Monday 20 March 2005
at 6pm

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Scrutiny Committee

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MEMBERSHIP:-

Councillor Mrs HEALY (Chairman) Councillor MARSH (Deputy Chairman), Councillors Mrs BANNISTER, BELSEY, LACEY O.B.E, TAYLOR and WARNER.

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35 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2006.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2005 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

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36 Declarations of Interest.

There were none.

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37 Key Performance Indicators Quarter 3 2005/2006.

The report was submitted to Members on 3 March 2006. Questions were received and officers were be in attendance to answer Members questions. The next report for Performance Indicators is due on 3 July 2006.

The committee discussed the performance of Housing and Council Tax Benefits in particular the staffing and recruitment and the use of agency staff, and the accuracy of recovering overpayments. The Acting Director – Financial Services advised the members that the improving performance was derailed in quarter three due to a significant computer downtime caused by server failure, creating an immediate backlog of work, which had a detrimental impact on processing times. The Acting Director also reported that the Council's performance was a function of the number of staff and their levels of experience. Two experienced members of staff were on maternity leave during Quarter 1. In Quarters 1 and 2 eight brand new entrants were employed, with funding from the DWP and their Kickstart programme, Gradually, as new starters became sufficiently proficient, it was possible to release some of the agency staff. The effect on performance was clear.
Four of the new entrants failed to make the grade and left the Council. The other four were progressing soundly, together with two more new entrants who joined in Quarter 3. As part of raising the overall standard of the whole team dedicated training had been arranged in late February to tie in with planned system downtime while the council tax bills were produced.

Members noted that there were still a large number of overpayments on the system that had been left for several years without recovery action being taken. Officers had, as time permitted, been working their way through the list to determine recovery or write-off, but it was a highly time consuming process. The recruitment of a dedicated overpayments officer, who started with the Council recently, would assist with this work and lead to overall improvements in the Council's recovery results.

Members requested that information be provided regarding the number of prosecutions per 1000 caseload, the cost of prosecutions and the benefits of the monies owed. The Acting Director of Finance agreed to supply the information to the Committee following the meeting.

The Members agreed that a review of Housing Benefits and Council Tax should be added to the Annual Scrutiny Programme 2006-2007.

Councillor Lacey requested further information regarding Lifeline and why it was not possible to extract comparable figures for this Performance Indicator, this information would be provided following the meeting.

AGREED: That a review of Housing Benefits and Council Tax be included in the Scrutiny Annual Programme 2006/2007.

38 Internal Audit – Summary of Activities and Performance for the period April 2005 to January 2006 and Audit Plan 2006 - 2007.

The committee considered the report of the Chief Internal Auditor providing Members with a summary of activities and performance of Internal Audit for the period 1st April 2005 to January 2006, the key audit findings for the period 1st November 2005 to 29 January 2006. The report also advised the Members of the proposed audit work for the remainder of the year compared to the Audit Plan, and advised the Committee of the proposed Audit Plan for 2006-07.

NOTED.

39 Scrutiny Annual Programme 2005/06 – Outstanding Items.

The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator referred to the report detailing the outstanding items in relation to the Annual Programme as follows;

Licensing Review – Members were advised that the audit of the licensing function would now take place as part of the Audit Plan 2006-2007. Members agreed to carry this item forward to the 2006/07 Annual Programme.

Consultancy funding for the procurement of Theatres, Leisure and Seafront Attractions – The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator circulated a response from the Assistant Director – Community Services. The Chairman requested that this response be forwarded to the Opposition Leader who had originally requested that this item be included in the Annual Programme for clarification as to whether enough information had been provided, this item might be carried forward to the 2006/07 Annual Programme.

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Recruitment and Retention – This item would be carried forward to the 2006/07 Annual Programme.

Review of the implementation of the new benefit fraud policy - This item would be carried forward to the 2006/07 Annual Programme.

Taxi and Private Hire Task Group – Monitoring report. This item would be reported at the first meeting of Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year.

Elections and Voter Turnout Task Group – Monitoring report. This item would be reported at the first meeting of Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator also provided Members with an update on the progress of the two outstanding Task Groups – Airbourne and Coaching Industry.

NOTED.

40 Vote of Thanks.

The Committee expressed their thanks to the Chairman for her contribution to the Committee throughout the year.

NOTED.

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The meeting finished at 7.20 p.m.

Councillor Mrs Healy
Chairman