

Committee: Scrutiny 2
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 4
Title: Work Programme – Best Value Process
Author: Ian Orton (01799) 510 402

Summary

- 1 This report provides Scrutiny Committee with details of the existing policy to deliver the requirements of the Best Value process.

Background

- 2 Best Value is a duty owed by the local authority to its local community. S3 of the Local Authority Act 1999 puts a duty on Best Value authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which they exercise their functions, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Best Value was introduced in pilot form in 1999 and implemented fully from April 2000. The initial guidance from the Audit Commission was that authorities should examine all services at least once during the first five years of the Best Value process starting with worst first. In December 2001 the government amended this instruction stating that authorities should review only the services that would benefit from a review.
- 3 The Council produced guidelines for carrying out the Best Value process in the spring of 2000. The guidelines were built around the following:
 - The purpose of any Best Value review is to produce a realistic action plan that will lead to substantial improvements in service delivery
 - Best Value is about securing continuous improvement, greater productivity and re-aligning services to a customer focus and away from the professional view of how services should be provided
 - To achieve this managers have to secure the participation of users and the public in the review process through consultation
- 4 The Best Value process is managed through an Officer Team and a Member Team. These teams lead reviews, oversee the process and ensure that the Service Improvement Plan delivers continuous improvement. The ethos of the Best Value process is the checklist built around the 4C's of Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete.

5 During the four years of Best Value the Council has carried out 16 reviews of which 4 have been reviewed by the Best Value Inspectorate. The main issues arising from the Best Value process are:

- What exactly have the reviews achieved?
- How imaginative were the reviews?
- Who monitors the Service Improvement Plans?
- Which reviews have been thematic?
- How were partners involved?
- What was the role of Scrutiny Committees?
- Did Members drive the reviews?
- Are recommendations from inspections fully carried out?
- How neutral is a Service Head in leading a review?

6 Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider:

- Examining Year 5 Reviews at the 5th February 2004 meeting
- Reviewing the progress of Service Improvement Plans twice a year
- Ensuring that wherever possible that reviews include a partnership element
- That at least twice reviews per year are of a thematic nature
- Reviews are co-ordinated by the Performance Manager to ensure neutrality in areas like Challenge

RECOMMENDED that the comments of Members are sought on the points raised in Section 6 of the report.

Background Papers: Best Value Reviews
Policy & Performance Library

Committee: Scrutiny 2 – Resources and Environment
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 5
Title: Golds Nurseries Business Park – Internal Audit
Author: Simon Martin (01799) 510422

Summary

- 1 This report provides feedback to Member's following their request that Internal Audit review management arrangements at Golds Nurseries Business Park.

Background

- 2 The management of Golds Nurseries Business Park has been the subject of much discussion amongst Members and Officers. This Scrutiny Committee asked Internal Audit to provide reassurance on recently introduced management arrangements. The full Internal Audit report and completed management action plan is attached as an appendix.

Overall audit opinion

- 3 Officers have ensured that arrangements for managing the Business Park have greatly improved in recent months. The Internal Audit report contains several recommendations to build upon this. These recommendations have been agreed and will be followed up in due course.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the Internal Audit report and management action plan.

Background Papers: Internal Audit files

To: Head of Housing and Property Services

For information: Director of Resources
Members of Scrutiny 2 Committee
Acting Chief Executive
Head of Legal Services

1. INTRODUCTION

An audit of Golds Nurseries Business Park has been carried out at the request of the Director of Resources. This followed a request from Members of Scrutiny 2 Committee.

2. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our detailed findings and recommendations are set out in the attached appendix. A management action plan is attached. Could you please arrange for it's completion and return by 7 November 2003. An electronic version can be mailed to you if you require.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The management of the Business Park has greatly improved. The likelihood of error or misadministration is now much less than in the past. We have identified a number of issues where we consider management action is required. This is so associated risks can be further reduced.

Having effective local systems and procedures in place is a positive step. These will of course need to be complied with throughout the remaining lease period. Progress should therefore continue to be monitored.

S H Martin
Audit Manager
8 October 2003

GOLDS NURSERIES BUSINESS PARK – 2003/04

1.1 AREAS COVERED DURING THE AUDIT

Work during the audit focused on ensuring that the Business Park is effectively managed. Our approach involved identifying the risks associated with managing the Business Park. These risks were then mapped against local systems and procedures designed to reduce the likelihood of error or misadministration. Our terms of reference reflected this and were agreed with the relevant Head of Service, Director of Resources and Acting Chief Executive. Our work ensured that:

- a) Objectives or policies are in place for matters relating to the management of the Business Park
- b) There is a maintenance plan for the remainder of the lease and adequate budgeting in each of the relevant years
- c) A member of staff acts as overall co-ordinator of Council related matters
- d) Existing tenants are retained
- e) Unoccupied units are let as soon as possible
- f) New lettings are made using the new recommended 3 year underlease
- g) The Council is complying with the terms of the head lease by carrying out required repair and maintenance works
- h) The Council is able to meet the costs of external and structural repairs or any increase in rent from the Landlord
- i) An adequate contract is in place for the management of the Business Park and contingency plans are in place in the event that the contract with our managing agent is dissolved
- j) The managing agent collects rent, monitors arrears, organises debt recovery and forwards rent collected to the Council
- k) The managing agent's performance is monitored and the conditions of contract are properly applied

We have taken an exception reporting style to this audit. Unless matters are highlighted overleaf it can be assumed that the risk of error or misadministration is being minimised.

1.2 OVERALL AUDIT OPINION

The management of the Council's part of the Business Park has greatly improved in recent months. The likelihood of error or misadministration is now much less than in the past . Progress should, however, continue to be closely monitored.

1.3 BUSINESS PARK OBJECTIVES

Officers have recently been pursuing objectives centred on reducing the Council's exposure to legal action and lost rental income. Whilst this has been vital in the short term, an emphasis now needs to be placed on defining objectives that cover the remainder of the lease. Many of these objectives are fairly clear given the Council's legal responsibilities. However, management arrangements need to be aligned with the Council's long-term ambitions for its part of the Business Park. This might simply be seeing out the remaining period of the lease, or continuing involvement in some future form. **We therefore recommend that** this issue be clarified so Officers can develop an appropriate management framework for the Council's part of the Business Park.

1.4 LOSS OF PROSPECTIVE TENANTS

It is encouraging to note that a new tenant has leased one of the refurbished units. However, two other prospective tenants withdrew their interest because the Council's Legal Section was unable to complete the necessary paperwork within a commercially acceptable timescale. An existing tenant who expressed a wish to transfer his tenancy to a larger unit may also have left the Business Park because the Council had not clarified the future arrangements for site lettings.

It is understood that the Council's Legal Section has had a number of competing priorities in recent months. Future legal work associated with completing leases has now been outsourced through the Essex Authorities TISWAS system. It is anticipated that this should result in leases being concluded within a commercial timetable. This has yet to be tested.

It was noted that no mention of this matter was made in progress reports to Members as these reports primarily concentrated on outcomes achieved.

1.5 DILAPIDATION WORKS

The Council's current relationship with the Head Landlord has been difficult because the repair and maintenance obligations were not always met. In March 2003 the Head Landlord insisted all dilapidation works were brought up to date by the end of September 2003. These have now all been completed with the exception of exterior cladding works. Delays were caused by the Head Landlord's insurers giving the wrong cladding specification. However, an order with the amended specification was placed on 2 September 2003. Work is now expected to be complete within 5 weeks of this date.

The Landlord's Agent has accepted the Council has not contributed to this delay.

Confirmation has been received from the Landlord's Agent that legal action will not be taken and that the Head Landlord has expressed satisfaction with the recent dilapidation work carried out by the Council.

It is therefore anticipated that any legal action resulting from not meeting the September 2003 deadline will be avoided. It is essential that the Council does not find itself in a similar situation again. **We therefore recommend that** a planned programme of repair and maintenance work be undertaken in accordance with the head lease.

1.6 FUTURE LETTINGS

It is in the Council's interest that the Business Park becomes fully occupied as soon as possible. One way of potentially encouraging this was extending the use of the units to include office use. However, it has not been possible to reach agreement on this principle with the Head Landlord. Legal Services have since advised that such lettings, although contrary to the terms of the Head Lease, should be considered providing the leases are contracted out of security of tenure after a period of less than 3 years. In such cases the potential for the Head Landlord to take legal action is regarded as minimal.

1.7 BUDGET PLANNING

During the audit future budget planning was discussed. The draft revised budget figures for 2003/04 are awaiting Committee approval. The budget assumes one further unit being let this financial year giving a 44% level of occupancy.

Budget estimates for 2004/05 are based on three further units being let in 2004/5 giving a 72% level of occupancy. This is considered to be the lowest likely occupancy figure for 2004/05.

	03/04 N BUDGET	1 03/04 R REVISED	03/04 T TO DATE	04/05 N BUDGET
Direct Expenditure	£129,130	£210,690	£113,880	£131,420
Income	-£111,390	2 -£44,340	-£18,590	-£74,560
Direct Cost (net)	-£17,740	-£166,350	-£95,290	3 -£56,860
1. draft 03/04 revised budget to be agreed by committee 2. 03/04 revised budget based on one further letting this financial year 3. 04/05 budget based on three further lettings in 04/05 <i>(For comparison purposes internal charges have been excluded from the table)</i>				

1.8 SUCCESSION PLANNING

Since April 2003 the Programme Officer has been coordinating all matters relating to the Business Park as recommended by Directors. For example, acting as the point of reference for those involved and bringing conformity to the way in which the Council deals with others. Now that the responsibility for coordination lies with just one person, it is important that day-to-day procedures are documented. This is in case she is absent, and or others are unclear what to do. It is noted that this process is under way. **We therefore recommend that** the process of drawing up procedures for all aspects of dealing with the Business Park be completed as soon as possible.

1.9 MANAGING AGENT

From 1 April 2003 a managing agent took responsibility for managing the Business Park, collecting rent and debt recovery. If this agreement were dissolved the Council does not have contingency plans for managing the Business Park. Although the likelihood of this occurring is relatively low, the impact would be quite significant if it were to continue for any period of time. **We therefore recommend that** contingency plans be drawn up to ensure the Business Park continues to be effectively managed.

At present there is constant contact between the Council and its managing agent because of the need to deal with day-to-day matters. However, the level of contact will decrease as more units are let, and the agent assumes ongoing responsibility. It will then become increasingly important to ensure their objectives are met. **We therefore recommended that** that the agent's performance continues to be formally monitored.

S. Martin / S. Bronson
September 2003

Committee: **Scrutiny 2**
Date: **3 December 2003**
Agenda Item No: **7**
Title: **Work Programme – CPA Process**
Author: **Ian Orton (01799) 510402**

Summary

- 1 This report provides Scrutiny Committee with details of the existing policy to deliver the requirements of the CPA process.

Background

- 2 Members are now fully aware of the requirements to prepare for a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the authority. But to briefly recap the Council will need to carry out following seven stages in the CPA process by early January 2004.
 - Council Self Assessment
 - Accredited Peer Challenge
 - Corporate Self Assessment informed by the Peer Review and our Self Assessment
 - Diagnostic assessment of the council's approach to Management of Public Open Space and progress in delivering a Balanced Housing Market
 - Benefit fraud Self Assessment
 - Auditor Assessment of Performance
 - Audited Performance Indicators, Inspection Reports and BV Plan Assessment
- 3 The Council will be subject to a Peer Challenge Review during the 24 to 26 November 2003 and the on site CPA Review will be carried out the week 23 February 2004. The work to complete this process started in May 2003 and a copy of the timescale is attached at Appendix A.
- 4 Appendix A outlines the delivery dates for the various stages of the CPA process. The Council has prepared draft Corporate Self Assessment documentation to meet the Peer Challenge and any recommendations from the Peer Challenge will be considered prior to submitting the final documents in early January 2004.

- 5 The existing policy is linked to sharing the process with Members, staff and partners via staff meetings, Member workshops and the production of a monthly newsletter Uttlesford News.

RECOMMENDED that the comments of Members are sought on the policies in place to implement the CPA process within the Council.

Background Papers: CPA Files
Policy & Performance Library

Workshop Staff	Thursday 4 th September 2003	The first of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
Meeting of Uttlesford Futures	Monday 15 th September 2003	Opportunity for Partners to share in the process
Member Group to meet on a regular basis	Wednesday 17 th September 2003	Members need to be fully involved in the Self Assessment scoring process
Workshop Staff	Thursday 25 th September 2003	The second of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
Workshop Members	Tuesday 30 th September 2003	An opportunity for all Members to comment and score the CPA documents
Draft documentation completed	3 rd October 2003	It will take most of October to go through the paperwork and prepare for the Peer Review
Member Group Meeting	8 th October 2003	Agree the IDeA Timetable
Workshop Staff	Thursday 9 th October 2003	The third of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
LSP CPA Workshop	20 TH October 2003	Draft Scoring of the Corporate Self Assessment
Workshop Staff	Thursday 23 rd October 2003	The fourth of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
Draft Self Assessment completed	31 st October 2003	Changes will be required as we consult with partners and the community re the Peer/CPA processes
Member Group Meeting	4 th November 2003	Score the IDeA Corporate Self Assessment
Workshop Staff	Thursday 6 th November 2003	The fifth of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
Member Group Meeting	19 th November 2003	Go through the IDeA Peer Challenge arrangements

Complete Version Two of the two Diagnostic Review Workshop Staff	20 th November 2003	Part of the process
	20 th November 2003	The sixth of the staff workshops. All staff will attend at least one workshop
IDeA Challenge Review	November 26 th to 28 th 03	Essential part of the CPA process
CMT	28 TH November 2003	Consider the Peer Challenge Report
Member Group Meeting	3 rd December 2003	Agree Peer Challenge Improvement Plan
Return Benefits Self Assessment Forms	8 th December 2003	Part of the process
Council Meeting	16 th December 2003	Agree process to submit final CPA documentation
Member Group Meeting	17 th December 2003	Consider CPA Final Documentation
CPA documentation – continue development process	Up until week of 2 nd January 2004	The CPA documentation will require fine tuning prior to delivery to the Audit Commission
Member Group Meeting	7 th January 2004	Assess CPA position
Deliver Self Assessment documents to Audit Commission	9 th January 2004	These documents are required a minimum of six weeks prior to the on site inspection
Member Group Meeting	28 th January 2004	Update on implementing the Peer Challenge Recommendations
Member Group Meeting	11 th February 2004	Confirm who sees who
Member Group Meeting	18 th February 2004	Final document review prior to inspection
CPA Corporate Assessment	23 rd February 2004	A key element of the CPA process
Draft report to authority	25 th April 2004	Opportunity for the authority to comment on the report and the CPA process
Authority to comment on report	9 th May 2004	Chance to correct any mistakes and influence the final document
Final report to the authority	13 th June 2004	To prepare for the final report
Report published	27 th June 2004	Manage the media
Version Five	31 st October 2003	Ian Orton

Appendix A

Uttlesford District Council

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The CPA is about helping councils to deliver better services to local people

Uttlesford District Council will be subject to a CPA site visit the week beginning 23rd February 2004 and an IDeA Peer Challenge during the 24th to 26th of November 2003. What do we need to do to prepare for these challenges? We need to plan to meet the key elements of the District CPA process, which are:

Project Plan to Deliver the Above

Objective	Date	Why
Create CPA Member Group	12 th June 2003 – First meeting	Political ownership established
Establish Officer led process to co-ordinate the CPA objectives	23 rd June 2003 – First Meeting	Work Plan drafted by 23 rd June 2003
Member Workshop	23 rd June 2003	CPA process shared with Members
Officer process to prepare draft documentation re the Corporate Self Assessment and the two diagnostic reviews	Officer Team established to meet on a regular basis to deliver the objectives	Essential that the draft documentation is gathered early so that gaps can be identified

Committee: Scrutiny 2
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 8
Title: Best Value Review – Planning Services
Author: John Mitchell (01799) 510450

Summary

- 1 The Improvement Plan for Planning Services is presented. There are five Critical Success Areas (CSA's): Focussing on what matters to local people, assuring the quality of development, enhancing customer care, reducing delay in development control and reinforcing management systems to assure quality. There are 10 Action Statements to support the CSA's, each of which sets out outcome measures, action measures, the relative importance of each initiative, timeframes for each and resources where known. The most important action statement is improving development control systems: without robust, simple and clearly-understood systems in place none of the other improvements can be introduced effectively. At the same time the Policy context needs to be progressed and to be "owned" by all stakeholders, including Members, while customer care needs to be advanced in the context of the Council's overall and evolving approach.
- 2 There are 35 outcome measures in total, and 153 action measures. All are SMART and cross referenced, where appropriate, to the draft Quality of Life Corporate Plan. The Improvement Plan has been costed to a fairly detailed level, including costs that are usually hidden, such as the costs of holding workshops and focus groups. The total costs of all the improvements, if implemented, would be in the region of £156,000: this includes the costs of market supplements for some staff and the recruitment of new staff if agreed in the longer term. Not all these measures will be necessary in the short term: indeed many of the key improvements that the Plan identifies can be made at little or no cost, but there will be training and development costs to ensure that new initiatives can be implemented effectively. Many improvements are already being implemented and these are highlighted in the SIP.

Background

- 3 The Planning Services Best Value review was postponed from last year. Consultants were appointed using Planning Delivery Grant: thus it is hoped to have used the Grant to secure a stable framework for sustained improvement in the future.

- 4 The Member Team comprises Cllrs Tealby Watson (chair), Clarke, Rowe and Godwin. There was also an Officer Team comprising representatives of all aspects of the service.
- 5 The SIP was drawn up following a thorough audit of the service under the headings of the four “C”s – Challenge, Compare, Consult, Compete. Some of these overlap: for example the Member workshops were both challenge and consult events while the experimental use of external consultants for handling planning applications can be considered as challenge and compete issues. Throughout the process reference was made to the Business Excellence Model and the Balanced Scorecard. Both of these are tools to enable progress in key areas to be assessed over time. The SIP is not an immediate remedy for all the problems faced by the Service but rather has to be read as a document that sets in train measures to improve the service over time.
- 6 An interim inspection of the Service by the Audit Commission took place on 4th October 2003. This included interviews with the Member team, the consultants, the Head of Service and some staff. At the time of the survey the review process was concentrating on the DC procedure, and the inspection was critical of its apparent reliance on this, and stressed the need to consider the rest of the service and to be more outwardly focussed. The outcomes have been addressed in the SIP.

Challenge

- 7 The service was challenged internally on the basis of why it is provided, for whom and whether it, or some elements, could be carried out externally. One of the key outcomes of the Member workshop was making the planning process more accessible to, and able to be influenced by, Members – consequently it was considered that outsourcing the whole service would not be compatible with this requirement. Certain elements of the service can be outsourced however without detriment to this requirement. Planning consultants, for example, have been used for appeals in the past, but the SIP involves an experimental use of planning consultants to undertake planning applications, so that the effects may be measured in terms of cost, quality and time.
- 8 All planning staff, the acting Chief Executive, relevant Directors, Heads of Service and some Members were interviewed individually and in confidence by the Consultants. A painstaking and detailed review of all the processes within the service – DC, Forward Planning, Enforcement and Appeals was undertaken. All staff were involved in the critique of the processes and in identifying solutions to problems, of which there are many and complex.
- 9 The service was challenged externally through member and parish workshops, as well as a telephone survey of other customers. The outcomes of the member and parish workshops are appended, with cross references to the improvement plan to show how issues have been taken forward.

Compare

- 10 The service was compared with that offered by authorities in the top quartile and visits made to some local authorities to investigate their processes and procedures. In general the service compares well in terms of forward planning and accessibility but less well in terms of DC performance and systems. The SIP sets out measures to ensure that UDC is in the top quartile within three years, and can sustain its position.

Consult

- 11 Consultation measures included the Member and Parish workshops, telephone surveys of other customers and a questionnaire survey of customers that is still ongoing and will be complete by March 2004. The outcomes are incorporated into the SIP, which also proposes further and structured consultation measures, the outcomes of which will require adjustments to the SIP as it evolves over time.

Compete

- 12 The use of planning consultants for some appeals and to handle some planning applications is being implemented experimentally, with a view to assessing the outcome in terms of cost quality and time. Temporary agency staff have been employed but their costs per hour equate to those of the Head of Service. Initial results suggest that in-house provision is invariably the best cost option but recruitment difficulties mean that external staff are likely to be necessary if even basic levels of service are to be maintained. The Council pays relatively poorly in comparison with other nearby local authorities and a proposal for market supplements as a retention and recruitment measure is being put forward. Consultants have also been employed to verify some aspects of individual planning applications on an ad-hoc basis, for example highway advice and noise issues.

The Service Improvement Plan

- 13 The Improvement Plan is appended. There are five Critical Success Areas (CSA's): Focussing on what matters to local people, assuring the quality of development, enhancing customer care, reducing delay in development control and reinforcing management systems to assure quality. There are 10 Action Statements to support the CSA's, each of which sets out: outcome measures, action measures, the relative importance of each initiative, timeframes for each and resources where known. The most important Action Statement is improving development control systems: without robust, simple and clearly-understood systems in place none of the other improvements can be introduced effectively. At the same time the Policy context needs to be progressed and to be "owned" by all stakeholders, including Members, while customer care needs to be advanced in the context of the Council's overall and evolving approach.

- 14 There are 35 outcome measures in total, and 153 action measures. All are SMART and cross referenced, where appropriate, to the draft Quality of Life Corporate Plan. The Improvement Plan has been costed to a fairly detailed level, including costs that are usually hidden, such as the costs of holding workshops and focus groups. The total costs of all the improvements, if implemented, would be in the region of £156,000: this includes the costs of market supplements for some staff and the recruitment of new staff if agreed in the longer term. Not all these measures will be necessary in the short term: indeed many of the key improvements that the Plan identifies can be made at little or no cost, but there will be training and development costs to ensure that new initiatives can be implemented effectively.
- 15 The key actions are:
- To prepare new Local development Framework in line with Regional Spatial Strategy and the evolving Quality of Life Corporate Plan
 - To move beyond consultation to a responsive dialogue that exchanges views regularly with those affected by planning decisions and ensure that this communication leads to real improvement in the service
 - To take a more structured and strategic approach to identify broader objectives that might be secured through planning obligations for the achievement of wider community needs by securing planning obligations which link the overall needs of the area to individual developments rather than ad hoc infrastructure improvements
 - To ensure that departmental & individuals' targets and objectives are linked to the corporate themes and objectives
 - To appraise the value added to the built environment through development control
 - To identify and apply the requirements for improved customer care
 - To be rigorous in the streamlining of business processes emphasizing continuous improvement
 - To move forward on electronic delivery of planning services
 - To develop partnership approaches to address issues which are common to other councils and reinforce other partnership arrangements to tackle cross-cutting issues
 - To benchmark against the best and ensure that comparisons lead to service improvements
- 16 Each of these Action Statements is accompanied by outcome measures and details of how these are to be achieved, including their importance and cost. Members should be aware that there is a significant cost element attached to increasing involvement and consultation.
- 17 The SIP shows that considerable improvements to the service can be achieved by a re-engineering of existing processes at no or little cost to the Council, but it is emphasised that there will be training costs. It also points the way to a first class service, but this cannot be achieved without investment. Some measures are immediate and some medium or longer term – some of the costlier measures do not have a high importance but would be essential

for a “Rolls Royce” service. Members have to decide what level of planning service is reasonably achievable in the context of resources and other corporate priorities.

Next Steps

- 18 The SIP needs to be tested by consultation with stakeholders. This will take the form of focus groups with critical friends, the relevant Committees, agents/applicants, internal customers, members and parish councils, coupled with the on-going questionnaire survey. Following consultation and any necessary amendments the SIP will be presented for approval.

RECOMMENDED that the Service Improvement Plan be noted and approved as the basis for consultation, and brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.

Background Papers: Review documents and appendices.

Critical Success Area 1
Focusing On What Matters To Local People

Action Statement
1 Prepare new Local Development Framework in line with regional spatial strategy and the evolving Quality of Life Corporate Plan
Outcome Measures
1.1 Ensure that the new LDF maximises involvement in community planning processes and in the associated activities of the local strategic partnership
1.2 Ensure that sufficient emphasis is placed on directing the planning service to the achievement of wider council and community goals. Detail how the LDF plan should be prepared to react to emerging priorities in the community strategy and emerging regional policy

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
1.1.1 To interpret and implement together with DC the emerging planning legislation. Enactment is expected in spring/summer 2004.	A	Policy & DC Teams	2004/5	TBA
1.1.2 Keeping Members involved, via appropriate training, with ownership of the evolving process by workshops, through the Members' Bulletin and email shots	A	Policy Team	From Nov 2003	£1,250 per workshop
1.1.3 Keeping the Parish Councils involved and informed by means of quarterly Parish meetings and ad hoc visits on request	A	Policy team, HPBS	From Nov 2003	NA
1.2.1 Supporting and encouraging the preparation of Parish Plans and Village Appraisals	C	Policy Team	QOLCP Targets	NA
1.2.2 New LDF will be needed to accommodate new regional and airport policy and to meet QOLCP requirements	A	Policy Team	From mid 2004	TBA
1.2.3 Monitoring and review to feed in to process and ensure targets are being met	A	Policy team and partners	Ongoing	£3,000 pa
1.2.4 Conservation Area enhancement statements. Skills training may be necessary see 7.5.1	E	Policy Team and perhaps partners	2005	Use of PDG or partners

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Critical Success Area 1
Focusing On What Matters To Local People

<p>Action Statement</p> <p>2 Move beyond consultation to a responsive dialogue that exchanges views regularly with those affected by planning decisions and ensure that this communication leads to real improvement in the service</p>
<p>Outcome Measures</p> <p>2.1 Re-establish the focus group / forum of agents originally set-up in 1998.</p> <p>2.2 Parish Council liaison</p> <p>2.3 Produce a customer charter that sets out clear service standards derived from those in the service plan</p> <p>2.4 Produce a means of demonstrating annually how the outcomes of the above have been taken into account in reviewing the service</p>

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
2.1.1 Define clearly, frequency of meetings (say quarterly), specific objectives, prevalent issues on service performance, capturing of ideas, feedback into planning service delivery & to all participating parties	A/B	HPBS	Nov 2003	£1,250 per meeting
2.2.1 Set up Parish focus groups to meet quarterly	C	HPBS	Ongoing	NA
2.2.2 Investigate extension of the DC Committee “call in” powers to town and parish councils, to include training	B	HPBS	2005/6	£10K
2.3.1 Write Customer Code. Code to specify planning process, planning policy framework and planning application procedure	A	All and Communications Officer	2004/5 or as QOLCP	NA
2.4.1 Set up feedback, monitoring and review system. The review should include changes to procedure, changes to supplementary policy (and in the longer term LDF policy) and changes to practice	A	HPBS, Policy Team, DC Team	2004	NA

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**Critical Success Area 1
Focusing On What Matters To Local People**

Action Statement
3 Take a more structured and strategic approach to identify broader objectives that might be secured through planning obligations for the achievement of wider community needs by securing planning obligations which link the overall needs of the area to individual developments rather than ad hoc infrastructure improvements
Outcome Measures
3.1 Agree and publicise the objectives to be achieved through planning obligations, in line with community needs, so that the requirements are clear to developers and other parties
3.2 Improve the quality of member involvement in the planning process by developing clear procedures to guide officers and members through the complex area of planning obligations, including guidance on costing mechanisms for deriving financial contributions. Include specific policies for planning obligations within development plans, particularly to deal with affordable housing and public open space. Include policies to guide agreements on health, cultural, social services facilities, school places, transport or public transport infrastructure. Ensure that developers of specific sites and types of development are aware of likely requests at the outset

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
3.1.1 Produce leaflet to explain rationale behind s106 agreements, when they are required and what are the triggers	D	Policy team	31/3/04	NA
3.1.2 In the longer term, work through the Essex Planning Officers Association and the Development Control Forum to produce county wide SPG on the use of planning obligations that can be adapted to include each District Council's own requirements	A	HPBS and Policy & DC Teams	2005/6	NA
3.2.1 See 3.1.2 above. Set up means of ensuring that members can be involved in SPG requirements without appearing to be "selling" planning permissions. New s106 protocol to be drafted in short term to include UDC Members, Parish and Town Councils	A	HPBS and Policy & DC Teams	From Jan 2004	NA
3.2.2 Member training on content of S106 agreements	A	HPBS	2003/4	NA

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Critical Success Area 2

Assuring the Quality of Development

(Reviewing the quality of decision making and its impact on the local environment)

Action Statement
4 Ensure that departmental & individuals' targets and objectives are linked to the corporate themes and objectives
Outcome Measures
4.1 Development in accordance with the Development Plan & record of number of departures (ideally nil)
4.2 Ensure the policies in the Local Development Plan Framework reflect the strategic aims of the Vision For Uttlesford
4.3 Keeping Members up to date with the content of planning policies

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
4.1.1 Review the existing Local Plan policies and assess them against the Council's strategic aims and reflect these in the LDPF	A	Policy Team	2004/5	NA
4.1.2 Prepare SPG and/or development briefs to support existing and amended policies (including S106s)	A	Policy Team	2004/5	£1000 pa
4.1.3 Ensure that the corporate strategic themes are put into planning context in the departmental induction	B	All	2004/5	NA
4.2.1 Ensure that the corporate strategic themes are reinforced through the appraisal system and are reflected in the individual's objectives	C	All	2004/5	NA
4.2.2 Identify training and development needs to deliver these objectives through a structured training plan	C	All	2004/5	£10,000
4.2.3 Develop appropriate forums to establish and maintain liaison with internal and external partners	C	All	2003/4	£5,000
4.2.4 Communicate the outputs of these forums to colleagues through structured briefing sessions	C	All	2003/4	NA
4.2.5 Establish appropriate quantifiable measures for these objectives	A	All	2003/4	NA
4.2.6 Establish a monitoring process (and or team) to ensure the objectives are being met	A	All	2003/4	NA
4.2.7 Continue to enhance and to encourage participation in the members tour of the district	-	Dept Mgt	2004/5	£1,500 per tour
4.3.1 Recommend to Council that there is comprehensive corporate member training and induction for new members	C	Member Team	2003	TBA

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Critical Success Area 2

Assuring the Quality of Development

(Reviewing the quality of decision making and its impact on the local environment)

Action Statement
5 Appraising the value added to the built environment through development control
Outcome Measures
5.1 Provide a clear appraisal of the results delivered by the development plan
5.2 Improve the quality of development through effective enforcement and ensure an 80% resolution of complaints within 3 months
5.3 Use a range of approaches to measure the effectiveness of development control work. This should include using feedback from developers and consultees
5.4 Provide a regular, user-friendly appraisal of the impact of the development plan on local quality of life

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
5.1.1 Continue with annual Member tour of completed sites. Continue to enhance (through a structured approach and encouragement of participation of all members) the members tour of the district to enable them to review the quality of decision making	E	JGP	Ongoing	See 4.2.7
5.1.2 Possibly arrange visits to completed sites to follow from site visits on Committee Day with a workshop to follow	E	JGP/HPBS	01/06/04	£2,000
5.1.3 Research the types of amendments made in negotiations on planning applications to ensure that common themes are taken into account when preparing the SPG.	C	Policy team	From now. 2 per year	£7,500
5.1.4 Survey occupiers of recently completed developments to see how living under PPG3 or living in 'Live/Work' schemes conditions is working	E	DC	From 2005	£1,000
5.2.1 Continue to work in partnership with all partners (esp. Building Control, Environmental Services, Property Services, Engineering & Members) to strengthen enforcement	A	Existing	Ongoing	NA
5.2.2 .Formalise prioritisation of enforcement on the basis of the severity of the breach in relation to the development plan	B	HPBS	Ongoing	NA
5.2.3 Move to a proactive enforcement system to ensure compliance with approved plans. But further compliance monitoring eg operational conditions, landscaping conditions and s106 agreements etc will require a new resource	C	HPBS and enforcement team New post will be required. Partnership with ECC?	2006	C£25K pa staffing costs

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5.2.4 Compile register of s106 agreements	B	New enforcement trainee	2004/5	NA
5.3.1 Set up focus groups for agents/applicants to meet quarterly	A	HPBS	Ongoing	£1,250 per meeting
5.3.2 Annual survey for one month of 10% of objectors by questionnaire with prepaid envelope	E	DC	April 2004 and annually thereafter	£2,500
5.3.3 Use citizens panel to get a public reaction to quality of development	E	As QOLCP	31/3/04	NA
5.1-5.4 Annual report via members bulletin, council newspaper and website	B	HPBS	From April 2004	NA
5.4.2 Feed into state of district debate	E	HPBS	As QOLCP	NA
5.4.3 Ensure Planning issues are included in any corporate residents surveys	E	HPBS	AS QOLCP	£TBA

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2004/5	
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Critical Success Area 3 Enhancing Customer Care

Action Statement
6 Identifying and applying the requirements for improved customer care
Outcome Measures
6.1 Reduce number of refused applications to 10% within one year by working with applicants to improve the quality of submissions
6.2 Achieve an improved awareness rating by the public
6.3 Establish and deliver targets for all aspects of the service that impact upon the end user (letters, emails, application speed, application progress)

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
6.1.1 Publicise and encourage members of the public to make use of the pre-application service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up appointment system and make sure room available Provide form for members of the public to complete in order that Officer can research site to be discussed Publicise the fact that Officer is available to see the public at CIC's by appointment 	A	DC	2005/6	TBC
6.1.2 Forecast the number of pre-application discussions and produce displays setting clear guidelines for the discussions having regard to the input provided Cllr Clarke and entitled "Planning Best Value Review" as it effects significant major developments	A	DC	2005/6	TBC
6.1.3 Set time frame for the discussions and publicise this. Allow only one pre-application discussion per proposal	A	DC	2005/6	TBC
6.1.4 Make clear what is expected from these discussions by producing an Information pack encouraging any agreements to be submitted with the application	A	DC/Comm. Officer	2005/6	£1K
6.1.5 Investigate and recommend any charging for discretionary functions	C	HBPS	2003/4	NA
6.1.6 Improve the leaflets displays (in accordance with any good ideas seen at other Authorities where applicable). Improve how these leaflets are displayed to help the public find easily the information they require. Produce new chart showing the process of a planning application (display this in a prominent position)	C	PID/Comm. Officer	2004/5	
6.2.1 Update leaflet with new standards. Publicise targets by leaflets and results on Web and Council newspaper.	E	P ID/Comm. Officer	2004/5	
6.2.2 Duty Officer available during specified hours and advertise this. Duty officer role to be extended to include responding to telephone calls requiring the views of a professional planning officer in conjunction with activity set out in 6.2.7	A	DC/PID. Officer	Ongoing	
6.2.3 Better publicity that members of the public can speak at meetings by advertising this on the Web and Council newspaper	E	CT/VW	2004/5	
6.2.4 Let the public know when the results of the meetings are available and post these results on	D	CT/VW	Ongoing	NA

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the Web and in newspaper. Insert note on schedule giving this information.				
6.2.5 New codes in Ocella which will enable easier tracking of an application. Consider setting up screen which will enable easier tracking of an application for quick information on phone calls.	A	CT/IT	2004/5	£5K
6.2.6 Establish central point of contact for Members via new Clerical Assistant currently being recruited	A	HPBS	Jan 2004	NA
6.2.7 Investigate the possibility of the establishment of a customer care group, with appropriate software and support, to be the first point of contact within the planning service in consultation with staff, Personnel Services and Unison following implementation of re-engineered DC processes (see section7)	C	HPBS	2004/5	£5,000
6.3.1 More training for staff on Ocella	A	CT/IT	Feb 2004	£5,000
6.3.3 Establish an action plan for backlog removal	A	HPBS, Cllrs RC,AT, MG, T-W	Dec 2003 – Jan 2004	NA
6.3.4 Procedure and clarity so that all general mail and central email box is acknowledged in 5 days. Try to provide information on when a full reply can be expected. Monitor weekly	A	All	March 2004	NA
6.3.5 All letters or email acknowledged quickly in accordance with targets and monitor and address slippage. Advise when a full reply can be expected.	A	All	March 2004	NA
6.3.6 Set up new procedure and monitoring system for majors, minors & others (already discussed)	A	All	March 2004	NA
6.3.7 Prepare for periods of staff leave and workload peaks. Highlight problems immediately. Make sure workload is up to date before these periods occur. Bring in suitable temp staff to help. Plan in advance in liaison with Personnel	A	All	ongoing	TBA
6.3.8 Stable workforce at competitive market rates	A	HBPS and Council	Now	£48K pa from 1/4/04 inc on costs and 3% estimated pay increase. C£14 k up to 31/3/03
Complaints/Compliments				
6.3.9 New complaints/compliments procedure making clear a procedure for recording, responding to, and monitoring all complaints	B	All	March 2004	NA
6.3.10 Produce form for staff to complete when customer is dissatisfied/satisfied with our service.	B	All	ongoing	NA
6.3.11 Contacting complainant to make sure they are aware that complaint has been followed up	B	All	ongoing	NA
6.3.12 One person responsible for making sure complaints or problems are dealt with quickly	B	All	ongoing	NA
Standard letters				
6.3.13 Produce Plain English letters/documents/leaflets	B	All	ongoing	NA

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Parish Councils				
6.3.14 Provide Parish Councils with a supply of Planning leaflets and general information on points of contact within Planning services.	B	All	ongoing	NA
6.3.15 Invite them to visit and provide training for use of the Planning Web site	B	All	ongoing	NA

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Critical Success Area 4
Reducing delay in Development Control

Action Statement
7 Be rigorous in the streamlining of business processes emphasizing continuous improvement
Outcome Measures
7.1 Achieve top quartile performance within 3 years
7.2 Reduce Backlog of applications to 300 within 6 months and 200 within 12 months
7.3 Make the best possible use of delegated powers with 90% of decisions delegated to Officers within 1 year
7.4 Achieve government targets relating speed of determination of minor and other applications within 1 year and major applications within 2 years.
7.5 Evaluate the current use of professional, technical and administrative resources to ensure that priorities are addressed (specifically include management skills development.
7.6 Improved internal liaison

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
7.1.1 Establish rigorous process performance management systems by:-	A			
7.1.2 Implementing daily weekly and monthly performance review meeting structures.	A	HPBS/all	From DEC	
7.1.3 Establish KPI's and data gathering methodologies, to feed above	A	Dept Mgt	DEC	
7.1.4 Develop stakeholder skills in using the above.	A	HPBS	JAN	£10K
7.1.5 Establish formal prioritisation systems and related expectations / work content.	A	Dept Mgt	JAN	
7.1.6 Develop master schedule, implement monitor and fine tune.	A	HPBS	JAN/FEB	
7.1.7 Develop culture of continuous incremental improvement.	A	All	On-going	
7.2.1 Identify current backlog and establish priorities.	A	CT/T/Ls	DEC	
7.2.2 Set expectations / work content.	A	Dept Mgt	JAN	
7.2.3 Feed into master schedule.	A	Dept Mgt	JAN	
7.3.1 Establish and agree, the decision criteria to be applied to determine each application routing and methodology to be applied.	A	HPBS/DMs	DEC	
7.3.2 Provide improved guidance for members on both formal and informal levels.	A	HPBS/DM'S	ONGOING	
7.3.3 Establish review mechanism to determine ongoing amendments as necessary	A	HPBS/DM'S	ONGOING	
7.3.4 Review mechanisms advising members of delegated recommendations	A	HPBS/DMS	ONGOING	
7.4.1 Establish clear accountabilities for application processing. Keep numbers involved in processing individual applications to a minimum.	A	DM	ONGOING	
7.4.2 Ensure continuity of accountability for applications from pre application advice to decision notice.	A	HPBS/ALL	DEC	
7.4.3 Establish "trigger" dates to flag up potential slippages and monitor and manage back-logs via Ocella system.	A	DM'S	DEC	
7.4.4 Ensure system compliance from all involved.	A	HPBS	DEC	

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7.4.5	Ensure applications are validated and logged onto Ocella on day of receipt. If Application is incomplete or cannot be validated, return to originator.	A	CT/TL'S	DEC	
7.4.6	Control / eliminate, number of application in the system that are on hold.	A	CT/TL'S	ONGOING	
7.4.7	Use / develop cost of application screen to validate application and produce cashiers report. Once daily transfer of cash / cheques to cashiers.	A	CT&TL'S	ONGOING	
7.4.8	Establish formal linkages between D.C., pre application and planning policy functions.	A	JGP	JAN	
7.4.9	Clarify "clock" start dates and monitor via Ocella, age of applications against trigger dates.	A	CT/TL'S	DEC	
7.4.10	Establish clear point of contact to handle queries via Ocella.	A	TL'S	DEC	
7.4.11	Review and revise 'on duty' officer system in line with 6.2.2	E	DC	DEC	
7.4.12	Review all documentation to ensure capture of accurate information first time, along with rationalisation of all standard letters / communications	A	HBPS, CT, TL'S	JAN	
7.4.13	Establish standard form of handling e:mails and encourage usage	A	CT	DEC	
7.4.14	Prepare Procedures Manual & accountability for updating	A	HPBS	2005/6	
7.4.15	Identify changes required from Ocella	A	ALL	DEC	
7.4.16	Specify new requirements	A	ALL	ONGOING	
7.4.17	Meet and discuss requirements (costs, timeframes, accountabilities) with IT and then implement	A	ST/IT	JAN	
7.5.1	Establish succession - planning programme in line with corporate initiatives	A	HPBS	QOLCP	
7.5.2	Review current organisation structure. Clarify roles responsibilities and skills requirements	A	HPBS/ PERSONNEL	JAN	
7.5.3	Build skills requirements into master schedule.	A	HPBS	JAN	
7.5.4	Carry out individual skills analysis and gap analysis, including management skills requirements.	A	HPBS	JAN	
7.5.5	Link to appraisal systems and agree individual skills development programme	A	DM	JAN/FEB	
7.5.6	Structure / co-ordinate programmes	A	HPBS	ONGOING	
7.6.1	Identify methodology to capture changes to policy / guidelines legislation (Local Plan)	A	Policy Team	ONGOING	
7.6.2	Identify methodology to capture problems in DC caused by poor understanding	A	Policy Team	Ongoing	
7.6.3	Establish regular communication meeting between Policy and DC, including representatives of other departments as appropriate, identifying participants, agenda, timing etc	A	Policy Team	Ongoing	
7.6.4	Support implementation of the communication process to capture improvements	A	Policy Team	Ongoing	

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Critical Success Area 5

Reinforcing Management Systems To Assure Quality

Action Statement

8 Moving forward on electronic delivery of planning services

Outcome Measures

8.1 Ensure that a realistic approach is in place to achieve the e-government target for planning services by 2005

8.2 Make the service accessible through a range of channels – including a user-friendly website

8.3 Ensure that ICT systems are delivering real performance benefits, through continuing investment in system development, maintenance and staff training

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
8.1.1 Form for comments on Web	C	CT	Jan	NA
8.1.2 GGP web based system (being bought)	D	IT/LF	2004/5	NA
8.1.3 GGP based NLPG system (being bought)	D	IT	2004/5	NA
8.1.4 Screens (2) available for public use at information desk (in discussions with IT)	B	CT/IT	2004	£1,000
8.1.5 Corporate improvements to Web site (new site should be up and running before Christmas)	B	IT	2004	NA
8.1.6 Planning application forms available on Web	B	CT/JP	ONGOING	NA
8.1.7 Better Web publicity in newspapers, Council newspaper and parish Councils	C	CT	04/05	NA
8.2.1 Clear guidance and training for staff on input to system	A	ALL	04/05	NA
8.2.2 Data (planning applications) on system from 74 – 48 checked and linked	C	PID	04/05	TBA
8.2.3 Stansted Airport applications plotted correctly	A	LF	05	£10,000
8.2.4 Improved CIC training on computer systems and coaching skills for staff to assist people to use the website	A	CT/IT	March 2005	£1,000

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Critical Success Area 5

Reinforcing Management Systems To Assure Quality

Action Statement

9 Develop partnership approaches to address issues which are common to other councils and reinforce other partnership arrangements to tackle cross-cutting issues

Outcome Measures

9.1 Develop partnerships with County Council and Environment Agency giving rise to quicker decisions on minor applications

9.2 Sharing staff and resources with other Councils

9.3 Continuing with existing partnerships e.g. Transport Forum, West Essex Partnership, Airport and other agencies, Essex Wildlife Trust, LA21, Uttlesford Futures, Uttlesford Access Group etc

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
9.1.1 Arrange training with EA and CC	E	Team Leaders/JGP	Ongoing	£TBA
9.1.2 Identification of officer contact point and establishment of feedback process e.g. to Wednesday meetings of DC team	A	Team Leaders	March 2004	-
9.2.1 Approach CC to see if there may be staff for secondment	C	HBPS	Jan 2004	£TBA
9.3.1 Feedback from DC Forum to be disseminated to all DC staff	A	JGP	From now	-
9.3.2 Set up internal corporate liaison process to ensure that internal applications are acceptable and do not give rise to embarrassing refusals of permission of our own developments	A	HPBS and team leaders	2004	-
9.3.3 Explore partnership working with adjoining authorities	D	HBPS	2004/05	TBA

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Critical Success Area 5

Reinforcing Management Systems To Assure Quality

Action Statement
10 Benchmark against the best and ensure that comparisons lead to service improvements
Outcome Measures
10.1 Consistent performance in top quartile after 3 years re determination of planning applications in 8 weeks.
10.2 Rate of allowed appeals to be no higher than the national average
10.3 Have an up to date development plan/local development framework.

