

CIVIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

29 March 2006
(6.00pm-7.20pm)

PRESENT: Councillors C. Rosenstiel (Chair), Boyce, Hart and Stebbings.

FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

06/CIV/6 **MINUTES**

The minutes of 25 January 2006 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

06/CIV/7 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ward and Smith.

06/CIV/8 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

06/CIV/9 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

06/CIV/10 **EXTERNAL AUDIT**

Two representatives from the Council's external auditors presented the report.

One of the external auditors, Andy Perrin, stressed the positive nature of the inspection letter, noting in particular that:

1. Great improvements have been achieved in waste and recycling.
2. Cambridge City Council's Use of resources score is the highest across the region.
3. The Council's financial management sets an example of good practice for other local authorities.
4. Cambridge City Council received an overall score of 3 in the new Use of Resources Assessment.

Members were pleased with the recognition by the government of the work carried out in planning standards and decision-making.

The Chair drew particular attention to paragraph 23 of the Direction of travel report, which concluded that, in relation to housing targets, "on qualifying sites, 30% of new homes that have been built are affordable" and that this was "in line with the Council's targets and places it as one of the top performers in the country".'

In response to a question regarding the significant level of increase in the Inspection Fee element of the total audit fee for 2006/07, the Director of Finance advised that this related to additional work that auditors have been required to undertake by the Audit Commission in all authorities.

He noted that no fee could be agreed, at this time, in respect of the new work relating specifically to Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) as the scope for this work has not yet been agreed, nationally, by the Audit Commission. These new returns are required by central government in order to produce consolidated accounts for the whole of the public sector.

06/CIV/11 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC PLAN 2006/2007 TO 2008/09. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2006/07.

Bridget Bishop, Acting Head of Internal Audit, presented the report to the Committee.

The Director of Finance announced the appointment of Sarita Haggart as the new Head of Internal Audit, commencing on 15th May 2006. He paid tribute to the high quality work which had been undertaken by Bridget Bishop in the role of Acting Head of Internal Audit, which had been recognised by officers across the Council as well as by the Council's external auditors.

The Committee thanked Bridget Bishop for her excellent work.

Resolved

To approve the three year Strategic Internal Audit Plan for 2006/07 to 2008/09 and to approve the first year of this plan as the annual Internal Audit Plan for 2006/07.

06/CIV/12 DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS AT EAST AREA COMMITTEE

Councillor Durrant, Chair of the East Area Committee, introduced the matter to the Committee.

Councillor Durrant raised the following points:

1. Planning applications used to be the main attraction for members of the public attending the East Area Committee. However, nowadays members of the public are

more interested in participating in the open forum and leave the venue once this finishes.

2. The planning applications are decided in a very formal, quasi-judicial manner, which differs substantially from the extended discussions in the open forum.
3. The East Area Committee sometimes splits the content of the agenda to provide a reasonable time for considering the open forum matters and deal with planning applications and hearing of applicants and objectors in a proper manner
4. He clarified that it was not a question of the quantity of the planning applications that had to be considered but the quality and style of the committee.

The Director of Central Services pointed out that doubling the number of East area meetings will also double the preparation time and will put extra pressure on the committee Section, which was already overstretched.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services proposed that an option paper be drafted in June to consider the issues and options.

Resolved

To consider the options and issues including resources for each area committee in June.

06/CIV/14 CHANGES TO LEGISLATION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Simon Pugh, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, advised on changes to exempt information, according to which the 15 categories have been reduced to 7 to comply with legal requirements governing freedom of information.

As these came into effect on 1 March, we have used the new exemption categories for reporting in the March Scrutiny Cycle. A report recommending the changes that need to be made to the Constitution will come to the next meeting.

The Committee closed at 7.20pm.

CHAIR