

16 January 2007

Our Ref. PARC 1/07

Your ref:

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To: The Chairman and Members of the Performance, Audit and Review Committee:

Councillors: J. M. Cunningham (Chairman), D. Miller (Vice-Chairman), Monica Bloxham, A.F. Hunter, Marilyn Kirkland, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, L. McNamara, L. Oliver, Diane Proudlove, Deepak Sangha, Derek Sheard, Mrs C.P.A. Strong and M.E. Weeks.

Substitutes: (Councillor Liz Beardwell)

You are invited to attend a meeting of the

## **PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**

to be held in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1,  
COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON ROAD,  
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY**

on

**25 JANUARY 2007**

at

**7.30 p.m.**

Yours sincerely,



David Miley  
Democratic Services Manager

**DRAFT AGENDA**  
**PART 1**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	-
<b>2. MINUTES</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2006.	-
<b>3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS</b> Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
<b>4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> To receive from Members of the Committee any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda. Members should either declare a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item of business. Also to receive advice from any Member of this Committee concerning a party whip direction.	-
<b>5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION</b> To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of producing the agenda none had been received.  Any other public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
<b>6. CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE – INITIAL UPDATE</b> REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES <i>To provide PARC with the opportunity to comment on the implementation of the Customer Service Centre.</i>	<b>1</b>
<b>7. COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS – UPDATE 2005 - 2006</b> REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES <i>To allow a review of the 3Cs received by NHDC in the period 1 April 2006 to 30 September 2006.</i>	<b>13</b>

<b>ITEM</b>		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>DISTRIBUTION OF OUTLOOK MAGAZINE</b> REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS <i>To advise Members of the current distribution of Outlook and review issues.</i>	<b>29</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2006</b> REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS AND PERFORMANCE <i>To update PARC on current progress in meeting the targets for the High Level Performance Indicators during October and November 2006.</i>	<b>33</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>AREA GOVERNANCE AND THE COSTS OF DEMOCRACY BUDGET SAVINGS 2006-2007</b> REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES <i>For PARC to consider the Area Governance proposals and Costs of Democracy budget savings.</i>	<b>43</b>

Dates of future meetings of PARC in 2007:

22 March 2007

19 April 2007

**PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**  
**25<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**6**

**TITLE OF REPORT: CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE - INITIAL UPDATE**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the achievements of the Council's new Customer Service Centre (CSC) after the first few months of operation since opening on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006.
- 1.2 To detail the actions to continue to develop the performance level and services delivered by the CSC.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This report is an initial view of the performance of the CSC. It is intended to present monthly performance information in the Members' Information Service, on the Council's website and intranet in 2007.
- 3.2 The implementation of the CSC is a key part of the Council's Customer Service Strategy and is one of the key visible outputs enabled by the service@north-herts programme which is transforming the way the Council provides services.

**4. OPERATIONAL REVIEW**

**4.1 Establishing a Single Point of Contact**

Planning reception transferred to customer services and relocated to the ground floor of the main Council Offices during the building work to establish the new CSC in August 2006. This was successful with no adverse reaction from planning customers and continuous provision of service by the customer service team.

The Council successfully opened its new single point of contact with the CSC team trained to handle 139 different lines of enquiry on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2006. From this date Town Lodge was closed to visiting customers and since then we have had no formal complaints regarding the closure of Town Lodge.

The Council now ensures that services are provided for the customer in this single reception with officers travelling to the CSC to manage expert service delivery. For example:

The CSC team now handle all verification of documents on behalf of benefits;

- Benefits staff an interview room within the CSC;
- Housing customers are seen in a dedicated interview room by Housing Needs staff.

The call handling team are providing first line support to help customers with their enquiries:

- Council Tax telephone calls are answered by the CSC team;
- Housing Needs callers receive assistance when requesting a housing application form or information about housing in the district.

The CSC team receive all general enquiry e-mails and electronic forms on behalf of the Council and by working with Housing Needs their separate e-mail address no longer exists. This will allow us to track response times and report on the volume of enquiries made to the Council electronically.

A key success has been in the consolidation of the receipt, logging and management of all comments, compliments and complaints to CSC. This has resulted in 95% acknowledged in 4 days and 87% complaints responded to in 10 days, the highest ever performance.

Another key success is that despite the relocation of services and the change of working environment, telephone system and computer systems for the Customer Service team members we only received one complaint in October and two complaints in November. In November we also received two compliments from customers.

The team are also able to assist with County Council enquiries and Highways issues in an informed way rather than just giving telephone numbers and explaining that we do not provide the service.

The new team has successfully risen to the challenges of new job roles and we have seen real enthusiasm from the team who are now able to talk with customers and advise them (in some cases resolving their problem) instead of just transferring calls in a switchboard environment.

#### **4.2 Enquiry Handling**

During October and November 66% of enquiries were recorded on the Council's new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system as received by telephone and 33% in person. The CRM database stores customer details, monitors the fulfilment of customer enquiries and also provides the information to enable the customer service team to handle the enquiries they receive. E-mail enquiries to the Council were directed to the customer service team from August 2006, before the CRM system was live and the CSC was completed. It is important to note that emails were not managed via the CRM during October and November due to staffing shortages and the need to process them quickly by the team. This was changed in December. By the end of November the CSC had created 5300 customer records whilst handling over 4,000 interactions a month.

The aim of the CSC is to resolve an average of 80% of customer enquiries at the first point of contact. Appendix A illustrates the enquiries received by service area during the period 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

This clearly reflects the significant volume of enquires regarding Council Tax and Benefits over the telephone as we have transferred the initial provision of this service and also verification of documents face to face.

The customer service team successfully handled 57% of these enquiries at the first point of contact in October and 54% November. This was much higher than the initial estimate of 20% of enquiries at the first point of contact. We are currently reviewing the lines of enquiry that we are able to resolve within CSC on behalf of Council Tax to ensure these are as efficient as possible and also to identify further opportunities to reduce the enquiries that we currently have to refer to the service.

#### 4.3 Call Handling

Call handling within the CSC is split into:

- 1) A switchboard operation that has been retained which includes calls to the Council's new business line 01462 474800 as well as callers who know who they wish to speak to. The business number is to be publicised throughout 2007 in both revised phone directory entries, council publications and letterheads. This number is also the best number for Councillors to use to contact the Council as it reduces the number of calls that the CSC needs to handle.
- 2) A call handling centre that deals with general enquiries received via the Council's main number and Revenues and Benefits calls (mostly Council Tax) that are directly routed to the call handling team instead of Council Tax staff. This allows the CSC team to act as a first tier of service delivery handling the straightforward enquiries. From 15<sup>th</sup> January all Housing Needs and Homelessness calls will be routed via the call handling centre in the same manner.

The graph in Appendix B illustrates the switchboard call volumes from October to December. The steady decline illustrates the normal seasonal trend. The CSC has successfully maintained a high quality switchboard service handling a significant number of calls. Performance has been running at 98-99% calls answered in 12 seconds with 1-2% lost calls. This compares to 88% in 12 seconds last year with 3-4% lost calls. Switchboard volumes are 50% lower than last year with these calls being handled by the new call handling operation. The switchboard service has proven to be highly effective at managing a large volume of calls that the CSC is not yet able to handle. This will be consistently reviewed although it is anticipated that the switchboard service will need to be retained to fulfil this function for at least a further year.

The graph in appendix C illustrates the call handling centre volumes from October to December. As can be seen calls answered have steadily increased over the period from 4258 to 6090 per month. A high level of lost and abandoned calls (where the customer chooses not to wait in the telephone queue) have been experienced which has been due to an initial staffing shortage within CSC. This is discussed fully in section 4.4.1 'Staffing Resources' below, along with the actions in place to improve performance in this area. Although the number of lost calls increased during November, in percentage terms they actually fell from 48% in October to 34% in November. This reflects the work done with the team and additional support given to them to improve performance. Despite a further increase in call volume in December the team maintained the gains made in call handling with the level of lost calls being 32%.

Overall call volumes match those received last year by Council Tax and Switchboard together. The real success is that the volume of calls answered by switchboard and immediately transferred to a service has fallen by 50%. These calls have been directed to the new call handling operation. The total calls handled

by the CSC (including switchboard) were 11,514 in October and 13,023 in November. Direct calls to the Council Tax number (routed to CSC) account for 25% of this call volume. The CSC team members handle an average of 700 calls per person per month compared to 416 per person per month in the Council Tax area last year.

We have agreed a phased approach to achieving performance targets with CMT based on a comparative review of other Councils and to reflect the investment in technology to improve transaction times and the increase in size of the CSC as more services are added to providing additional economies of scale.

We therefore propose targets of:

<b>Period</b>	<b>Call Handling Target</b>
80% calls answered in 60 seconds	End March 2007
80% calls answered in 40 seconds	End June 2007
80% calls answered in 30 seconds	End September 2007
80% calls answered in 20 seconds This is the recommended target of the National e-Service Delivery Standards target for Local Government	End December 2007

We will also be including call answering targets in customer focus groups to review all customer care standards during February and March 2007.

#### 4.4 **Development Plan**

##### 4.4.1 Staffing Resources

Following the first month of operation it was clear that the CSC team had insufficient resources available to cover the call handling operation, resulting in a high level of abandoned/lost calls. Given the staff transferred, it had only been possible to put 2 staff on the telephones, half the original estimate of the number required. In practice staffing resources needed to be diverted away from call handling to manage the face to face customer volumes as insufficient staff resources had been transferred to handle verification customers. The requirement to cover the new team's holiday and sickness absence also added to this pressure. The team is currently not of sufficient size to provide the call answering cover required and previously this was covered by other services within the Council. This pressure will ease as the team gains critical mass over the next year. These issues were highlighted in a summary report to the Reorganisation Group (now Organisational Development Group) along with the reason for the staffing imbalance.

In addition the actual call information captured was modelled to determine the actual staffing levels required to handle the actual incoming call volume. This confirmed that initial estimates of required staffing were accurate. A report detailing the case for additional staffing and the analysis undertaken was presented to Corporate Management Team, on 25<sup>th</sup> November. Following this report, an initial short term solution was identified whereby the IT helpdesk was been re-located to CSC on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2007 so that their spare capacity can be used to assist with call volumes after a few weeks of training. The medium term solution is the approval and recruitment of two additional full-time staff to correct the staffing imbalance in January.

This staffing level, based on call modelling real statistics, aims to deliver 80% of calls answered in 60 seconds as an initial target and reduce the lost/abandoned call

level to an initial target of 15%. This target level reflects that 8% of callers currently abandon their call before joining the call queue to the customer service team.

The service@north-herts programme is currently creating a model for service review based on process mapping which will allow more accurate profiling of resources and capture of efficiency gains. We now propose to move away from a wide and shallow implementation (lots of general enquiries at a low level of complexity) as this is hard to implement in terms of clearly identifying staff for transfer. It has also been proven that this approach does not address requirement for efficiency gains, despite improvement to customer accessibility and contact. We intend to proceed with a more detailed implementation, service by service, facilitated by this Council wide process review activity as part of service@north-herts which can be directly linked with the Council's forthcoming Efficiency Fundamental Service Review. This will minimise the risk of failing to transfer appropriate staff resources and will ensure that clear opportunities and targets for efficiency gains are made.

#### 4.4.2 Additional Services

We are currently reviewing the existing Revenues and Benefits operation to ensure the number of enquiries enabled are maximised for convenience of customers and staff to aid quick resolution. This will include refresher training in preparation for the annual Council Tax billing. From 1<sup>st</sup> April the Council will no longer advertise a separate telephone number for Council Tax.

From mid January all Housing Needs and Homelessness calls will be routed via CSC, eliminating the two telephone numbers for Homelessness and Housing Need general enquiries eliminated. This will be supplemented with an enhanced service for checking housing applications on arrival.

The previous plan for wide and shallow implementation will now be revised to focus on a deeper, service by service, approach to ensure detailed process review, accurate resourcing and clear identification of efficiencies to be achieved. This approach has already started with Enforcement services.

The CSC is also committed to:

- Planning for Sports Course Bookings for full launch in Easter.
- More efficient handling of waste enquiries including working with the contractor to improve customer service via access to their systems.
- Fielding Bus Pass renewal enquiries, calls will be handled within the CSC to support Planning.

#### 4.4.3 Satisfaction Monitoring

Customer satisfaction amongst callers to the CSC will be trialled in January via telephone survey. In addition, a longer term solution is being investigated to consistently monitor customer satisfaction after the point of service delivery on the telephone, when visiting the CSC and when using the Council's website.

#### 4.4.4 Communication

As the CSC is the most visible part of service@north-herts and it signifies the Council's new approach to service delivery, it is essential that regular and open communication about performance is maintained. An intranet page will be launched in January along side a monthly bulletin to update staff and Councillors on progress and performance. We also plan to publish performance information on the Council's website from July.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

## **6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Failure to support the new approach to customer service delivery will impact on the long term achievement of efficiencies through the service@north-herts programme.
- 6.2 Future risk will be minimised by consistent status review of services using call modelling tools and the introduction of a Council wide process review activity as part of the service@north-herts programme.
- 6.3 The additional staffing required within the CSC will be funded by corporate virement for the rest of the current financial year. The funding for 2007/08 was agreed from the strategic priorities fund by Challenge Board at their meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The new approach to a more in depth, service by service implementation, supported by a service process review programme will ensure that the correct resources are identified for transfer and that any associated human resources issues are managed in line with the Council's Re-organisation policy.
- 7.2 The additional staffing resources will ensure that the current team are fully supported in their new roles and that the pressure on them can be managed as further enquiries and services are added during 2007/08.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 Not applicable

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That PARC:

- 9.1 Note the achievements to date and those of the CSC team in setting up the single customer point of contact and CRM system.
- 9.2 Recognise the resourcing difficulties that the CSC has experienced in its first few months of operation and support the immediate corrective action that the Council has taken to ensure that the initial imbalance is corrected.
- 9.3 Recognise and endorse the change in approach to transfer more services forward to the customer (within the CSC) to ensure efficiencies and service improvements are delivered in a controlled way using a Council wide approach to process review in the service@north-herts programme.
- 9.4 Endorse the plans to publish monthly performance information to the members via MIS, to the Council via the intranet and to customers via the website.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 Ensuring that we listen to our citizens and deliver responsive, high quality, value for money, customer focussed services is a strategic objective for 2006/07.
- 10.2 Seventy per cent of our customers use the telephone as their preferred method of initial contact with the Council; it represents our most important access channel.
- 10.3 The delivery of 80 per cent of customer enquiry resolution at their first point of contact with the Council via the CSC is a key objective of the Council's service@north-herts transformation programme.

## **11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

Not applicable.

## **12. APPENDICES**

- 12.1 Appendix A - CSC Enquiries by Service Area 1<sup>st</sup> October - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006
- 12.2 Appendix B - Switchboard Call Volumes 1<sup>st</sup> October - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006
- 12.3 Appendix C - CSC Call Handling Volumes 1<sup>st</sup> October - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006

## **13. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 Operational Review - Customer Service Centre - CMT Report 28<sup>th</sup> November 2006

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**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS UPDATE 2005/2006**

**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES**

**1. SUMMARY**

1.1 To provide the Performance, Audit and Review Committee (PARC) with:

- A progress report on the comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 - 31<sup>st</sup> Sept 2006;
- A summary of trends and remedial action taken;
- The action plan for 2007.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 This report was deferred due to the implementation of the Customer Service Centre during August and September of 2006.

3.2 NHDC places high importance and value on running an effective 3Cs procedure as part of the strategic objective 'Ensuring that we listen to our citizens and deliver responsive, high quality, value for money, customer focussed services', the Customer Care Strategy 2003-2006 and running a procedure compliant with the British Standard's Institution (BSi) Standard (Complaints Management System 86:2000).

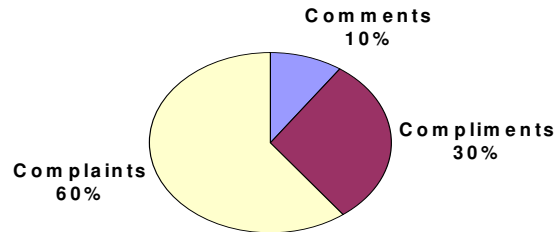
**4. ISSUES**

**4.1 3 Cs Received**

315 3Cs were received 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 to - 31<sup>st</sup> September 2006, 36% lower than this period last year reflecting the contracting out of leisure services. 223 3Cs were registered directly by the contractors which would take 3Cs to 10% higher than last year. It is important to consider this volume in relation to the number of service requests the Council handles. Following the implementation of the Customer Service Centre handles an average of 4000 transactions a month (based on general callers and Council Tax enquires only).

The chart below shows the breakdown of 3Cs:

### 3C's 1st April - 30th September 2006



Complaints fell by 17% against last year, compliments fell 55% and comments have fallen by 44%. Appendix A shows '3Cs by Directorate'. 1200 comments were also recorded via the comments books at Letchworth and Hitchin museums regarding their exhibitions and events. (These are not recorded on the 3Cs database).

The Chart in Appendix B illustrates the issues raised in complaints. The main issues were:

- 28% of complaints registered against 'quality of service provided';
- 14% of complaints registered against 'failure to deliver a service';
- 8% of complaints registered against 'staff conduct'.

Letter remains the most popular way to register a complaint (36% of all 3Cs, down 3%). However, this was equalled by electronic contact (via e-mail and our website, 36% of all 3Cs, up 9%), this is the highest ever level of registering 3C's by electronic means.

## 4.2 Performance

### ***Satisfaction***

Overall satisfaction of customers, measured by survey in February 2006, established that 52% customers were very satisfied/satisfied with the way in which we handled their issue compared to 57% the previous survey. The best things about how we handled the complaint were helpfulness of staff (45% of respondents), quick reply (41% of respondents) the outcome of the issue being resolved to the customer's satisfaction (32% of respondents).

The council succeeded in maintaining a low level of dissatisfaction amongst respondents with only 28% of customers being dissatisfied/fairly dissatisfied with the way, in which we handled the issue raised by them. This was the same as the previous year's survey. The main reason for the dissatisfaction was the outcome (22% of respondents). Only 8% of respondents regarded staff as unhelpful.

Appendix C details the reasons stated by customers who were dissatisfied/fairly dissatisfied with the actions taken to address the issues where possible.

### ***Acknowledgement***

95% of all complaints were acknowledged within 4 days compared to 88% last year. This was achieved through the consolidation of complaint registration to within the Customer Services Team. 100% within 4 days is the Council's target Appendix D shows 'Time Taken to Acknowledge Complaints' for the 6 month period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September for 2004, 2005 and 2006.

### ***Completion***

This year 87% of all complaints were responded to fully within 10 days, 56% were resolved in 4 days. This exceeded the Council target of 85% in 10 days. This is better than last year's performance, 85% of complaints resolved in 10 days, of which 52% were dealt with in 4 days. Appendix D shows 'Time Taken to Complete Complaints' for the 6 month period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September for 2004, 2005, and 2006.

## **4.3 Main Issues**

The key areas of customer complaint are shown below:

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Area of Service</b>
Chief Executive's	Elections, Democracy and Legal
Customer Services	Parking Services, Grounds Maintenance, Hitchin Swim, North Herts Leisure Centre, Halls, Refuse, Recycling
Finance & Regulatory Services	Council Tax, Revenues, Housing Benefit, Housing Needs, Planning

## **4.2 Corrective Action**

Of all complaints received only 18% required corrective action, where the Council was found to have made a mistake or omission, a fall of 15% on last year. Corrective action was undertaken in all of these cases.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>No. of Complaints</b>	<b>Times When Corrective Action Required</b>	<b>%</b>
Chief Executive's	13	2	15%
Customer Services	117	25	21%
Finance & Regulatory Services	91	7	8%

A summary of corrective action within each directorate is shown in Appendix E.

## **4.3 Contractors**

### ***Grounds Maintenance***

From 1<sup>st</sup> April - 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006 John O'Connor received 157 enquiries, 28% more than the same period last year. Of these 41 (26%) were identified as justified complaints compared to 32 (17%) last year to which the contractor programmed corrective works. The key issue of justified complaint was grass cutting (61% of all justified complaints).

John O'Connor completed 47% within 4 working days (26% less than last year), 73% within 10 working days (20% less than last year).

The Council received 16 direct complaints compared to 20 the previous year. 8 related to failure to deliver service (grass cutting, weeding and shrub cutting) and 3 related to water use during drought conditions. This year the Council received 4 quality of service compliments compared to 9 last year.

### ***Waste Management***

From 1<sup>st</sup> April - 30<sup>th</sup> September Service Team received 201 complaints (3 more than the same period last year), of these 47 (23%) related to Council policy and procedure. This was 20% lower than the previous year. These related to the no side waste policy, recycling arrangements and roll out of brown recycling bins. In the same period Service Team received 23 compliments (2 more than last year).

During the six-month period Service Team received 453 reports of missed bins. This is monitored as part of the contract and is a key performance indicator (PE1). During this period 17.31 missed collections per 100,000 were recorded (15.09 less than the target of 32.40). The percentage of these genuine missed bins collected (performance indicator PE2) with the contracted time scale (if reported by 12.00 the same day, after 12.00 the next day) was 94.26% (4.74% below target).

The Council received 34 direct complaints compared to 37 last year (including street cleansing, graffiti and domestic refuse). 7 were related to failure to deliver service compared to 13 last year, 7 to quality of service compared to 9 last year and 4 related to contractor staff conduct related to 3 last year. Unlike last year we recorded no direct complaints about disagreement with Council Policy.

The Council received 12 compliments compared to 13 compliments last year, 7 regarding quality of service.

### ***Sports Centres***

DC Leisure - Royston Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swim Centre and Archers

109 complaints, 10 comments and 5 compliments were handled by DC Leisure. Cleanliness at Hitchin Swim was the main issue of complaint resulting in revised cleaning schedules and procedures. The absence of a cleaner resulted in a noticeable increase in complaints which were resolved when the cleaner returned to work.

The Council received 13 complaints regarding Hitchin Swim Centre, mainly relating to cleanliness.

SLL - North Herts Leisure Centre and Letchworth Outdoor Pool

60 complaints, 13 comments and 26 compliments were handled by SLL. The complaints mainly related to cleanliness resulting in the employment of a cleaner, revised staff rotas to cope with peak period cleaning demands.

The Council received 3 complaints regarding North Herts Leisure Centre relating to cleanliness and badminton equipment.

#### **4.4 Local Government Ombudsman**

There were no cases of maladministration during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005-31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. 19 decisions were made during the year, 9 more than the previous year. The main services that received these were Planning (47%) and Housing (32%).

- 5 were declared outside the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) jurisdiction compared to one the previous year.
- 11 were declared to have no instance of maladministration compared to five the previous year.
- One was discontinued at the LGO's discretion, as there was no evidence of maladministration.
- Two were discontinued as local settlements were reached supported by the LGO the same number as last year:
  - 1) A complex housing application where the LGO supported the council's decision but a time and trouble payment was paid to the applicant of £50.
  - 2) A complex issue relating to noise nuisance and the location of a bring bank for glass bottles where the LGO supported the Council's decision but a time and trouble payment of £400 was paid due to a time delay between recognising the complaint as a statutory noise nuisance.

LGO complaints for the last three years are shown in Appendix F.

#### **4.5 Further Work**

The receipt, logging and monitoring of 3Cs was transferred to the Council's Customer Service Centre (CSC) from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006. Acknowledgements of 3Cs are now delivered at the point of contact with the customer, the customer being given their case number. All services receive a reminder e-mail if 3Cs are outstanding and the CSC actively reviews the volume of outstanding cases to get resolution. As a result we propose only to report the completion times for complaints. Standard reporting is being rolled out to services in January.

We have not seen a significant change in the volume of 3Cs since the transfer to the CSC, however we have yet to fully publicise this service as we are in the early start up of the CSC. From April we intend to publicise the service to the public to ensure they are encouraged to register any issues that they may have. This may result in an increase in recorded 3Cs.

Please see Appendix G for the future action plan with regard to the 3Cs.

### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There is no legal requirement to operate a complaints system. However, the legal consequence of failing to address a complaint through the 3Cs procedure could be significant. Best practice illustrates that complaints dealt with at an early stage reduce escalation, potentially to a legal claim.

5.2 Customers have the right to ask the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to investigate a complaint. The LGO prefers that a complaint should first be dealt with through the Council's complaint procedure. However, if the complaint is sufficiently

serious, the LGO can choose to investigate immediately. An explanatory leaflet 'How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman' is available at all Council reception desks stating which complaints the LGO can and cannot investigate.

## **6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 If the Council fails to follow the 3Cs procedure a justified complaint may not be resolved, causing further complaint to the Ombudsman and negative press coverage damaging our reputation as a council, not just a single service.
- 6.2 Claims for damages and compensation could be significant should the 3Cs procedure not be followed.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Council has a well established and effective training event to ensure that staff are trained to improved customer skills specifically for the requirements of the 3Cs procedure.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 Not applicable

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 PARC is recommended to note the good performance in managing 3Cs between April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> and the remedial action taken.
- 9.2 PARC is requested to endorse the work programme for the management of 3Cs.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 This report provides corporate reporting of 3Cs to allow issues raised formally by our customers and the positive action taken by the Council to be reviewed. This is also a requirement of the BSi standard complaints system standard CMSAS 86:2000.
- 10.2 Listening to our citizens to deliver responsive, high quality, value for money and customer focused services is a key Council strategic objective.

## **11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 Not applicable

## **12. APPENDICES**

- 12.1 Appendix A : 3Cs by Directorate
- 12.2 Appendix B: Reasons for Complaint
- 12.3 Appendix C: Customer Dissatisfaction and Actions
- 12.4 Appendix D: Council Performance 1<sup>st</sup> April - 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004, 2005 and 2006
- 12.5 Appendix E: Summary of Corrective Action
- 12.6 Appendix F: Local Government Ombudsman Complaints
- 12.7 Appendix G: Planned Actions

## **13. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 PARC Report 3C's 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005  
PARC Report 3C's 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005  
PARC Report 3C's 13<sup>th</sup> May 2004

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**TITLE OF REPORT: DISTRIBUTION OF OUTLOOK MAGAZINE**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

**1. SUMMARY**

This report is to inform Members of the current position with the distribution of the Council's quarterly residents' magazine *Outlook* and reviews the issues involved.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 To ensure that *Outlook* reaches as many households as possible within the District the magazine is distributed by a combination of local newspapers, using until now both *The Comet* and *Herts on Sunday*, and a specialist distributor. (The closure of *Herts on Sunday* on 10 December means that an alternative will have to be found for that element.) There are considerable savings through "piggybacking" on the local papers and currently these charge about a third of the price per 1,000 copies as a specialist or "solus" distributor, where *Outlook* may or may not be distributed with other magazines and leaflets.
- 3.2 We print 52,000 copies, enough theoretically for every address, and succeed in delivering to about 78%. This is comparable with most councils, some of whom claim to reach over 90% of addresses with their magazines but some of whom will admit to reaching only 60 per cent.
- 3.3 In response to concerns expressed by Southern Rural Members about the unreliable circulation of newspapers in the villages, the most recent issue of *Outlook* was given entirely to the solus distributor. As a back-up, we distributed further copies among local pubs and shops in the area.
- 3.4 It has to be said that our back checking against delivery of this issue has produced an extremely disappointing return, with only 36% of residents saying they had received it. This contrasts with the figure of 75% given in the summer District Wide Survey. We are urgently seeking an alternative distributor for the spring issue. Interestingly, a number of respondents said they normally received *Outlook* but had not received this particular edition.

## 4. ISSUES

- 4.1 There are alternatives to the present system, but all come at a price. There are alternative solus distributors, but the price asked by one who works for a number of other Hertfordshire Councils is three times our current average price for rural areas. Royal Mail are used by some councils and theoretically will deliver to all addresses. Their current price is about double our present cost but they are very inflexible and have to be booked several months in advance. If we miss their cut-off, the entire delivery is lost and we still have to pay.
- 4.2 According to the District Wide Survey, there is some difference between our five areas. Those residents saying they had had *Outlook* received through their door were:

Baldock	75%
Hitchin	78%
Letchworth GC	82%
Royston	70%
Southern Rural	75%
Total	77%

We have since established that the lower performance in Royston is due to the non-coverage of two new estates and this has now been corrected.

- 4.3 The current overall cost of distribution of *Outlook* is around £1,800 per issue. This compares with, for example, East Herts, who pay around £3,600, double our figure for a very slightly larger circulation.
- 4.4 It has been suggested that a more expensive but reliable service could be financed by dropping the periodicity of *Outlook* to three times per year, with the increased delivery costs being met by savings in design and printing of the fourth issue. Members are invited to comment on this suggestion.

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

## 6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The financial implications if a more expensive distribution system is thought necessary, indicated in 4.4 above, is an annual increase in delivery costs for the District, depending on the method chosen, of between £7,000 and £10,000. A firm quotation is currently being sought from Royal Mail. There is no budget provision for this increase.
- 6.2 Risks – effective distribution of *Outlook* assists the Council towards its strategic objective of achieving satisfied communities, by keeping residents informed of its activities.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no human resource implications
- 7.2 An equalities issue arises in the case of remote communities which may be difficult to serve.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 Members of Southern Rural Committee have expressed opinions and made suggestions.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That the Communications Manager should continue to pursue cost effective methods of distributing *Outlook* with a view to improving coverage.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The improved circulation of *Outlook* creates a better informed community and helps the Council to meet its strategic objective in regard to satisfied communities.

