

**PERFORMANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 22 NOVEMBER
2012**

Present: Councillor S Howell – Chairman.
Councillors K Artus, K Eden and E Parr.

Also present: Councillors J Ketteridge and R Chambers.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), S Bronson (Internal Audit Manager), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal) and A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control).

Also present: Debbie Hanson and Emma Patchett - Auditors (Ernst & Young LLP).

PA29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Crome, A Dean, D Jones and A Ketteridge.

PA30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2012 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PA31 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute PA27 – Correspondence between Councillor Dean and Councillor Howell

The Chairman clarified that the ‘agenda review’ mentioned in the last paragraph of the minute should refer to ‘the calendar of events 2013/14.’

PA32 2011/12 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

The Committee noted the content of the Annual Audit letter which summarised the key findings of the 2011/12 audit of Uttlesford District Council.

The letter stated that the External Auditor had issued an unqualified opinion on the 2011/12 financial statements included in the Authority's statement of accounts. It had also concluded that the Council had made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.

The contents of the letter were noted.

PA33 CERTIFICATION OF CLAIMS AND RETURNS

The Committee received the report on the External Auditor's findings in respect of the Council's Audited claims and returns for 2011. No significant issues had been identified. There had only been one qualification letter issued, in respect of Housing Benefit claims. The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance explained that the tests carried out in this area had revealed a 99.8% accuracy rate which exceeded the target of the Council's own KPI in this area.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, Emma Patchett explained that the increase in this year's audit fees was due to a few more errors which took more time to analyse.

The report was noted.

PA34 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report from the Audit Manager on the audit work undertaken since the last meeting.

The report was noted.

PA35 INTERNAL AUDIT BENCHMARKING

The August meeting of the Committee had requested benchmarking information to compare Uttlesford's Internal Audit function with that of other councils in terms of cost, team size and work programme. The approval of the Internal Audit Strategy and the Internal Audit Charter and Terms of Reference for 2012/13 had been deferred until this work was carried out.

The benchmarking exercise had been undertaken against the Internal Audit sections of nine other district councils, of differing types and sizes. In addition there had been a survey of all councils in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cambridge on how they provided the Internal Audit Service.

The results showed that against the nine Councils, Uttlesford had the lowest daily chargeable rate, the 2nd lowest budget, the 3rd lowest budget percentage of CT requirement, and was equal 4th lowest in terms of team size.

It was noted that the internal audit service was provided in a variety of different ways at other councils including in-house, partnerships and outsourcing.

The Chairman was pleased with the results of this exercise. It showed the strength of the service provided and that the work carried out was of value to the Council. The Assistant Chief Executive – Legal said service monitoring was on going and officers would continue to explore different options for providing the service.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members note the report
- 2 The revised Internal Audit Strategy 2012/13 presented to the August meeting of the Committee be approved.
3. The revised Internal Audit Charter and Terms of Reference 2012/13 presented to the August meeting of the Committee be approved.

PA36

PA16 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2012/13

The Committee considered the report which set out the key performance indicators and performance indicators for Q2 of 2012/13.

i) KPI 11,12,13,15 and PI 30 - Processing of Planning Applications

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control attended the meeting to update progress on the performance indicators relating to the processing of planning applications.

KPI 11 - Processing of major applications

There had been a significant improvement against the previous quarter but the figures were still below target. This could be attributed in part to the transfer to the IDOX system. It was also noted that a smaller number of major applications were received which meant that each application had a significant effect on the percentage total. Improvements were being addressed by the appointment of an additional temporary member of staff and better project management of cases.

KPI 12 – Processing of minor applications

There had been a significant improvement in processing minor applications and the target had been met this quarter. This was the result of improved working practises.

KPI 13 – Processing of other applications

These made up the majority of the applications received by the department. There had been a downward performance this quarter due to issues with the transfer to IDOX, and the clearance of older cases. In answer to members questions, the Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said that performance was being addressed by putting in place improved processes. The total holding of applications had reduced by 10% by the end of October and the aim was to keep the out of time applications to a minimum. The IDOX system would enable performance management of planning officers and this would be introduced shortly.

PI 30 % - Planning applications validated within 3 days.

This area had been performing poorly and although still below target, there had been a marked improvement this quarter, even though there had been a down time when the new system was introduced. The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said that this was an important element of the process, as timely validation made it easier for planning officers to determine their applications within the target period. He explained that the section would be reorganised to establish a team dedicated to the validation process. The new IDOX system should speed up the process but staff were still getting used to the system. It was anticipated that the 90% target could be achieved from 1 February 2013..

Measures had been put in place to improve the quality of the applications received. This included having a duty officer available every day to provide more compensative advice to enable problems to be resolved prior to submission.

Councillor Artus asked if the department was adequately resourced in terms of conservation advice. He was advised that there was one specialist conservation officer. In order to make best use of this resource the officer would now hold a surgery to give advice on specific applications rather than being consulted on all applications.

Councillor Eden asked how the department measured the quality of the decisions made. It was explained that this was not an area focused on by the indicators. However the department would be seeking feedback on its service by surveying its customers.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director Planning and Building Control for attending the meeting. He understood that this was work in progress and asked him to report back to the May meeting of the Committee.

ii) KPI 15 – Number of return visits to collect missed bins

It was noted that the number of missed bins for this quarter had increased to 132 per 100,000 collections. (target 50).

The Director of Public Services attended the meeting and explained that this period covered the introduction of the new collection system, so initial high numbers of missed bins levels had been anticipated.

Initially there had been a particularly high number of food caddies missed and instructions had been given to crews to address this. There had been initial problems in clarifying area boundaries and identifying collection points. Some assisted collections had been missed and as a result the crews were being given a list of properties on a daily basis. Problems of incomplete collections of Fridays had been addressed in the short term by introducing additional rotas on Saturdays and Mondays.

On-going measures were centred around individual staff assessments as there appeared to be a variance in performance between the crews. Efforts were being made to maintain settled patterns of drivers on the rounds.

Measures to be introduced in the next 2 months included a new round on a Wednesday to relieve pressure on certain Friday rounds. It had also been decided, in order to maintain continuity of the rounds, that there would be no collection during Christmas week. It was stressed that early communication to the public on these matters was essential.

By the end of the financial year officers were hopeful of installing in cab technology.

The Director of Public Services said it was unlikely that Quarter 3 would show improvement. However recently there had been a decrease in the number of calls received from the public and it was hoped that an improvement would start to show in the Q4 performance.

In answer to a member question, it was confirmed that there had been no complaints in relation to the paid-for garden service as this was an established service with dedicated crews and named addresses.

The Chairman said he appreciated the challenges of putting in the new system. It was complex to deliver but it was still important that get it right. He was pleased that the problems found were being addressed by the management team. He congratulation the Street Services team on the tremendous amount of work undertaken on the implementation over the past few months. The Director of Public Services was asked to report progress to the next meeting of the Committee in February.

PA37

CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Assistant Director Corporate Services presented the Corporate Risk Register as at the end of Q2 2012/13.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm.