

Committee: Scrutiny 2
Date: 9 July 2003
Agenda Item: 5
Title: WORK PROGRAMME 2003/04
Author: Ian Orton (01799) 510 402

Summary

- 1 This report gives an officer perspective on the key issues facing Scrutiny Committee during 2003/04 and the report recommends that the Committee determines a work programme for that period.

Background

- 2 2002/03 was a busy year for the Scrutiny Committee. Issues included Regional Planning, the Local Government Improvement Programme, the Stansted Airport Campaign and Flooding prevention measures. A Best Value Review of Street Cleansing Services was carried out during 2002/03 and the report arising from this review will need to be examined by the Committee in due course.
- 3 The Council has just launched *Shaping the Future of Uttlesford* the Community Plan for the District. Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider aspects of the partnership process within the District that fall within its remit.
- 4 During 2003/04 there will be a Best Value Review of Revenues Services, of Planning Services and of Refuse & Recycling which Scrutiny the Committee will monitor. In addition the authority is preparing for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in February 2004 and an IDeA Peer Challenge in November 2003. Scrutiny Committee will be expected to comment on the process and self-scoring leading up to CPA submission. The monitoring of the PFI Project, as a resource issue, would appear to fall within the remit of Scrutiny Committee.
- 5 As part of the preparation for CPA the authority is considering increasing range and reporting mechanism of the performance management system within the authority. This will involve reporting quarterly information of the performance of the authority to Scrutiny Committee. If agreed Scrutiny Committee may wish to refer comments on performance to the appropriate parent committee.

- 6 In addition to the items identified above Scrutiny Committee will consider items from the “standard “ agenda items from the Committees being scrutinized. Scrutiny Committee has a “ call in “ process and in 2001/02 one decision was called in. Finally Scrutiny Committee can identify any themes or service areas (within the remit of Resources, Environment & Transport Committees. In addition Scrutiny Committee can also consider the role of the Development Control and Licensing Committee, but not in respect of any decisions on particular applications) to examine as part of a scrutinizing role.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1 the items set out in paragraphs 3 to 6 of the report are included the work programme for 2003/04

Committee: Scrutiny 2 – Resources & Environment
Date: 9 July 2003
Agenda Item No: 6
Title: Internal Audits
Author: Simon Martin (01799) 510422 / (01438) 242426

Summary

- 1 This report summarises recently completed internal audit work. The report refers to services falling within the remit of the Resources and Environment Scrutiny Committee only. It is recommended that Members note the report content and seek management assurance on any important issues.

Background

- 2 Full internal audit reports and completed management action plans have already been circulated to the Leader of the Council, relevant Committee and Scrutiny Committee Chairman. This arrangement was agreed with Members last year.
- 3 The requirement for an adequate internal audit function is set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations. On the 1 October 2002 The Stevenage and Uttlesford Audit Partnership became responsible for carrying out reviews of the Council’s internal control systems. A joint committee of

Members from this Council and Stevenage Borough Council oversee the Partnership.

Recent internal audit work

- 4 A number of internal audits have been completed since the last report to this scrutiny committee. A summary of key findings is set out below. Also set out in an appendix to this report is further detail showing the recommendations made following each audit and the response subsequently made by management. These responses were very positive. All recommendations will be followed up in due course to ensure implementation.
- 5 *Council Tax and Business Rates* - our audit confirmed that Council Tax administration was well controlled and adequate and accurate records were maintained. It was noted that collection rates were now consistently good. Two minor recommendations relating to evidencing reconciliations and discounts have been agreed. Our audit also established that effective controls were in place to support the administration of Business Rates. It was noted that direct debit uptake was nationally acclaimed. A recommendation relating to producing procedure notes has been agreed. This is important because one member of staff retains much of the day-to-day knowledge of this service.
- 6 *Housing Benefits* - effective controls to support the prompt administration and payment of Housing Benefits were in place. The system is well controlled and adequate and accurate records were securely maintained.
- 7 *Miscellaneous Debts* - although the results of our audit were generally satisfactory we identified that some key procedures and systems of control have lapsed. We were also unable to identify adequate systems of performance management. It has been agreed that management attention will be directed at these important issues to ensure controls are strengthened and best practice reinstated.
- 8 *Creditor Payments* - our audit confirmed that systems of control over creditor payments were in place and working satisfactorily. Sample testing confirmed that invoices were being paid on time.
- 9 *Insurance and Loans* – our audit confirmed that effective systems of control were in place. A number of recommendations to improve existing procedures have been agreed, not least of which was the need to ensure insurance renewals were dealt with in a more timely way.
- 10 *Cash* - it was confirmed during our audit that effective systems of control were in place and continued to work well. Only one matter relating to the

level of fidelity insurance cover was raised. This was agreed and actioned during our audit.

- 11 *Risk Management* – our audit identified the need to build upon existing arrangements. It was consequently agreed to reconstitute the Risk Management Group and revise its terms of reference. In addition we recommended that training needs were met and knowledge subsequently extended across the Council. This was agreed and work on this has recently begun. We also recommended that all key risks are identified, recorded and assessed. The results of this ongoing exercise will then need to be monitored and reported. This was also agreed and work will begin later in the year.

It is RECOMMENDED that members note the report content and seek management assurance on any important issues.

Background Papers: Internal Audit reports