Individual / Team Initiatives & Action Programmes	Importance	Who	When	Resource (£)
10.1.1 Match skill and resources to anticipated workloads.	A	DMs	From Nov 2003	
10.1.2 Use benchmarking via the Development Control, Admin and Policy Forums.	D	JGP/CT/RH	From Nov 2003	
10.1.3 Organise Member to Member meetings with other Councils.	A	IO	2004	£2,000
10.1.4 Implement and continually review the Improvement Plan by reporting twice yearly to the Scrutiny Committee and through retention of the Member Best Value Group	A+	All	From Nov 2003	
10.1.5 Use of consultants to manage workload peaks. Consider use of "pooled" consultants with other Councils.	C	HPBS	From Nov 2003	£30K
10.1.6 Structured training on ICT systems from system providers who know the packages in detail. Market test different suppliers from a user perspective.	C	IT/CT	From Nov 2003	
10.1.7 Visits to other benchmarking Councils.	B	HPBS/DMs	2004/5	
10.2.1. Monitor performance of development plan/local development framework against recent Government advice. Use Supplementary Planning Guidance when required.	B	RH/JGP/SN/MJ	From Nov 2003	
10.2.2 Check reasons for allowed appeals.	E	JGP/TL'S	From Nov 2003	
10.2.3 Disseminate relevant information on new Government Guidance to Officers and Members (10.3 initiatives the same as 10.2)	A	JGP	From Nov 2003	

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Committee: Scrutiny 2 – Resources & Environment
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 9
Title: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF REVENUES SERVICES
Author: Mike Brean (01799) 510330

MEMBER REFERENCE GROUP: Councillor Mrs C A Bayley, Councillor R Lemon, Councillor V Lelliott and Councillor Mrs S Schneider

Summary

- 1 This report provides Members with full details of the Best Value Review of Revenues Services and the Anti-Fraud Team. It seeks approval of the Service Improvement Plan and proposes that Scrutiny 2 recommends to the Resources Committee on 22 January 2004 that the plan be adopted.

Best Value Review Process

- 2 The Terms of Reference set out the scope and coverage for the review. It followed the fundamental best value review process by using the 4 C's of compare, consult, challenge and compete. Appendix 1 explains how the 4 C's were applied to the review.

Service Improvement Plan

- 3 The Service Improvement Plan has been developed over the course of the review. The plan, which is at appendix 2 to this report, was endorsed by the Member Reference Work at its meeting on 22 October 2003. The plan details the capital and revenue costs for each objective, with totals for each on the final page.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee approve the Revenues Services Best Value Review Service Improvement Plan and recommend it to the Resources Committee for adoption.

Background Papers: Best Value Review of Revenues Services file (held by Mike Brean)

Compare	
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)	The CIPFA Benchmarking Club was subscribed to for comparative service information in respect of Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Full details are available on request. Some of the information requires further investigation and meetings are being arranged with similar sized authorities to compare data.
Essex Revenues Rating and Valuation Group	Comparative service information is provided at the meetings of this Group, held three times a year.

Consult	
Council Tax customer survey	A customer survey was carried out in August 2003. 1126 survey forms were issued and 184 returned.
Business Rates customer survey	A customer survey was carried out in July 2003. 550 survey forms were issued and 110 returned.
Housing and Council Tax Benefit	The benefits survey is triennial and is required as a Best Value Performance Indicator. The survey has to be carried out in two sampling windows. In September 2003, 490 customer survey forms were sent and 237 have been returned. The second tranche is in January 2004.
Personal caller exit survey	This involved interviewing 40 personal callers over a four-week period in September/October 2003.
Personal caller waiting times survey	Over a four-week period, an exercise was carried out to establish the waiting times of personal callers.
Results of all of the customer surveys will be brought together in the form of a booklet on completion of the benefits survey.	

Challenge	
Challenge Event	This event, which involved internal and external stakeholders and customers, was held on 25 September 2003. Discussion groups identified a number of issues, which have been included in the Service Improvement Plan (SIP).
Customer accessibility	A number of issues surrounding access were identified as in need of attention. They have been included in the SIP (Aim 1)

	and some are now subject to discussion as part of the First Point of Contact Review Group.
Customer payments	<p>Details of introducing payment cards at Post Offices are included in the SIP. Also, negotiations are progressing with neighbouring local authorities for them to accept payments of council tax and other debts on our behalf and vice versa.</p> <p>Other developments, such as automated telephone payments, automated direct debits and the direct payment of housing benefit are contained in the SIP (Aim 3).</p> <p>A report was produced on the discount for prompt payment of council tax and the Member Reference Group decided not to pursue this.</p>
Peer challenge by neighbouring local authorities	Two neighbouring authorities have carried out 'Mystery shopper' exercises. The results will be included in the customer survey feedback booklet.
Peer challenge visits	Visits were made to Braintree District Council and the London Borough of Lewisham to consider the arrangements in place for dealing with customer enquiries, electronic access and overpayment recovery.
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Performance Standards	The DWP performance standards have been fully embraced. A self-assessment is being finalised, which will be used for the benefits service CPA. This will contribute to the overall CPA for the authority. An action plan has been developed to identify areas of weakness in the performance standards.
Information Technology (IT)	The SIP (Aim 2) covers a number of enhancements in IT to improve service delivery.
Partnership working	Various options for partnership working are covered in the SIP (Aim 5).
Compete	
Market assessment	The Member Reference Group considered a proposal for a market assessment of Revenues Services to be carried out by an external company. The findings of the CIPFA Benchmarking Club indicate that the service is very competitive in most areas. In view of this the Member Reference Group decided that the market assessment proposal would not be pursued.

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Aim 1	Improve access to services
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Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
1.1	Improve Revenues reception and interviewing facilities: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower level counter • Interview room • DDA compliant • Adequate lighting • Induction loops • Security • Signage 	£6 000 (Capital cost)	Adequate interviewing facilities that meet the needs of customers and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.	2004/2005	First Point of Contact Review Group
1.2	Increase office-opening hours. Cost based on 3 members of Revenues Services staff working 4 hrs on Sat morning for 1 year.	£10 300 (Annual cost)	To give customers greater access to service.	2004/2005	First Point of Contact Review Group
1.3	Increase telephone access hours and review use of voicemail/call diversion.	Not known (FPCRG)	To give customers greater access to service.	2004/2005	First Point of Contact Review Group

* DWP funding bid to be made to meet some of the cost

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
1.4	Provide staff presence at Dunmow CIC. Cost based on 1 member of Revenues Services staff present for one morning per week for 1 year.	£2 250 (Ann cost)	Improved accessibility for customers living in Dunmow area of district.	27 February 2004	Sheila Adams
1.5	Maximise take up of benefit.	£1 795 (Ann cost)	To award benefit to all those entitled.	29 July 2004	Sheila Adams
1.6	Publicise Council Tax discounts and exemptions.	£1 000 (Ann cost)	To award discounts and exemptions to all those entitled.	29 July 2004	Sue Ellis
1.7	Provide facility for customers to receive information in large print, Braille or audiotape.	Not known (FPCRG)	To enable customers to understand the information that has been sent to them.	31 March 2004	First Point of Contact Review Group
1.8	Improve the standard of Benefit decision letters.	Not applicable	To enable customers to understand the information that has been sent to them.	31 January 2004	Julian Sayer

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Aim 2	Enhance Information Technology to deliver service improvement
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Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
2.1	Develop Revenues web page	£12 000 (Cap cost)	To enable customers to make enquiries and complete forms on line.	31 March 2004	IT section and Revenues Q/D Team
2.2	Introduce 'workflow' technology to compliment document imaging system Maximum cost for all Revenues staff £32 000 Less DWP funding bid <u>£11 000</u> Minimum cost £21 000	£32 000 * (Cap max cost) £21 000 (Cap min cost)	To enable customers to receive improved service through speedier response to enquiries.	2004/2005	IT section and Revenues Q/D Team
2.3	Pilot additional VDU flat screens for Benefits section staff Maximum cost for Benefits section staff £13 000 Less DWP funding bid <u>£8 650</u> Minimum cost £4 350	£13 000 * (Cap max cost) £4 350 (Cap min cost)	Improved response to customers and accuracy of work.	2004/2005	IT section

* DWP funding bid to be made to meet some of the cost

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
2.4	Pilot the introduction of home working Maximum capital cost £12 000 Less DWP funding bid <u>£8 000</u> Minimum capital cost £4 000 Annual revenue cost £4 200	£12 000 * (Cap max cost) £4 000 (Cap min cost) £4 200 (Ann cost)	To promote 'work/life' balance amongst Revenues Services staff and improve the accuracy and time taken to process claims.	June 2004	IT section
2.5	Develop management reporting reports to assist in the speed and accuracy of processing claims and the recovery of overpayments. Maximum cost £3 000 Less DWP funding bid <u>£2 000</u> Minimum cost £1 000	£3 000 * (Cap max cost) £1 000 (Cap min cost)	Improve on the speed and accuracy of processing claims and recovery of overpayments.	2004/2005	Mike Brean Julian Sayer
2.6	Create an Intranet referral form and send out email to all staff	Not applicable	To increase the ease for non-revenues staff to report suspected fraud	31 October 2003	Adrian Webb
2.7	Implementation of new server for Sx3 Revenues and Benefits computer system Maximum cost £26 000 Less DWP funding bid <u>£17 350</u> Minimum cost £8 650	£26 000 * (Cap max cost) £8 650 (Cap min cost)	To increase the efficiency of the computer system in dealing with customer enquiries and processing of work	2004/2005	FOX IT Julian Sayer

* DWP funding bid to be made to meet some of the cost

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
Aim 3	Introduce new and improved methods of administering and making payment				
3.1	Introduction of payment card for cash payers at Post Offices	£850 (Cap cost) £400 (Ann cost)	Increased methods of payment and much needed business for Post Offices.	31 January 2004	Sue Ellis Julian Sayer Denise Greenwood
3.2	Automated telephone payments (ATP)	£10 000 (Cap cost) £1 500 (Ann cost)	Improve payment collection method.	2004/2005	IT Section
3.3	Introduce automated Direct Debit set up (AUDDIS), amendments and cancellations (ADDACS).	£3 000 (Cap cost)	Increased efficiency of Direct Debit payment administration.	ADDACS 31 May 2004 AUDDIS 31 Dec 2004	Julian Sayer IT Section
3.4	Introduce direct payment of Housing Benefit	Not applicable	Increased efficiency of Housing Benefit payments and more secure method of payment to reduce fraud.	October 2004	IT Section Phil O'Dell Julian Sayer

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
Aim 4	Introduce the Department for Work and Pensions Performance Standards				
4.1	Implement DWP Performance Standards in benefits administration	Not applicable	To conform to national standards and prepare for CPA.	31 March 2004	Mike Brean Sheila Adams Sue Mustill
4.2	Submit Fraud Policy to Resources Committee for approval	Not applicable	To obtain formal approval for the use of sanctions	20 November 2003	John Mercer Adrian Webb
4.3	Finalise and issue Code of Conduct to Investigators	Not applicable	To ensure all investigators know the boundaries within which they must operate.	30 November 2003	John Mercer Adrian Webb
4.4	Register all qualified Authorised Officers with Counter fraud Investigation Branch	Not applicable	To conform to national standards and prepare for CPA.	30 September 2003	Adrian Webb
4.5	Produce an Authorised Officer request form with an area for the outcome of the authorisation.	Not applicable	To conform to national standards and prepare for CPA. To ensure authorised powers are being used appropriately and achieve their objectives.	30 September 2003	Adrian Webb