## **11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 These are discussed in section 4 above.

## **12. APPENDICES**

- 12.1 None

## **13. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 13.1 Roger Harrison  
Communications Manager  
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## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 None

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**TITLE OF REPORT: HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2006**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS &amp; PERFORMANCE

**1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To update PARC on the current progress in meeting the targets for the High Level Performance Indicators during October and November 2006 as attached in Appendix A.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

- 2.1 This report does not recommend a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In March 2006 PARC agreed that nineteen (including sub-sets) High Level Performance Indicators should be monitored on a monthly basis throughout 2006/7. Indicators at red or amber status should be highlighted at Corporate Management Team where a Rescue Recovery Package would be agreed if considered appropriate. The performance indicator would then be reported to PARC with details of the progress towards meeting the performance target.
- 3.2 The October report was presented to CMT on 28 November and the November results were circulated to CMT end of December 2006.
- 3.3 There are currently no 'rescue recovery plans' in operation.

**4. TRAFFIC LIGHT STATUS AT THE END OF NOVEMBER 2006**

- 4.1 At the end of November 2006 the High level Indicator status was as follows:

September	October	November
12 indicators at status green	12 Indicators at status green	13 indicators at status green
5 indicators at status amber	5 Indicators at status amber	4 indicators at status amber
2 indicators at status red	2 Indicators at status red	2 indicators at status red *

\*One of these indicators is LPI 24 '% staff receiving appraisal within the allowed time-scale' All staff appraisals were completed by 27 November 2006.

- 4.2 The performance results and commentary can be found at Appendix A.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None.

## **6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS (if appropriate)**

8.1 Not applicable.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That PARC notes the status of the High Level Indicators during October and November 2006.

9.2 That PARC notes areas of under-achievement as well as good performance.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 The recommendation(s) contained within paragraph 9 are made in accordance with the declared policy of the Council.

## **11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

11.1 Not applicable

## **12. APPENDICES**

12.1 Appendix A - Details of the High Level Performance Indicators – April to November 2006.

## **13. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 Performance Information Files 2000 to date - available from the Performance Library, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth.

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# HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007

# APPENDIX A

BVPI	Description	Cumulative/ Monthly	@ 30 Apr	@ 31 May	@ 30 June	@ 31 July	@ 31 Aug	@ 30 Sept	@ 31 Oct	@ 30 Nov	@ 31 Dec	@ 31 Jan	@ 28 Feb	@ 31 Mar
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## Financial & Regulatory Services Directorate

BV76d	The number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) prosecutions and sanctions, per year, per 1,000 caseload, in the local authority area.	Cumulative	2006/07	0.00	0.98	1.46	2.31	3.15	3.62	3.93	4.42				
			Profiled target	0.00	0.50	1.00	2.30	2.50	3.30	3.80	4.10	4.50	4.70	4.90	5.00
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	Reported quarterly in 05/06		1.60	Reported quarterly in 05/06		4.40	Reported quarterly in 05/06		4.30	Reported quarterly in 05/06		6.74

BV78a	The average processing time taken for all new housing and council tax benefit claims submitted to the local authority.	Cumulative	2006/07	28.2	25.3	24.9	23.7	24.0	22.4	22.6	22.7				
			Profiled target	38.0	37.5	37.0	36.5	36.5	36.5	36.0	35.5	35.5	35.0	35.0	35.0
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	No data	No data	44.1	45.2	43.0	38.7	31.9	30.2	30.3	31.5	31.4	28.7

BV183b	The average length of stay in hostel accommodation of households that are unintentionally homeless and in priority need (weeks).	Cumulative	2006/07	51.00	36.89	40.47	38.17	36.37	42.06	42.63	43.79				
			Profiled target	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00
			Status	Red	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red			
			2005/06	75.43	56.58	51.4	46	46	41.19	43.75	42.59	41.47	42	42.65	39.92

The details of households that have left hostel accommodation, which are used to calculate the cumulative return for this performance indicator, have been amended. This has resulted in a change to the previously reported cumulative returns for May, June, July, August and September. This report has been updated to show the revised figures.

The performance return increased in both October and November and as a result, the indicator has just obtained a red traffic light status. This was partly due to offers of housing in a new development at Great Ashby being delayed because of problems with the building work. The properties were offered and accepted by clients but stays in hostel accommodation were extended due to the completion dates being delayed by over three months. To improve performance, factors such as the current working practices and policies that influence the length of stay in hostel accommodation are now being reviewed. For example, a review of the allocation scheme has been entered on the pending list for the February 2007 Forward Plan.

# HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007

# APPENDIX A

BVPI	Description	Cumulative/ Monthly	@ 30 Apr	@ 31 May	@ 30 June	@ 31 July	@ 31 Aug	@ 30 Sept	@ 31 Oct	@ 30 Nov	@ 31 Dec	@ 31 Jan	@ 28 Feb	@ 31 Mar
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BV109a	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 60% of major applications in 13 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	66.67% 4/6	84.62% 11/13	78.26% 18/23	76.92% 20/26	75.00% 21/28	69.70% 23/33	71.43% 30/42	70.21% 33/47					
			Profiled target	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	71.43%	66.67%	54.55%	64.71%	65.00%	68.18%	66.67%	66.67%	66.67%	68.75%	69.39%	70.59%	
BV109b	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 65% of minor applications in 8 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	66.67% 20/30	68.12% 47/69	63.27% 62/98	59.42% 82/138	62.11% 100/161	65.08% 123/189	66.05% 142/215	67.52% 158/234					
			Profiled target	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	
			Status	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green					
			2005/06	73.68%	73.85%	69.79%	67.20%	70.00%	71.81%	72.15%	71.90%	70.57%	71.02%	71.26%	71.97%	
BV109c	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 80% of other applications in 8 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	77.53% 69/89	77.05% 141/183	79.32% 234/295	80.63% 333/413	81.17% 418/515	81.74% 488/597	81.70% 558/683	81.70% 634/776					
			Profiled target	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green					
			2005/06	89.19%	85.48%	85.28%	82.82%	84.04%	83.67%	83.68%	83.78%	83.93%	83.74%	83.25%	83.81%	

BV204	The number of planning appeal decisions allowed as a percentage of the total number of planning appeals against refusals of planning applications.	Cumulative	2006/07	0.0% 0/4	20.0% 2/10	13.3% 2/15	16.7% 3/18	14.3% 3/21	12.5% 3/24	16.7% 5/30	18.2% 6/33				
			Profiled target	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	50.0%	30.0%	23.1%	25.0%	25.0%	28.6%	25.0%	27.6%	27.6%	28.1%	25.7%	25.0%

BVPI	Description	Cumulative /Monthly	@ 30 Apr	@ 31 May	@ 30 June	@ 31 July	@ 31 Aug	@ 30 Sept	@ 31 Oct	@ 30 Nov	@ 31 Dec	@ 31 Jan	@ 28 Feb	@ 31 Mar
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## Customer Services Directorate

BV12	The number of working days/shifts lost to the Local Authority due to sickness absence	Cumulative	2006/07	0.60	1.20	1.71	2.42	3.25	3.97	4.81	6.12				
			Profiled target	0.44	0.88	1.52	2.16	2.80	3.60	4.48	5.36	6.16	6.88	7.36	8 days
			Status	Red	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Amber				
			2005/06	0.49	0.92	1.61	2.48	3.27	3.82	4.59	5.53	6.57	7.53	8.37	9.09

**BV12** We have a number of new long-term sick cases and a number of existing serious cases. All cases are automatically referred to our Occupational Health service and cases are monitored through the case conference process working to resolve each case as quickly as possible. The Head of Human Resources will attend the next case conference on 11 January to assess progress and advise on appropriate action.

