

Forest Heath District Council

MINUTES of the **PERFORMANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall on Thursday, 30 January 2014 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

C Noble (Chairman)	T J Huggan
A J Wheble (Vice-Chairman)	G Jaggard
M J Anderson	M J Jefferys
C J Barker	J W McGhee
D W Bimson	

Also in attendance:

R Almond, Development Manager
C Brain, Scrutiny Officer
M Christie, Business Manager
M Evans, Senior Business Partner (Planning, Performance and Control)
B Fiske, Business Partner, Finance and Performance
R Mann, Head of Resources and Performance
S Phelan, Head of Housing
J Snares, Internal Audit Manager

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C F J Lynch.

SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

880. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

881. **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2013 were unanimously accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

882. **THIRD QUARTER 2013-2014 INTERNAL AUDI PROGRESS REPORT (REPORT NO PAS14/025)**

The Committee received Report No: PAS14/025, which updated Members on the work undertaken by Internal Audit in November and December 2013 (Annex A). The report also provided an update on progress made against the

2013-2014 Internal Audit Plan, attached as Appendix B, previously approved by the Committee on 27 November 2013.

During the period, three audit reviews had been completed to final report stage. Audit reports were issued as final where their contents had been agreed with management, in particular responsibility for actions and timescale. Appendix A to the report contained a summary of the content of the internal audit reports issued in November and December 2013. Each summary provided an indication of the issues arising from the reviews, as well as action taken in response to previous audit reports.

Members scrutinised the report, with particular emphasis on the audit review of payment cards. The Head of Resources and Performance advised that the recommendations from the audit review had been accepted with timescales attached, which were tied in with the new banking arrangements from April 2014. There would be two sets of payment cards, one under each authority's name. Where joint purchases were made, these would be made by the lead authority. A review would also be carried out with regard to the amount of petty cash each council held.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report, including progress made against the 2013/14 Internal Audit Plan.

883. **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013-2014 (REPORT NO PAS14/026)**

The Committee received Report No: PAS14/026, which set out the Key Performance Indicators being used to measure the Council's performance for 2013-2014 and provided an overview of performance against those indicators for the third quarter of 2013-2014. Appendix A included performance against Quarter three 2013-2014 for Forest Heath together with a combined performance for West Suffolk, where relevant. A colour coded "traffic light" system was used to indicate levels of performance against agreed targets: Green for on or exceeding target; Amber for below target within tolerance and Red for significantly below target. Where performance was below target the data was supported by notes and explanations from service areas.

The current quarter three performance summary for Forest Heath showed that of a total of 36 indicators, 16 were green, 4 were amber, 5 were red and 11 were data only indicators. For West Suffolk, the current quarter three performance summary showed that of a total of 34 indicators, 12 were green, 7 were amber, 4 were red and 11 were data only indicators.

The Committee discussed a number of the indicators, with particular emphasis on those showing red under the traffic light system, and asked questions on a number of areas. In particular, discussions were held on the:

(1) FH/HOU005 – Time taken to make decisions on homelessness applications (days)

Members were advised that the figures had been skewed by one complicated case that took 81 days to determine. The average would have been 20 days excluding this case. However, across West Suffolk the number of days had gone down from 38 to 22 days. In the next quarter it was anticipated that numbers would be reduced still further as new procedures were introduced. In response to a question it was

explained that the increase in homelessness cases was not seasonal, but was of national concern due to the current economic climate and there were some indications that it might be due to the changes made in the way that benefit payments were now being paid to tenants. The Council had no control over the number of people who presented themselves as homeless.

- (2) FH/HOU009 – Private sector tenancies made available through West Suffolk Lettings Partnership

Members were advised that more effort had been directed in Forest Heath to encourage private landlords to let properties through the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership. An event was planned for the end of March 2014, where private landlords would be invited to join the lettings partnership.

- (3) WS/LCC002 – Visitors to Nowton Park/East Town Park/Abbey Gardens/Clare Castle County Park and Brandon County Park.

Members questioned why the visitor numbers were grouped together and suggested that visitor numbers be presented for each attraction. The Head of Resources and Performance agreed to provide Members with a written response.