* DWP funding bid to be made to meet some of the cost

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
4.6	Analyse the Administrative Penalty recovery rate for 2002/03.	Not applicable	To evaluate the effectiveness of this sanction	31 October 2003	Adrian Webb Matt Southall
4.7	Agree a policy with Revenues for regular feedback on the recovery of Administrative Penalty debts	Not applicable	To enable monitoring of the effectiveness of the sanction	31 October 2003	Adrian Webb Mike Brean
4.8	Review all fraud policies on an annual basis	Not applicable	To ensure appropriateness of the policy and to achieve an above standard	31 January 2004	Adrian Webb

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Aim 5	Use partnership arrangements to deliver improved levels of service
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Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
5.1	Pilot Revenues Services staff presence on mobile library service. One member of staff for 8 weeks.	£375 (Ann cost)	Improved accessibility for customers in outlying areas of district.	27 February 2004	Sue Ellis
5.2	Enable customers to pay Council Tax and other debts at Braintree, East Herts and South Cambs Councils.	Not known	Improved accessibility for customers in outlying areas of district.	2004/2005	Denise Greenwood IT Section
5.3	Investigate the feasibility of Business Rates joint working arrangements.	Not known	To provide business continuity to vulnerable area of Revenues Services.	2005/2006	Mike Brean Adrian Marsh
5.4	Explore potential data matching partnership opportunities with neighbouring authorities	Not known	To identify UDC benefit claimants who are working in another authorities area in such employment as taxi drivers.	31 December 2003	Adrian Webb John Mercer
5.5	Pursue joint working initiatives with Counter Fraud Investigation Service as appropriate	Not applicable	To promote joint working and to enable skills transfer between organisations	On-going	Adrian Webb
5.6	Consider joint working arrangements for the Anti-Fraud Team.	Not known	To obtain economies of scale and provide cover for limited resources	31 December 2003	John Mercer Adrian Webb

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
Aim 6	Training and information				
6.1	Fraud Awareness and Induction Training with 6 monthly follow-up sessions	Not applicable	To increase staff awareness of fraud and how to report suspicions	December 2003	John Mercer
6.2	Produce a quarterly fraud newsletter for Council staff	Not applicable	To provide feedback on the work of the Anti Fraud Team	31 December 2003	Adrian Webb
6.3	Produce fraud referral source statistics on a quarterly basis and analyse for trends and good/poor levels of referrals	Not applicable	To enable positive feedback to those people who are providing high quality referrals and to enable proactive training and reminders for those people who are not providing a reasonable number of referrals	31 December 2003	Adrian Webb
6.4	Submit an annual fraud report to Members	Not applicable	To provide feedback and information on the success of the team	31 December 2003	John Mercer Adrian Webb
6.5	Introduce the training evaluation documentation provided by Personnel	Not applicable	To enable training providers and courses to be evaluated for future use	30 September 2003	Adrian Webb

Revenues Services Best Value Review

Service Improvement Plan

Item	Objective	Estimated Cost	Desired Outcome	Target Completion Date	Responsible officer and major contributors
6.6	Establish a corporate Anti Fraud training plan to include training provider and dates	Not applicable	To enable monitoring of courses attended, providers and cost	31 December 2003	Adrian Webb

Estimated expenditure of service improvement plan objectives		
Capital		Revenue
Maximum (without DWP funding)	Minimum (with DWP funding)	
£117 850	£70 850	£21 820

* DWP funding bid to be made to meet some of the cost

Committee: Scrutiny 2 – Environment and Transport
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 10
Title: BEST VALUE REVIEW – REFUSE AND RECYCLING
Author: Richard Secker (01799) 510580

Reference Group Members:

Councillors: V Pedder (Chairman), E Abrahams and S Flack
Officers: D Burridge, E Hodge, R Pridham, V Rogacs and R Secker
Critical Friends: T Bragg – Maldon District Council
D Maidman – Verdant plc

Summary

- 1 This report provides Members with the details of the Best Value Review that has been carried out of Refuse Collection and Recycling services. It has the final improvement plan attached as agreed by the Member Reference Group (MRG) and proposes that this Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Environment and Transport Committee accepts the improvement plan.

Scope of the Review

- 2 The review considered whether the following services, namely household and commercial refuse collections, recycling banks and kerbside recycling collections
 - Meet national and local standards, and remain a community priority
 - Meet customer expectations
 - Could be more effectively and efficiently provided

The aim is to show what is currently being achieved and how any improvements can be made in future.

Brief Description of the Services

- 3 Refuse Collection
 - weekly collection of refuse from all households mainly kerbside by residents choice
 - assisted back door collection for elderly and disabled residents
 - free collections of bulky household waste
 - weekend village CA scheme for mixed wastes
 - garden waste via prepaid sacks collected with normal refuse
 - trade refuse service to commercial users using various containers or prepaid sacks for small premises

Recycling

- weekly kerbside collection of dry recyclables, alternately black (paper and magazines) and green boxes (cans, plastic, cardboard and textiles)
- 51 recycling sites with static containers for glass, cans, papers, plastics, textiles and books depending on specific site potential
- weekend supervised green waste containers in towns/villages with materials taken for on farm composting
- trade recycling currently is limited to separated cardboard

Finance Summary

- 4 The following table sets out the direct estimated costs and incomes for 2003/04 for these services:

Refuse Collection:	Gross cost	£1,380,750
	Income	£489,000
	Net cost	£891,670
Recycling Services:	Gross cost	£539,190
	Income	£252,290
	Nett cost	£286,900
Total Cost		£1,178,570
Annual Cost per Household		£40.38

At this stage the compete requirement has been demonstrated twice in the provision of these services by competitive tendering in 1990 and 1996. It is anticipated that a further exercise will be undertaken for 2006 when waste management changes across Essex are planned and necessary for all authorities.

Waste Hierarchy

- 5 There is a well established and internationally recognised hierarchy which seeks to actively prevent waste production and then only finally to dispose of waste to landfill if there is no other option. The order of preference is therefore:-

Reduce
Reuse
Recycle
Recover Energy
Landfill Disposal

Taking these issues in the above order

Reduce

- 6 Currently Uttlesford residents statistically produce more waste per household than any other Essex area and is in the top quartile nationally. Although this can be explained partially by the relative affluence of the area, there are a number of other issues which the MRG identified. As can be seen from the description of services above, Uttlesford provides a wide and comprehensive

range of services to householders, often without any separate charge. This provision has two major drivers, first the desire to protect the environment and character of the district by preventing or minimising fly tipping and general abandonment of waste in the countryside. Secondly, this district has the worst coverage by accessible civic amenity sites (ECC criteria is for all residents to be within a 6 mile radius) with there being only the Saffron Walden site. All other Essex districts have 2 or 3 sites with smaller areas. This under provision has for the last 20 years been partly met by the Uttlesford weekend container service. The new CA site proposed for Dunmow in 2005 will deal with the under provision and allow the various services which collect mixed waste to in future only handle separated materials which are recyclable. Other waste generating activities and styles of service such as kerbside green waste collection and the use of domestic wheeled bins have not been introduced because of their waste generating potential and greatly increased costs.

Reuse

- 7 In an area such as Uttlesford, the ability to find local outlets for items such as clothing and household goods is limited. Currently the Salvation Army have textile banks, Oxfam book banks and recently a group has been established to refurbish some items of furniture.

Recycle

- 8 The services mentioned above provide a comprehensive range of collect and bring services for approximately 90% of the Uttlesford area with participation rates of approximately 70%. The range of materials involved is still limited by the re-processors and manufacturers capacity to handle the products and the quantity and quality required for economic viability. A transfer station in the Harlow area is anticipated in 2004 and ultimately a local MRF is planned.

Recover Energy

- 9 Essex County Council and the Essex districts and unitaries have agreed that incineration will not be a process employed to handle municipal waste. However, a process known as anaerobic digestion will provide the disposal process and produce further recyclable (metals, glass and plastics), a compost material and a combustion gas to generate electrical power. The utilisation of this process will provide for the treatment of kitchen wastes which the En-Trust funded trail would otherwise have covered by expansion to the whole district. This will mean the saving of the planned future revenue costs which would have resulted had the vehicle kitchen waste collections continued.

Landfill Disposal

- 10 This is the least favoured and acceptable means of disposal and European legislation is now reducing the amounts of waste involved and requiring pre-treatment before deposit. Similarly with the reduction of sites available and landfill tax increases planned this would not continue to be a cheap option.

The Review Process

- 11 The review has followed the standard Best Value process of compare, consult, challenge and compete. The MRG met on a regular basis as programmed as did the supporting officer group.

a) Compare

The services provided for the full range of customers were compared with other Essex authorities and the Daventry group. The performance of Uttlesford is extremely good from having the lowest ratio of missed collections, giving 52 collections each year, free bulky waste collections and end of life vehicle removal to the widest range of materials collected for recycling and the actual recycling performance (20% for 2003/4). The comparison of costs was not pursued given the variation in services provided and the demographics of each authority. However, an independent study a number of years ago established that the costs were 50% higher for servicing rural communities compared to urban area.

b) Consult/Challenge

These two requirements were taken together and because of poor response levels and attendances at events previously, a comprehensive survey form was issued to over 2000 trade customers and householders. Some 750 forms were returned (37% response) and the data compared. In essence the provision of a single collection day with all materials available kerbside (special arrangements would continue for elderly and disabled residents) was clearly acceptable. Also, the continuation of free bulky collections and village CA services until better permanent CA facilities are developed was a general expectation. Front line staff from the Contractor, the Direct Service Organisation and the Services Officer team were also interviewed by some of the Best Value Officer Group. All survey forms etc., are available for viewing by arrangement.

c) Compete

The value for money and market testing which are often difficult parts of most reviews were not considered by the MRG as an issue as compulsory competitive tendering had been undertaken in both 1990 and 1996 and resulted in the present service providers. There was also the expectation of future tendering in 2006.

Answers To Fundamental Questions

- 12 The Terms of Reference required the Best Value Review process to answer a number of fundamental questions. Having completed the review the MRG can answer these as follows:

No	Question	Response
1	Does the Council have a statutory duty to provide the Services?	<p>Refuse collection has long been a statutory service for domestic and trade customers with specific charges made for the latter.</p> <p>Initially, recycling undertaken by local authorities was discretionary with an obligation only to produce a Recycling Plan. Since 2001 statutory targets have been in place and a new Act will soon require a kerbside service collecting at least two materials.</p>
2	Are the services meeting current required standards?	<p>In respect of refuse collection, the missed bin rate is amongst the lowest in UK at 12 per 100,000 collections. The civic amenity service provided by Essex CC does not give adequate coverage to the south of the district. This lack of facilities is planned to be addressed in 2005.</p> <p>Recycling levels are expected to be 20%+ in 2004 and the extra civic amenity site will allow changes to add approximately 5% to that figure.</p>
3	What contractual arrangements are appropriate to meet future requirements?	<p>Current arrangements go through to 2006 by which time a single pass operation can be in place. In this way dry recyclables and residual waste are collected at the same time using a single twin body vehicle.</p> <p>At that time competitive tendering with the Essex CC and in other districts can be undertaken if considered advantageous.</p>

Answers To The Specific Questions

- 13 The Terms of Reference required the Best Value Review process to also answer a number of specific questions. Having completed the review the MRG can answer these as follows:

No.	Question	Response
1	Are the present standards appropriate to meet customer requirements?	<p>An extensive customer survey showed that for refuse collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 92% of householders were satisfied - 90% of trade customers were satisfied - 96% of customers were satisfied with their contact with the Admin team <p>Similarly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 90% were satisfied with the recycling collections - 75% were satisfied with the recycling centres - 68% were satisfied with special collections <p>The positioning of a CA site in the south of Uttlesford will allow the recycling centres and special collection arrangements to be enhanced and refocused to improve performance</p>
2	What improvements and/or changes will be necessary to meet national and local targets	<p>The provision by Essex County Council of a transfer station in the Harlow area and a CA site in Dunmow add approximately 8% to the recycling performance by enabling waste reduction measures to be introduced and refocusing some services. This will achieve initial statutory and PSA targets. Ultimately the use of anaerobic digestion as the disposal method for residual wastes will produce further recyclables and energy to achieve all individual and pooled targets.</p>
3	How can the charges be implemented in the most cost effective way	<p>The progress introduction of split body vehicles by 2006 will enable the merging of all kerbside recycling and residual waste services.</p>

No.	Question	Response
4	Can the development of partnerships assist in the delivery of any service improvements or future performance targets	The emerging joint working with other districts and/or a partnership with the current contractor will give economy of scale and access to new facilities.
5	Can the existing refuse collection and kerbside recycling service be merged into a single contract and collection system	Yes by 2006 – see 3 and 4 above.
6	How can information on services and collection variations be more effectively commercialised to all customers	<p>Some initial progress has been made by each week only collecting one type of dry recyclables, i.e. either black or green boxes. Only one calendar is needed for each collection day from 2004.</p> <p>Ultimately the single collection day for residual waste and dry recyclables will further simplify the information provided to the public via the internet, council newspaper, advertisements, direct leafleting and village newsletters/magazines.</p>

- 14 As a result of the Review Process, the MRG is now in a position to propose an Improvement Plan, which sets out a number of actions to be taken to continue the improvement, development and integration of the refuse collection and recycling services.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee approve the Refuse Collection and Recycling Services Best Value Review Improvement Plan and recommend to the Environment and Transport Committee for adoption.