To improve the performance of this indicator managers are encouraged to apply the attendance procedure where appropriate and a new training course has been launched to further coach and train managers to use these procedures.

Also, we are currently preparing an article for 'Team Talk', the council's internal monthly newsletter, highlighting the problems with the current sickness absence rate. The article will urge staff to keep absences down to only those that are absolutely necessary and ask officers to consider the cost to tax-payer's and the pressure on colleagues to cover any absences.

BV82ai	Percentage of household waste arising which have been sent by the Authority for recycling	Cumulative	2006/07	13.35%	12.92%	13.62%	13.85%	13.41%	14.24%	14.44%	14.90%				
			Profiled target	13.64%	12.50%	12.49%	12.57%	12.84%	12.80%	13.31%	13.49%	13.60%	13.72%	13.92%	13.63%
			Status	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	14.5%	12.08%	13.72%	13.78%	14.07%	14.01%	14.44%	14.64%	14.64%	14.94%	14.98%	15.34%

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BV82bi	Percentage of household waste sent by the Authority for composting or treatment by anaerobic digestion	Cumulative	2006/07	14.06%	21.53%	23.87%	22.86%	21.70%	22.28%	22.18%	22.33%				
			Profiled target	14.4%	20.59%	21.54%	21.40%	21.09%	20.97%	20.27%	19.80%	18.87%	17.84%	17.20%	16.59%
			Status	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	9.56%	11.54%	14.88%	14.99%	14.75%	14.72%	14.65%	14.20%	13.52%	12.52%	11.89%	11.40%

**HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007**

**APPENDIX A**

<b>BVPI</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cumulative /Monthly</b>		<b>@ 30 Apr</b>	<b>@ 31 May</b>	<b>@ 30 June</b>	<b>@ 31 July</b>	<b>@ 31 Aug</b>	<b>@ 30 Sept</b>	<b>@ 31 Oct</b>	<b>@ 30 Nov</b>	<b>@ 31 Dec</b>	<b>@ 31 Jan</b>	<b>@ 28 Feb</b>	<b>@ 31 Mar</b>
<b>BV84a</b>	No. of kilograms of household waste collected per head of the population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	35.3	83.1	132.8	172.5	210.9	253.0	<b>295.3</b>	<b>325.7</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	47.8	97.3	147.1	189.3	232.0	278.1	<b>319.3</b>	<b>362.2</b>	398.2	435.5	468.7	511.2kg
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	43.9	85.7	130.6	168.4	206.6	248.0	<b>287.0</b>	<b>326.0</b>	358.9	397.9	434.8	470.4kg
<b>BV170a</b>	The number of visits to/usage's of Local Authority funded or part-funded museums/galleries per 1,000 population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	59	135	184	230	309	348	<b>395</b>	<b>431</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	37	75	113	167	220	275	<b>326</b>	<b>350</b>	388	425	462	500
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	32	57	91	145	195	222	<b>268</b>	<b>298</b>	327	354	419	490
<b>BV170b</b>	The number of those visits to Local Authority funded, or part funded museums/galleries that were in person, per 1,000 population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	24	46	68	94	126	152	<b>185</b>	<b>220</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	24	46	70	108	149	173	<b>204</b>	<b>231</b>	251	273	300	325
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Amber</b>				
			2005/06	26	47	69	103	140	160	<b>189</b>	<b>213</b>	229	246	271	295
<b>BV170c</b>	The number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	0	37	424	527	527	663	<b>926</b>	<b>1527</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	213	426	640	747	747	800	<b>1226</b>	<b>1653</b>	2080	2453	2827	3200
			<b>Status</b>	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>				
			2005/06	197	854	1318	1440	1440	1533	<b>1628</b>	<b>2363</b>	2635	2867	3092	3626

**BV170b** The number of visits to our museums in person is below target although it does show an increase when compared to the same time last year.

**BV170c** The number of school visits is still behind target but has moved from red to amber, the actual number of visitors from schools during November was 601.

## HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007

## APPENDIX A

BVPI	Description	Cumulative /Monthly		@ 30 Apr	@ 31 May	@ 30 June	@ 31 July	@ 31 Aug	@ 30 Sept	@ 31 Oct	@ 30 Nov	@ 31 Dec	@ 31 Jan	@ 28 Feb	@ 31 Mar	
LPI 11 (LC4)	The percentage of market stalls hired as a percentage of stalls available	Monthly	2006/07	52%	50%	50%	49%	54%	55%	56%	60%					
			Profiled target	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green				
			2005/06	53.22%	54.48%	54.98%	54.85%	53.72%	53.72%	55.38%	57.46%	57.26%	51.49%	51.33%	50.58%	

**LPI 11** Utilisation of market stalls has increased by 4% since October. The introduction of reduced stall hire rates of £10/stall on Tuesday and £15/stall on Saturday at Hitchin market has been the main cause for the improved overall utilisation rate. The reduced rates are a 6 month trial that was introduced in August 2006 by Full Council. Cabinet met in December to determine if the scheme should continue. Cabinet have requested officers to provide them with options of allowing discounts to traders with less financial impact to the authority. These options will be presented to Hitchin Area Committee on the 23rd January, their responses will be presented to Cabinet on the 30th January. Any supported options will be presented to Council on the 8th February.

LPI 15 (LC15)	The number of swims and other leisure visits per 1000 population	Cumulative	2006/07	645	1299	2020	2934	3701	4274	4921	5540					
			Profiled target	626	1233	1857	2725	3536	4011	4512	4975	5307	5881	6475	7300	
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	512	1005	1578	2453	3247	3796	4329	4804	5136	5718	6312	7137	

## HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007

## APPENDIX A

BVPI	Description	Cumulative /Monthly	@ 30 Apr	@ 31 May	@ 30 June	@ 31 July	@ 31 Aug	@ 30 Sept	@ 31 Oct	@ 30 Nov	@ 31 Dec	@ 31 Jan	@ 28 Feb	@ 31 Mar
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LPI 24 (L59)	% staff receiving appraisal within the allowed time-scale	Cumulative	2006/07	1.47%	9.58%	36.12%	66.63%	75.41%	84.73%	92.51%	100%						
			Profiled target	3.6%	13%	26%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		
			Status	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Completed				
			2005/06	3.37%	14.22%	29.73%	49.24%	62.93%	68.87%	79.77%	81.58%	83.89%	91.50%	92.12%	92.23%		

LPI 24 – As at 31 July (the allowed timescale) 66.63% were completed.

As at 27th November 100% of appraisals were completed.

LPI 19 (PE1)	No. of collections missed per 100,000 collections of household waste	Monthly	2006/07	14.41	24.31	17.96	16.05	13.83	17.04	15.83	16.35				
			Profiled target	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	33.04	29.83	32.04	24.54	33.19	24.10	16.36	23.85	21.17	14.19	14.62	15.39

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LPI 20 (PE2)	% of missed collections put right within allowed time-scale	Monthly	2006/07	96.55%	96.33%	94.87%	95.83%	91.94%	89.19%	95.77%	95.77%				
			Profiled target	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber			
			2005/06	100%	100%	99.22%	96.08%	100%	100%	97.06%	96.88%	97.73%	96.61%	96.36%	95.31%

LPI 20 This issue was raised with the contractors by the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services in early November. The contractors have responded with assurances that they are committed to improving the performance of this indicator.