- (4) Planning Indicators (General) – Members were advised that of the six KPIs all are significantly below target (three for Forest Heath and three West Suffolk). The performance on three had improved from the second quarter of this year, with the other three dropping in performance. Several of the major applications which were over time were part of the backlog and one of the applications was the Morrisons supermarket. With regard to the minor applications, performance had improved, but still was not meeting the target.

Work was ongoing in the Planning and Regulatory Services to improve performance but there would be a lag as the backlog was worked through. Steven Wood, the new Head of Planning and Regulatory Services and Christine Flickner, the new Principal Planning Officer would be in post week commencing 3 February 2014. As of 30 January 2014, there were two Planning Officer vacancies to fill. Once all staff were in place the backlog of cases was expected to reduce. Until the service was fully staffed and the full shared services business plan was in place it would be difficult to predict whether staffing levels would be sufficient to manage the increased caseloads. However, this would be kept under review.

It was anticipated that once the shared service for planning was embedded across West Suffolk with new internal processes, new systems and aligning teams, Members should see the planning figures starting to improve.

- (5) FH/WPM006 (Household waste sent to landfill (tonnes))

The Committee suggest that this indicator be presented as a percentage. The Business Manager agreed to include a percentage in the notes of future reports. However, he explained that the percentage would be the opposite to the percentage of household waste recycled and composted (FH/WPM0070).

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

884. **FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (REVENUE AND CAPITAL) – APRIL TO DECEMBER 2013 (REPORT NO PAS14/027)**

The Committee received Report No: PAS14/027, which provided information on the financial position for the first nine months of the financial year 2013-2014. Attached to the report at Appendix A was the year end forecast outturn which showed an underspend of £58,000. Appendix B detailed the Council's capital financial position for the first nine months 2013-2014, showing expenditure of £1,329,000. Earmarked reserves showed a projected year end balance of £4,574,000.

Members were requested to note the position to December 2013 and the significant variances as outlined in the report at paragraph 4.3.1. Budget Holders would continue to work with the Resources Business Partners and Business Support Advisors for the remainder of the financial year in order to monitor the forecast position and an updated position would be provided be presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

Initial reporting was showing that the overall business rate yield anticipated for 2013-2014 was below that forecasted as part of the NNDR1 return in January 2013. Work would continue with the Anglia Revenue Partnership team to understand the variances within the overall yield. In the meantime the additional revenue assumed in the 2013-2014 budget of £42k remained an area of risk to the Council.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

885. **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT – DECEMBER 2013 (REPORT NO PAS14/028)**

The Committee received Report No: PAS14/028, which was the quarterly monitoring report in respect of the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

The Head of Resources and Performance informed Members that the Strategic Risk Register was regularly updated by the Risk Management Group and at its recent assessment in December 2013, the Group reviewed the target risk, the risk level where the Council aimed to be and agreed a current risk assessment. The assessment of each risk was based on the Councils Risk Assessment Toolkit.

The latest copy of the revised Strategic Risk Register was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. Since the last assessment report was presented to the Committee on 28 November 2013, there had been no new risks identified and no risks had been amended or closed. However, some controls or actions had been updated and those which were not ongoing and had been completed by December 2013 had been removed from the register.

It was reported that whilst a single risk register for West Suffolk had not yet been compiled, the development of a single management and service structure

across Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury had seen considerable similarity between the risk registers of the respective councils.

The Committee discussed some of the risks in this quarter's report and did not make any suggestions for amendments to the Register on this occasion.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

886. **PERFORMANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE (REPORT NO PAS14/029)**

The Committee received Report No: PAS14/029, which provided information on the current status of the Committee's Work Programme. Attached as Appendix 1 to the report were details of items scheduled to be presented to the Committee during 2014-2015.

Members considered its work programme and discussed the frequency of inviting Portfolio Holders to future meetings. It was agreed that each Portfolio Holders would be invited to attend twice in a four year cycle. Members then suggested inviting the Leader of the Council to its July meeting to present the Cabinets Annual Report 2013-2014.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

The meeting closed at 6.55pm.