Background Papers: Best Value Review

EST VALUE REVIEW REFUSE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING SERVICES

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Aim 1 To develop partnerships to assist in the delivery of service improvements and performance targets.

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Work with Essex CC and all districts and unitary authorities	Develop long term waste disposal and recycling contracts. Agree to the pooling of statutory and PSA targets.	Increased recycling, non-incineration waste disposal solutions and able to meet EU targets.	On-going through to 2008	Unknown at present
(ii) Joint working and procurement within the West Essex Area	Agree facilities and arrangements which would allow earlier progress in recycling and waste minimisation	Increased recycling performances, meet individual targets and potentially reduce overall costs	ECC transfer station in 2004/05	Subject to DEFRA funding UDC savings on MRF fees.
(iii) Consider possible joint public/private partnership for future contracts.	Arrangements involving the DSO and Verdant or another contractor in post 2006 working.	Improved use of staff and management resources potentially involving two or more local authorities	2005/06	Reduced management costs

Aim 2 Merge the existing refuse collection and kerbside recycling services into a single contract.

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Develop and prepare a specification for a single combined service	Prepare tender documentation for revised service to comply with EU Procurement.	Improved services for less cost.	Start preparation April 2005	Mainly from within existing resources
(ii) Ensure that the vehicles are appropriate and available.	Continue the progressive replacement of existing vehicles with twin body RCVs	Simplified refuse collection and recycling service.	On-going to 2006.	Already within capital programme
(iii) Introduce a universal kerbside system for residual and recycled waste streams	Plan and publicise the revised collection day by information to each household. Some change is inevitable to almost all areas.	All households will then receive a kerbside collection of recyclables.	Implement in August 2006.	Existing resources

Aim 3 Implement service improvements and changes to meet national and local targets.

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Investigate effective waste reduction initiatives	Examine all elements of the waste stream. Target trade and street sweeping waste particularly.	Reduces the total waste and household waste streams thereby improving recycling performance.	2004	Existing resources
(ii) Increase the range of materials collected for recycling and reuse	Increase partnership working and projects with other West Essex authorities and charities	Increase recycling performance and encourage re-use of household items	2004	None
(iii) Encourage the formation of a business waste forum	Organising an initial meeting and later providing technical and secretarial support	Reduces waste disposal pressures and improves business profitability	2004	Initial start up costs less £1000

Aim 4 Implement the service improvements and changes in most effective and efficient way.

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Work with Essex CC to provide a CA site in Dunmow	Encourage earliest provision of the CA site or part of the joint development also involving a new UDC depot.	Reduced demand for weekend container and special collection services. Increased recycling performance of approximately 5%	2004/05	ECC project
(ii) Redirect the current weekend bring services from mixed to recyclable collections.	Implementing a manned container service for green waste, timber and metals.	Reduces waste stream and increases the recycling performance by approximately 3%	2004/05	Increased costs offset by recycling credits
(iii) The use of a single vehicle and collection day.	Revised schedules and publicity	Simplified and more cost effective service	2006	Reduced management costs

Aim 5 To provide services which are appropriate and meet customer requirements

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Extend the range of containers available for hire	Include the smaller sizes of wheeled trade bins in the options available	Increased customer base, improved on site storage, increased trade income	2004/05	Part of normal annual costs.
(ii) Extend the range of materials collected for recycling from trade premises	Visit customers completing survey forms indicating that 50% of their waste could be recycled.	Reduce waste disposal problems, generate income from sale of materials.	2004/05	Existing resources.
(iii) Survey customers annually.	Send out survey form each year with the Duty of Care documents.	Service more responsive to customers needs and changing circumstances.	Annually	None.

Aim 6 Communicate information on services and collection variations more effectively to all customers

How	What is involved	Improvement expected	Timetable	Finance/Resource Implications
(i) Simplified service arrangements	Single weekly collection day for all materials	Reduces number of recycling calendars produced from 10 to 5 versions	2005/06	Small cost reduction
(ii) Notification of all changes for Bank Holidays in a single notice	Distribute information sheet with recycling calendar in December each year.	Improved information for all customers	2005/06	None
(iii) Arrange for all boxes of the same colour (ie Green or black) to be in the same week.	Introduce change over during the Christmas period in 2003	Improved information available to the public	2003	None
(iv) Information on the internet of all collections.	Change information progressively as new systems are implemented.	Improved access to current information.	On-going	Existing resources

Committee: Scrutiny 2
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 11
Title: Work Programme – Section 106 Agreements
Author: John Mitchell (01799) 510450

Summary

- 1 This report explains the function and use of planning obligations, and planning conditions. Planning Obligations are a means of securing contributions towards, or the actual works to implement, social, amenity and infrastructure requirements arising from new developments, and normally are applied to secure off-site works. Conditions are imposed on planning permissions and apply to the site itself.

Background

Conditions

- 2 Conditions may be imposed on any planning permission as a means of regulating the use or development of land. Circular 11/95 gives guidance on the use of conditions. It states, "If used properly, conditions can enhance the quality of development and enable many development proposals to proceed where it would otherwise have been necessary to refuse planning permission. The objectives of planning are however best served when that power is exercised in such a way that conditions are clearly seen to be fair, reasonable and practical."
- 3 All conditions need to be able to satisfy six "tests", namely that they are necessary; relevant to planning; relevant to the development to be permitted; enforceable; precise; and reasonable in all other respects.
- 4 The Circular advises that in considering whether a condition is necessary local planning authorities should ask themselves whether planning permission would have to be refused if the requirements of the condition were not imposed. If not then the condition needs special and precise justification.
- 5 An appeal can be lodged against the imposition of a condition within 6 months of the grant of planning permission. A planning application to vary or remove the condition can be made at any time.

Planning Obligations

- 6 Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act confers the power on local planning authorities to grant planning permission subject to an agreement between the Council and the developer and other interested parties, restricting the development or use of the land in any specified way. Such agreements are most commonly used to achieve service, amenity and infrastructure improvements, either by means of a financial contribution or by carrying out the works themselves. Planning permission is not issued unless and until the obligation is agreed.
- 7 The Act also enables an applicant to enter into a planning obligation by providing a unilateral undertaking.
- 8 Circular 1/97 gives advice on the use of planning obligations. It states that they need to be necessary; relevant to planning; directly related to the proposed development; fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development, and reasonable in all other respects.
- 9 Section 106A of the Act allows a developer to apply to the local planning authority to discharge or modify a planning obligation after 5 years.
- 10 Both Circulars 11/95 and 1/97 give advice on the use of conditions or obligations.
- 11 Para B20 of Circular 11/95 states: "It is important to recognise that if there is a choice between imposing conditions or entering into a planning obligation, the imposition of a condition which satisfies the policy tests of Circular 11/95 is preferable because it enables a developer to appeal to the Secretary of State. The terms of conditions imposed on a planning permission should not be re-stated in a planning obligation: that is to say, an obligation should not be entered in to which requires compliance with the conditions imposed on a planning permission. Such obligations entail unnecessary duplication and frustrate a developer's right of appeal"
- 12 Para 12 of Circular 11/95 states: "It may be possible to overcome a planning objection to a development proposal equally well by imposing a condition on the planning permission or by entering into a planning obligation under section 106 of the Act. The Secretaries of State consider that in such cases the local planning authority should impose a condition rather than seek to deal with the matter by means of a planning obligation. This is because the imposition of restrictions by means of planning obligations deprives the developer of the opportunity of seeking to have the restrictions varied or removed by application or appeal under Part III of the Act if they are or become inappropriate or too onerous. It should be noted however that section 106A of the Act allows a developer to apply to the local planning authority to discharge or modify a planning obligation after the expiry of five years after the obligation is entered in to."

Comment

- 13 Government advice and policy is clear. In circumstances where a planning condition **or** a planning obligation could be used to overcome a planning objection, then a planning condition should be used.
- 14 It is appreciated that Members may consider that a condition is “weaker” than a planning obligation, but in practice this is not the case. If members are concerned over a contravention of a condition then the Council has considerable enforcement powers, if necessary using enforcement and stop notices or obtaining an injunction, proportionate to the level of harm created by the contravention. An Applicant can lodge an appeal against the imposition of the condition within 3 months of the grant of planning permission. An Applicant could also make a planning application to relax a condition at any time, and that would have to be considered on its merits.
- 15 If Members are minded to refuse planning permission for an application they are required by the General Development Procedure Order 1995 to state clearly and precisely their full reasons for refusal, specifying all policies and proposals in the Development Plan that are relevant to the decision. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act requires that the determination of applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 16 Circular 8/93 – “The Award of Costs incurred in Planning and other procedures” – states in Para. 9: “Planning authorities are not bound to adopt or include as part of their case, the professional or technical advice given by their own officers or received from statutory bodies or consultees. But they will be expected to show they had reasonable planning grounds for taking a decision contrary to such advice; and they were able to produce relevant evidence to support their decision in all respects. If they fail to do so, costs may be awarded against the authority.”
- 17 One of the main issues arising from the Best Value Review of planning services is the involvement of Members in the planning process, particularly the content of legal agreements. One of the recommendations in the draft Service Improvement Plan is to set up a Protocol that will enable the involvement of ward Members without compromising probity. This is still being formulated but a draft flow chart, showing how such a protocol might operate, is appended. It is stressed that this is a **draft**. The protocol relies on the setting up of an Officer group from relevant services, with Partners as appropriate, that meets regularly to agree appropriate terms for inclusion in planning obligations. Ward members would be notified of any applications that would attract a planning obligation and asked for their input on what could be included to benefit the local community. Their input would inform the discussions of the Officer Group, who would report back to ward Members prior to the application being considered by Committee. It is again stressed that this is a draft proposal that has not been progressed but it gives an idea of the type of approach that could be taken to include the needs of the local

