

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (INTERNAL)

11<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2008

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PRESENT	Councillor V. Shuttleworth (Chair) Councillors Lethbridge, Des Wilson
APOLOGIES	Councillor Mrs. P. Jopling
ADVISERS	A. Baker, Revenues and Benefits Manager; R. Bowman, Scrutiny Manager; M. Cooper, Value for Money Officer; D. Parkin, Performance Officer; S. Reid, Assistant Director for Finance and IT

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### 45. PERFORMANCE CLINIC – RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE

The Chair drew attention to BVPIs 008, 009, 079b(i) and 079b(ii).

The direction of travel was negative compared to previous years. Although some of the indicators were still amongst the top 25% of authorities. Any organisation can pay bills quickly, although it is equally important that they are paid accurately. The government expects bills to be paid in thirty days and some suppliers expect them to be paid in fourteen days, some even less.

Now invoices come to finance first to be scanned into the system. Under previous arrangements the invoice was first sent to the officer concerned.

**BV009** – The Assistant Director explained that performance had dropped only slightly. 2006/07 had been a high point where the authority was the second highest performing in the country against the indicator. It cannot be managed with any great precision as it relies on payment by council tax payers. It would require attention if this slight downturn was part of a trend.

**BV79b(i)** - The Assistant Director explained that it is difficult to obtain information from the variety of systems this data is derived from. It was very difficult to collect housing benefit overpayments. Many people in receipt of overpayment had moved away from the district. It was one of the most challenging debts that the council had to collect.

Members questioned whether the processes for debt collection are rigorous, prudent and robust. The Assistant Director stated that regarding council tax, the authority has good assets in the Revenues and Benefits Manager and those tasked with debt recovery. It was important to take into account the circumstances of the individual debtor concerned. The approach taken is firm but fair. Processes could be improved for collecting

housing benefit overpayments. As stated, this was a challenging debt to collect with less legal protection available for the council in its recovery. One issue was that when the fraud section was successful it increased overpayment figures as occurrences of overpayment were uncovered.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager stated that in 2007/08 the fraud section had been very successful which had impacted on the overpayment figures.

The Chair praised the directorate for its overall very good performance.

### **Service plan**

The Assistant Director talked the members through the service plan explaining several key points.

Revenues and benefits had seen a good take-up of benefits. The Chair stated how difficult it was to target the most vulnerable in increasing benefit uptake. Work is currently underway to profile customers.

The Assistant Director mentioned the importance of getting internal audit recommendations implemented; overall there was a busy schedule for the directorate. Members questioned whether IT equipment would be replaced in the run-up to LGR. There was a rolling programme of IT renewal, as PCs become obsolete very quickly. The need for linkage with the other authorities of the county meant that IT upgrades were important to facilitate this.

### **Risk register**

Members discussed several issues around the departmental risks, with the Assistant Director describing each in more detail. There were no issues raised in relation to the department's risks.

### **VFM analysis**

The Chair stated that there appeared to be high satisfaction along with high service costs. The Chair described this as a win, as customer satisfaction was of paramount importance. This therefore represented good value for money and the staff should be congratulated.

### **Data quality**

A data quality issue was questioned by the members. The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the 2006/07 data wasn't available at the time. For that reason it was estimated that performance was in the top quartile. When an audit was carried out it was discovered that performance was actually just below the top quartile.

### **Volatile budgets**

Members made no comment in relation to this item.

**National indicators**

Members questioned whether the Assistant Director believed that there would be a smooth transition from BVPIs to NIs in the directorate. In response the Assistant Director stated that there had been a struggle with the new indicators although robust systems were now in place.

**CHAIR**

The meeting concluded at 2:45pm