

**PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 p.m. on 13 NOVEMBER 2008**

Present: Councillor H S Rolfe – Chairman  
Councillors S Barker, J E N Davey, A J Ketteridge, and  
P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Head of Community Engagement), D Bradley (Interim Head of Finance), S Bronson (Audit Manager), P Evans (Business Improvement and Performance Manager), Stephen Joyce (Chief Finance Officer), R Millership (Head of Housing Management), J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Pridham (Head of Street Services), C Rockall (Interim Change Manager), C Roberts (Democratic Services Officer) and A Webb (Director of Central Services).

Also present: P E King (Audit Commission).

**PS39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T P Knight and J Salmon.

**PS40 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2008 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**PS41 BUSINESS ARISING/ACTION LIST UPDATE**

**(i) Items for the February 09 meeting of the Committee**

The following Committee actions were identified as needing to be referred to the February meeting of the Committee.

PS74 07/8 Comprehensive Area Assessments

PS4 08/9 Asset management

PS18 08/9 Complaints – speed of responses; new forms

PS18 08/9 Complaints – number outstanding and recording methodology

PS67ii 07/8 Supplementary opinion and audit plan – from Paul King

**(ii) Item for the May 09 meeting of the Committee**

The following Committee action was previously identified as needing to be referred to the May meeting of the Committee.

PS4 08/9 Audit Commission – Housing Inspection

PS42      **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – REFUSE AND RECYCLING**

The Committee received the report of the Audit Manager with a substantially completed management action plan.

In answer to questions by the Chairman the Audit Manager and the Head of Street Services confirmed that it would be possible to achieve reconciliations regarding the recommendations by the end of December.

RESOLVED that the Audit Manager's report be noted.

PS43      **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENTS**

The Audit Manager presented her report on the Annual Governance Statements 2007 and 2008 with a timetable for review of the issues raised in the 2007 document and for the preparation of the 2008 version.

Councillor S Barker suggested that the flow diagram annexed to the report should include dates and Councillor P Wilcock stressed the importance of raising the risk profile.

RESOLVED that the Audit Manager's report be noted.

PS44      **CORPORATE AND OPERATIONAL RISKS**

The Committee received the report of the Audit Manager on arrangements in place to identify and manage risk to the Council achieving its objectives, with particular reference to risks currently above the Corporate Risk Appetite.

The Chairman asked how the review had been carried out since red indicators appeared on almost all items. The Audit Manager explained that managers had been asked to provide explanations and the Chief Executive added that the results of the staff survey would provide useful information for this purpose.

Councillor Wilcock asked how the risk in item 07 SR 1 assigned to Michael Perry had been halved and the Chairman and Vice Chairman enquired about items in which both red and green colours appeared. The Director of Central Services agreed to produce details of risk elements, changes and how changes had happened, for appending to the minutes. Members were content to accept the operational risk table without further explanation since it had already been examined by another committee.

The Chairman suggested that documents be produced using black and white traffic lights, that any other notation using colour should not now be used for committee documents throughout the organisation, and that consistency be sought in the format and production of reports being generated by the Covalent

system. He added that the report was a most useful document which would gain value as risk management became embedded in the organisation.

RESOLVED that the Audit Manager's report be noted.

**PS45 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – CREDITORS AND VAT**

The Committee considered the recent internal audit report and completed management action plan for Creditors and VAT.

The Chairman asked whether the Council could subscribe to a “no win no fee” duplicate payment recovery system and the Chief Financial Officer agreed to investigate this.

Some Members asked questions about the remaining use of cheques and it was noted that the Strategic Management Board was to set self targets regarding the move from cheques to the BACS system.

RESOLVED that the Audit Manager's report be noted.

**PS46 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – CONTRACT SYSTEMS (HOUSING)**

The Committee considered the recent internal audit report and completed management action plan for Contract Systems (Housing).

In answer to questions the Housing Manager explained that there was now a five year framework agreement for contracts, and detailed the training and legal support which was made available within the Council.

It was noted that a further external audit inspection would take place in the current year. In this context the Chief Executive referred to the concerns, which the Council had raised with the Audit Commission, about the unfortunate timing of the previous inspection and the approach adopted by the inspectors. Mr P King indicated that the Commission would bear in mind for 2009 the concerns expressed by the Council.

It was agreed that the Chairman of the Committee and the Housing Manager would meet to discuss capacity within the Department.

Councillor Ketteridge complimented the housing staff on the recently published Homelessness Review and Strategy action plan.

RESOLVED that the Audit Manager's report be noted.

PS47

## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2 2008/9**

The Committee received the report of the Business Improvement and Performance Manager updating them on data for the new quarter and suggesting two amendments of targets.

The Chairman of the Committee commented that the general trend seemed to be positive, although the process of budget profiling was new and teething problems were understandable.

Members discussed the information including the reasons for collection and it was agreed that the topics of (i) long term sickness and (ii) the effect of projected uses on land values should be revisited by officers and suggestions for targets be put forward to the next meeting, together with details of the size of sample of the benefit claims which had been checked.

RESOLVED that the Business Improvement and Performance Manager's report be noted.

PS48

## **BENCH MARKING REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Business Improvement and Performance Manager on "SPARSE" benchmarking of the Council's performance compared with rural peers, which had improved. The report also drew attention to a no cost trial which had been negotiated of "COVALENT" benchmarking whereby the Council's performance could be compared with all national performance indicators recorded by COVALENT at a basic cost of £500 per annum.

RESOLVED that the report of the Business Improvement and Performance Manager be noted and that the Finance and Administration Committee be requested to make the necessary sum available for Covalent benchmarking subject to the results of the trial.

PS49

## **CORPORATE COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT**

The Committee received an update by the Business Improvement and Performance Manager on the progress of the review and implementation of a Corporate Complaints Management process in the Authority.

The Chief Executive drew attention to the existing process of monitoring complaints and the proposed introduction of valuing "behaviours", which would contribute to the Council's excellence in all customer dealings. He also stressed the value of service standards so that the customer knew what to expect.

RESOLVED that the report of the Business Improvement and Performance Manager be noted.

PS50      **HR AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee received an update by the Director of Central Services on the progress of the recommendations made earlier in the year.

It was noted that the report appeared encouraging.

RESOLVED that the report of the Director of Central Services be noted.

PS51      **USE OF RESOURCES**

The Committee received a report by the Director of Central Services on a new scoring system for assessing the Council's use of resources in the year 2009.

RESOLVED that the report of the Director of Central Services be noted.

PS52      **RED FINANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee received a report by the Director of Central Services on budgets showing 10% variance from the profile.

It was noted that there were income shortfalls particularly in waste management.

RESOLVED that the report of the Director of Central Services be noted.

PS53      **SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS**

The Committee received a report by the Acting Director of Development on contributions received but not yet expended under these agreements.

RESOLVED that the report be submitted for consideration to the next meeting of the Committee.

PS54      **ACCESS TO SERVICES – ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received a report by the Interim Change Manager on action taken pursuant to the recommendations contained in the Audit Commission's report published in August 2007. He explained that good progress had been made and that the main recommendations had now been subsumed into the Council's mainstream documents, including the corporate plan and the short term recovery and improvement plan. The progress made would form part of the forthcoming "direction of travel" review by the Commission.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and, if necessary, a further update be submitted in due course covering any issues relating to the Access to Services inspection that emanate from the “direction of travel” report.

The meeting ended at 9.50pm