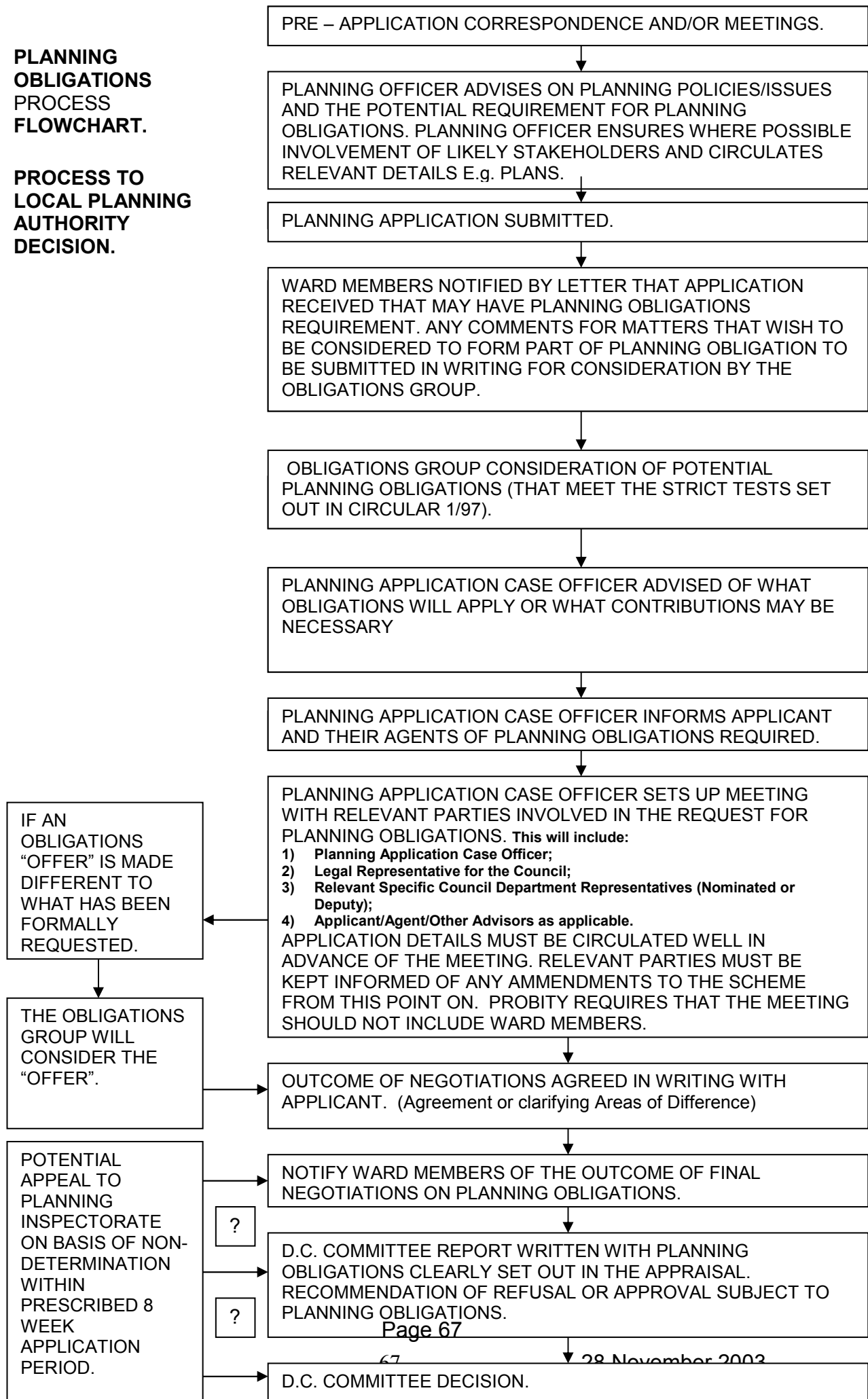
community. In the longer term the principle could be extended to include Parish and Town Councils.

RECOMMENDED that members consider the report and note the progress that has been made in producing a protocol to enable Members to have an input into legal agreements.

Background Papers: Best Value Review of Planning Services draft Service Improvement Plan.

PLANNING OBLIGATIONS PROCESS FLOWCHART.

PROCESS TO LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY DECISION.



Committee: Scrutiny 2
Date: 3 December 2003
Agenda Item No: 12
Title: Licensing Arrangements
Author: Richard Secker (01799) 510580

Summary

- 1 This report advises Members of the procedures and policies used or proposed in respect of taxi and liquor licensing activities respectively.

Background

- 2 As a result of the recent increase in some taxi licensing fees, the Licensing Committee received a petition objecting to the increases and the procedure which had been followed on that occasion. However, as the actual level of fee increases had been properly considered by Members in July 2003, this Committee has been requested to look at the procedures used.
- 3 The transfer of liquor licensing from the Magistrates Court system to local authorities is planned for next year and a draft policy document has been produced.

Taxis

- 4 In general taxis licensing is expected to recover the costs incurred by the local authority albeit over more than one year. Fees and charges are set by each local authority to reflect their structure and systems.
- 5 Additionally, the local authority sets the maximum fare tariffs for hackney carriages which can be charged to the public. There is a statutory process which must be followed including consultation with the public and trade before any increases are resolved. The last increase was applied from January 2003 following initial representations from the trade.
- 6 On 31 July 2003, the then Development Control and Licensing Committee received a report (copy attached) advising of the need to increase some Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fees to cover a budget deficit for this service. It had become clear earlier in 2003/04 that there would be a deficit but because of factors mentioned in the July 2003 report, this was likely to rise to some £15,000 and therefore an increase from September 2003 was required.

- 7 The need for an increase had been raised by officers at their quarterly meeting with the trade. In fact, the actual fees likely to be effected were mentioned by the Head of Environmental Services.
- 8 The Committee resolved to implement the increases from 1 September 2003 and noted that the increased fees were still at or below the Essex average. As there is no statutory requirement to consult on these particular fees, public notices were placed in the local newspapers and 'Taxi Chat', which is this Council's trade newsletter to all drivers and operators.
- 9 Clearly had the Criminal Records Bureau not changed their policy and charging structure in such an abrupt way the increases would have been introduced later and probably at a lower level. This would also have permitted more dialogue with the trade although it is unlikely that the agreed increases would have been avoided.
- 10 As with any increase in fees or charges for services there is inevitably and understandably resistance from the specific customer base. However these increases have been decided and applied in a way similar to any other Council service fees and charges

Liquor Licensing

- 11 The modernisation of the archaic licensing laws in England and Wales has finally been given Royal Assent. This will, through the Licensing Act 2003, transfer the responsibility for licensing all premises in which a licensable activity takes place to the local authority.
- 12 Broadly licensable activities will include one or more of the following:-
- (a) the sale or supply of alcohol
 - (b) the provision of regulated entertainment
 - (c) the provision of late night refreshment (the sale of hot food or drink between 11.00 pm and 5.00 am)
- 13 The major change regarding the sale of alcohol will mean that all public houses, restaurants, clubs, off-licences, supermarkets and corner shops will no longer have their licences dealt with by the Magistrates Court, but instead will apply to their local authority.
- 14 Local authorities will be responsible basically for two types of licences for:-
- (a) premises where any licensable activity takes place
 - (b) person responsible for the supply of alcohol

Additionally, there is provision for temporary event notices for small, occasional events which must be administered by the local authority.

- 15 Although the Act has been passed, the regulations and guidance notes will not be available until November or December 2003 as these must be

presented to both Houses of Parliament for agreement. This rather unusual situation does make the transition from the Magistrates system to an as yet uncertain local authority system difficult for implementation planning and funding. The fees and charges are to be set by Government, who wish to decriminalise the process, reduce bureaucracy, extend opening hours/availability and generally to increase tourist and family use. Therefore, generous funding for the transition is not anticipated.

- 16 Attached as Appendix A is a copy of a draft Licensing Policy that has been jointly produced by the Essex Licensing Group which consists of officers from all Essex local authorities and Essex Police. Some informal consultation by the Group has already taken place with various trade groups, specialist solicitors, LACORS and DCMS and generally the reaction has been good. A final version will be produced by the end of 2003, but few changes are anticipated.
- 17 Members views are invited on the attached draft Licensing Policy which should form the basis of the Uttlesford Licensing Policy for adoption by the full Council in 2004.

RECOMMENDED that Members comments are considered in respect of future taxi licensing fee increases and the draft liquor licensing policy.

Background Papers: Papers attached.

Committee: Development Control and Licensing
Date: 31 July 2003
Agenda Item No: 6
Title: Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Fees
Author: Richard Secker (01799) 510580

Summary

- 1 This report advises Members of the need to increase the scale fees in respect of driver's licences, vehicle transfers and vehicle testing to recover the costs incurred and recommends the revised fees to be charged from 1 September 2003.

Background

- 2 The licensing function of local authorities does generally require that fees and charges are set to recover the costs associated, albeit over a period exceeding a single year.
- 3 Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fees are set by each local authority individually to achieve this objective. Over the last few years although the charges made by the trade to the users have increased this local authority has not needed to adjust their fees as the rapid increase in the numbers of both drivers and vehicles offered economies of scale. However this advantage has now been eroded by external charges and costs, which make a revision of fees essential.

Drivers Licence Fees

- 4 The licence fee of £50 year is common to both hackney carriage and private hire drivers with £70 year being the fee for a joint licence. Originally criminal records checks were carried out free of charge via Essex Police but in 2002 the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) was established and charged £12 for each enquiry. This did not directly impact on the local authority, as the driver was able to pay the CRB direct by either cheque or credit card.
- 5 Recently the CRB have without any consultation introduced a payment on account system whereby the local authority will be invoiced direct and the fee has increased to £29.
- 6 This significant change also increases the administration work/interviews now required to complete the documentation previously undertaken by the CRB. Therefore in order to cover the costs of increased administration and CRB fee

APPENDIX

- 7 (payable in first and every third year) it is suggested that the drivers licence fees are increased to £80 year for a single licence and £100 for a joint licence.

Vehicle Transfers

- 8 All hackney carriage and private hire vehicles are licensed annually with distinctive rear plates issued using white/black and yellow/black colours respectively. Each plate is vehicle specific giving vehicle details of registration number, model, colour and licence expiry date. However there is provision in the licence conditions for plates to be transferred to replacement vehicles to use any unexpired licence period. This option has over the last few years become more popular, often with some vehicles being replaced at 6 months from first registration.
- 9 This does involve the production of a new rear plate and supporting documentation equivalent to the original licence issued. Currently Uttlesford charges a fee of £20.50 whereas other Essex districts charge between £35 and £75 per transfer. Therefore it is suggested that the Uttlesford fee be increased to the Essex average fee of £50, which would then reflect the true costs incurred.

Vehicle Inspections

- 10 All hackney carriage and private hire vehicles are inspected for mechanical condition and safety by the council's vehicle workshop at Great Dunmow. Inspections are annually for vehicles under 5 years and six monthly for vehicles over 5 years.
- 11 This requirement ensures a consistent standard of vehicle inspection and one which recognises the higher than average use and mileage covered. Most vehicles licensed are basically normal family saloon/estate cars and not black cabs. Stretch limousines can also potentially be licensed and are often older vehicles imported from the USA.
- 12 The current inspection fee is £23 and does not now represent the time/costs involved. Other Essex districts charge between £30 and £50 per inspection with an average of £36. It is therefore suggested that the inspection fee be increased to £35, which again reflects actual costs.

RECOMMENDED that as from the 1 September 2003:

- (i) The hackney carriage and private hire drivers licence fee be increased to £80 year and the joint drivers licence be increased to £100 year.
- (ii) The vehicle transfer fee be increased to £50.
- (iii) The vehicle inspection fee be increased to £35.

Background papers: none.