**

Further to a request at the last meeting, the Committee received a report showing the number and type of public health complaints received over the past 3 years. The target was to give an initial response within 1 -3 working days depending on the urgency of the matter. However it was more difficult to devise a measure for the outcomes as cases often varied in nature and complexity. In order to gauge customer satisfaction all customers were given a questionnaire to complete and return and the level of satisfaction appeared to be generally high.

Members considered the tabled figures and asked for clarification as to whether the numbers were per case or if they could reflect multiple complaints about the same case as this could distort the figures.

The Chairman asked if there was any data available to show the percentage of calls that were answered within the 1-3 day target. The Head of Environmental Services replied that all calls were logged and answered promptly but there wasn't specific data to show this. He could however produce a report showing the number of outstanding complaints.

Members questioned the procedure for logging out of hour's noise events and were informed that they were logged by the Cambridge Answering Service and passed to the office the next day. Members asked to be provided with details of this process.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Officers be asked to consider a possible method to monitor the speed of response to initial complaints.
- 2 The Committee be provided with details of the number of outstanding complaints and officers clarify the method for recording the number of complaints.

PS19

## **RED FINANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee received details of the budgets that were over 10% below or above expected income from the profiled budget savings. The Committee noted that at this stage there were no major areas of concern.

The Chairman asked for comments on this reporting process. Some members commented on a number of problems with budget profiling.

The Interim Director of Central Services said that there was a limitation on the information that could be shown using the Council's current financial system. The system was based on the old way of working and would need to be re-coded in order for it to produce relevant data. As the work would take about six months to complete it would have to be carried out at a convenient time during the budget process.

RESOLVED that Members receive an update on the implementation of the new Finance System at the next meeting of the Committee.

## PS20 **2007/08 INDICATORS OF CONCERN**

The Committee received a report setting out further explanations for the underperformance of a number of 2007/08 performance indicators.

The Chairman thanked officers for providing this detailed information. Members referred to the information on housing void rates and questioned whether the introduction of Choice Based letting would inevitably increase this figure. The Housing Management Manager said that this was a contributing factor and other council's were experiencing similar difficulties. Officers will be reviewing the scheme in November once it had been in operation for a year, after which a report would be presented to a future committee.

In relation to BV66(c) the Housing Management Manager confirmed that the number of rent arrears cases did appear to be decreasing, despite the increase in the number of notices being served. Officers would continue to identify any cases as early as possible to try to reduce numbers in arrears.

## PS21 **2008/09 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1**

The Committee received a report that set out the performance data for quarter 1 (April – June) for the Corporate, National and Service indicators. Full performance data was shown for the corporate indicators, whilst the others were reported on an exception basis. Where the targets had not been met the relevant officers had provided a comment.

Members noted that the data had been presented in a new spreadsheet report format taken from the Covalent system which would hopefully reduce the amount of administration required in this process. Members were happy for the information to be presented in this way and asked for future reports to include the previous quarter's figures for comparison.

The Committee then discussed corporate indicator CI 01 – amount spent against budget, this showed £2.743m spent against the £3.682m profiled budget. The Interim Director of Central Services explained that there were a number of caveats to this underspend. For instance, the budget had a built in 5% staff turnover which equated to a saving of around £500k, but this saving was not yet shown within the profiles. In fact, the percentage was not realistic in terms of staff turnover and from September the £500k would be included in the budget as a service saving. The Heads of Division appeared to be on

target to achieve this figure but this could not be guaranteed. Other increases in expenditure were likely to result from the impact of market trends and increases in gas/electricity charges, whilst there would be a reduction in income from land charges and collection and disposal of white goods. There was also still an element of underspend as officers were still being very cautious with regards to expenditure.

Councillor Ketteridge clarified that the figure in the indicator did not represent a forecast outturn but was only an indicator of the direction of travel. Councillor Wilcock said that whilst he accepted the explanation given by the Interim Director of Central Services, he was concerned that this was a headline figure and therefore could be misleading.

The Chairman said that the Committee could be reassured by the data in the indicator but should be aware of the mitigating factors mentioned above. It was important to remember that the Council was still in the process of financial recovery. The next meeting would be looking at the half yearly figures and these should be more meaningful.

Councillor Foley referred to the performance information generally and commented that there was always likely to be an effect on services with the changes that had taken place within the council over the last few months.

PS22

## **AGENDA FOR SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER MEETINGS**

The Chairman said that the next agenda was very full but he would not let the meeting go on later than 10.00pm. It would be helpful for Members to read the papers and have ready any questions for officers.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.