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## Financial & Regulatory Services Directorate

BV76d	The number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) prosecutions and sanctions, per year, per 1,000 caseload, in the local authority area.	Cumulative	2006/07	0.00	0.98	1.46	2.31	3.15	3.62	3.93	4.42				
			Profiled target	0.00	0.50	1.00	2.30	2.50	3.30	3.80	4.10	4.50	4.70	4.90	5.00
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	Reported quarterly in 05/06		1.60	Reported quarterly in 05/06		4.40	Reported quarterly in 05/06		4.30	Reported quarterly in 05/06		6.74

BV78a	The average processing time taken for all new housing and council tax benefit claims submitted to the local authority.	Cumulative	2006/07	28.2	25.3	24.9	23.7	24.0	22.4	22.6	22.7				
			Profiled target	38.0	37.5	37.0	36.5	36.5	36.5	36.0	35.5	35.5	35.0	35.0	35.0
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
			2005/06	No data	No data	44.1	45.2	43.0	38.7	31.9	30.2	30.3	31.5	31.4	28.7

BV183b	The average length of stay in hostel accommodation of households that are unintentionally homeless and in priority need (weeks).	Cumulative	2006/07	51.00	36.89	40.47	38.17	36.37	42.06	42.63	43.79				
			Profiled target	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00
			Status	Red	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red			
			2005/06	75.43	56.58	51.4	46	46	41.19	43.75	42.59	41.47	42	42.65	39.92

The details of households that have left hostel accommodation, which are used to calculate the cumulative return for this performance indicator, have been amended. This has resulted in a change to the previously reported cumulative returns for May, June, July, August and September. This report has been updated to show the revised figures.

The performance return increased in both October and November and as a result, the indicator has just obtained a red traffic light status. This was partly due to offers of housing in a new development at Great Ashby being delayed because of problems with the building work. The properties were offered and accepted by clients but stays in hostel accommodation were extended due to the completion dates being delayed by over three months. To improve performance, factors such as the current working practices and policies that influence the length of stay in hostel accommodation are now being reviewed. For example, a review of the allocation scheme has been entered on the pending list for the February 2007 Forward Plan.

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BV109a	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 60% of major applications in 13 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	66.67% 4/6	84.62% 11/13	78.26% 18/23	76.92% 20/26	75.00% 21/28	69.70% 23/33	71.43% 30/42	70.21% 33/47					
			Profiled target	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	71.43%	66.67%	54.55%	64.71%	65.00%	68.18%	66.67%	66.67%	66.67%	68.75%	69.39%	70.59%	
BV109b	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 65% of minor applications in 8 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	66.67% 20/30	68.12% 47/69	63.27% 62/98	59.42% 82/138	62.11% 100/161	65.08% 123/189	66.05% 142/215	67.52% 158/234					
			Profiled target	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	65.00%	
			Status	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green					
			2005/06	73.68%	73.85%	69.79%	67.20%	70.00%	71.81%	72.15%	71.90%	70.57%	71.02%	71.26%	71.97%	
BV109c	Percentage of planning applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 80% of other applications in 8 weeks	Cumulative	2006/07	77.53% 69/89	77.05% 141/183	79.32% 234/295	80.63% 333/413	81.17% 418/515	81.74% 488/597	81.70% 558/683	81.70% 634/776					
			Profiled target	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	80.00%	
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green					
			2005/06	89.19%	85.48%	85.28%	82.82%	84.04%	83.67%	83.68%	83.78%	83.93%	83.74%	83.25%	83.81%	

BV204	The number of planning appeal decisions allowed as a percentage of the total number of planning appeals against refusals of planning applications.	Cumulative	2006/07	0.0% 0/4	20.0% 2/10	13.3% 2/15	16.7% 3/18	14.3% 3/21	12.5% 3/24	16.7% 5/30	18.2% 6/33				
			Profiled target	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	50.0%	30.0%	23.1%	25.0%	25.0%	28.6%	25.0%	27.6%	27.6%	28.1%	25.7%	25.0%

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## Customer Services Directorate

BV12	The number of working days/shifts lost to the Local Authority due to sickness absence	Cumulative	2006/07	0.60	1.20	1.71	2.42	3.25	3.97	<b>4.81</b>	<b>6.12</b>				
			Profiled target	0.44	0.88	1.52	2.16	2.80	3.60	<b>4.48</b>	<b>5.36</b>	6.16	6.88	7.36	8 days
			Status	Red	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Amber</b>				
			2005/06	0.49	0.92	1.61	2.48	3.27	3.82	<b>4.59</b>	<b>5.53</b>	6.57	7.53	8.37	9.09

**BV12** We have a number of new long-term sick cases and a number of existing serious cases. All cases are automatically referred to our Occupational Health service and cases are monitored through the case conference process working to resolve each case as quickly as possible. The Head of Human Resources will attend the next case conference on 11 January to assess progress and advise on appropriate action.

To improve the performance of this indicator managers are encouraged to apply the attendance procedure where appropriate and a new training course has been launched to further coach and train managers to use these procedures.

Also, we are currently preparing an article for 'Team Talk', the council's internal monthly newsletter, highlighting the problems with the current sickness absence rate. The article will urge staff to keep absences down to only those that are absolutely necessary and ask officers to consider the cost to tax-payer's and the pressure on colleagues to cover any absences.

BV82ai	Percentage of household waste arising which have been sent by the Authority for recycling	Cumulative	2006/07	13.35%	12.92%	13.62%	13.85%	13.41%	14.24%	<b>14.44%</b>	<b>14.90%</b>				
			Profiled target	13.64%	12.50%	12.49%	12.57%	12.84%	12.80%	<b>13.31%</b>	<b>13.49%</b>	13.60%	13.72%	13.92%	13.63%
			Status	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	14.5%	12.08%	13.72%	13.78%	14.07%	14.01%	<b>14.44%</b>	<b>14.64%</b>	14.64%	14.94%	14.98%	15.34%
BV82bi	Percentage of household waste sent by the Authority for composting or treatment by anaerobic digestion	Cumulative	2006/07	14.06%	21.53%	23.87%	22.86%	21.70%	22.28%	<b>22.18%</b>	<b>22.33%</b>				
			Profiled target	14.4%	20.59%	21.54%	21.40%	21.09%	20.97%	<b>20.27%</b>	<b>19.80%</b>	18.87%	17.84%	17.20%	16.59%
			Status	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	9.56%	11.54%	14.88%	14.99%	14.75%	14.72%	<b>14.65%</b>	<b>14.20%</b>	13.52%	12.52%	11.89%	11.40%

**HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007**

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<b>BV84a</b>	No. of kilograms of household waste collected per head of the population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	35.3	83.1	132.8	172.5	210.9	253.0	<b>295.3</b>	<b>325.7</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	47.8	97.3	147.1	189.3	232.0	278.1	<b>319.3</b>	<b>362.2</b>	398.2	435.5	468.7	511.2kg
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	43.9	85.7	130.6	168.4	206.6	248.0	<b>287.0</b>	<b>326.0</b>	358.9	397.9	434.8	470.4kg
<b>BV170a</b>	The number of visits to/usage's of Local Authority funded or part-funded museums/galleries per 1,000 population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	59	135	184	230	309	348	<b>395</b>	<b>431</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	37	75	113	167	220	275	<b>326</b>	<b>350</b>	388	425	462	500
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>				
			2005/06	32	57	91	145	195	222	<b>268</b>	<b>298</b>	327	354	419	490
<b>BV170b</b>	The number of those visits to Local Authority funded, or part funded museums/galleries that were in person, per 1,000 population	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	24	46	68	94	126	152	<b>185</b>	<b>220</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	24	46	70	108	149	173	<b>204</b>	<b>231</b>	251	273	300	325
			<b>Status</b>	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Amber</b>				
			2005/06	26	47	69	103	140	160	<b>189</b>	<b>213</b>	229	246	271	295
<b>BV170c</b>	The number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups	Cumulative	<b>2006/07</b>	0	37	424	527	527	663	<b>926</b>	<b>1527</b>				
			<b>Profiled target</b>	213	426	640	747	747	800	<b>1226</b>	<b>1653</b>	2080	2453	2827	3200
			<b>Status</b>	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>				
			2005/06	197	854	1318	1440	1440	1533	<b>1628</b>	<b>2363</b>	2635	2867	3092	3626

**BV170b** The number of visits to our museums in person is below target although it does show an increase when compared to the same time last year.

**BV170c** The number of school visits is still behind target but has moved from red to amber, the actual number of visitors from schools during November was 601.

## HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2006/2007

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LPI 11 (LC4)	The percentage of market stalls hired as a percentage of stalls available	Monthly	2006/07	52%	50%	50%	49%	54%	55%	56%	60%					
			Profiled target	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	58%	
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green				
			2005/06	53.22%	54.48%	54.98%	54.85%	53.72%	53.72%	55.38%	57.46%	57.26%	51.49%	51.33%	50.58%	

**LPI 11** Utilisation of market stalls has increased by 4% since October. The introduction of reduced stall hire rates of £10/stall on Tuesday and £15/stall on Saturday at Hitchin market has been the main cause for the improved overall utilisation rate. The reduced rates are a 6 month trial that was introduced in August 2006 by Full Council. Cabinet met in December to determine if the scheme should continue. Cabinet have requested officers to provide them with options of allowing discounts to traders with less financial impact to the authority. These options will be presented to Hitchin Area Committee on the 23rd January, their responses will be presented to Cabinet on the 30th January. Any supported options will be presented to Council on the 8th February.

LPI 15 (LC15)	The number of swims and other leisure visits per 1000 population	Cumulative	2006/07	645	1299	2020	2934	3701	4274	4921	5540					
			Profiled target	626	1233	1857	2725	3536	4011	4512	4975	5307	5881	6475	7300	
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	512	1005	1578	2453	3247	3796	4329	4804	5136	5718	6312	7137	

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LPI 24 (L59)	% staff receiving appraisal within the allowed time-scale	Cumulative	2006/07	1.47%	9.58%	36.12%	66.63%	75.41%	84.73%	92.51%	100%						
			Profiled target	3.6%	13%	26%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
			Status	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Completed				
			2005/06	3.37%	14.22%	29.73%	49.24%	62.93%	68.87%	79.77%	81.58%	83.89%	91.50%	92.12%	92.23%		

LPI 24 – As at 31 July (the allowed timescale) 66.63% were completed.

As at 27th November 100% of appraisals were completed.

LPI 19 (PE1)	No. of collections missed per 100,000 collections of household waste	Monthly	2006/07	14.41	24.31	17.96	16.05	13.83	17.04	15.83	16.35					
			Profiled target	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40	32.40
			Status	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green				
			2005/06	33.04	29.83	32.04	24.54	33.19	24.10	16.36	23.85	21.17	14.19	14.62	15.39	

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LPI 20 (PE2)	% of missed collections put right within allowed time-scale	Monthly	2006/07	96.55%	96.33%	94.87%	95.83%	91.94%	89.19%	95.77%	95.77%				
			Profiled target	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%
			Status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber			
			2005/06	100%	100%	99.22%	96.08%	100%	100%	97.06%	96.88%	97.73%	96.61%	96.36%	95.31%

LPI 20 This issue was raised with the contractors by the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services in early November. The contractors have responded with assurances that they are committed to improving the performance of this indicator.

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**10**

**TITLE OF REPORT: AREA GOVERNANCE AND THE COST OF DEMOCRACY BUDGET SAVINGS 2006/07**

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES, HEAD OF PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL AND HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Attached is the report that was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 19 December 2006.

The Performance, Audit and Review Committee, Scrutiny Committee and the five Area Committees have been invited to comment on the report before it is re-considered by Cabinet on 27 February 2007. Members' views are invited.

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**TITLE OF REPORT: AREA GOVERNANCE AND THE COST OF DEMOCRACY BUDGET SAVINGS 2006/07**

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES, HEAD OF PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL AND HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS: COUNCILLOR TRICIA GIBBS  
COUNCILLOR ANDREW YOUNG  
COUNCILLOR RICHARD THAKE

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report sets out a series of proposals and options to determine savings which may be made if the Council's approach to its governance and decision making arrangements is restructured.
- 1.2 The aim is to achieve the target of £50,000 under the heading 'costs of democracy' that was agreed as part of the Service and Financial Planning process for 2006/7.
- 1.3 Cabinet is asked to consider and consult on the savings proposals and options prior to making any consequent recommendations to Council on the constitutional change necessary to effect their implementation.
- 1.4 The report is predicated on the need to streamline the decision making processes and procedures of the Council and, in so doing, reduce by a commensurate level the 'bureaucracy' of administration, management and other officer support that the current structures and practices generate. While this is intended to improve efficiency, it will also mean a change in the way the Council works.
- 1.5 For the purpose of this report, the 'costs of democracy' are defined by the following CIPFA budget headings:

Costs of Democracy is a corporate cost centre held within the Chief Executive's Directorate which covers the direct costs and recharges from across the authority to fund the costs of supporting the democratic process. These activities include Member Services, officers time in preparing for and attending meetings, pre-meetings, political briefings, technical and professional advice, corporate management time, Chairman's functions, Member training, allowances etc.
- 1.6 This report also aims to respond to the outstanding issues on Area Governance that were originally identified by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group in May 2005 and which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting in June 2006.
- 1.7 Any decisions that are taken at this stage need to be mindful of the thinking that is currently contained within the Lyons Review of Local Government, the LGA Paper Closer to People, the Local Government White Paper and the Barker Review.

## **2. FORWARD PLAN**

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was referred to in the Forward Plan of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006, Cabinet resolved:

To agree that officers undertake further detailed work to review the options in paragraph 4.6 on the area governance and decision making arrangements of the Council in order to meet the future savings requirements of the Service and Financial Planning process.

And

That a further report on proposals for new arrangements will be submitted to Cabinet in October 2006.

- 3.2 Paragraph 4.6 stated:

'However, it is also evident that these savings cannot be found unless there is a more thorough and systematic review of the overall decision making processes of the Council, which include the following:

- Cabinet and delegated decision making to Portfolio Holders, Area Committees and Officers
- Operational arrangements for PARC/Scrutiny functions
- Cost effectiveness and consistency of planning determination at Area Committees
- Enhancing capacity of community leadership by Area Committees
- Changing the functions of Area Committees
- Reducing the number and frequency of meetings
- Reducing the number and frequency of ancillary meetings, sub-groups, etc'

- 3.3 This report sets out a series of proposals and options with associated costings that aim not only to meet the required savings but also to offer additional for 2007/8.

## **4. KEY PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 In view of the overall budget size and the desire to reduce 'bureaucracy' and meet efficiency targets, a strategic approach to finding savings has been adopted through the Financial Strategy. It is considered that a change in the system of decision making across the authority which entails a reduction in the number of meetings and, crucially, a commensurate reduction of work load and officer time in administering and supporting these, will both enable the authority to make the savings and maintain a sustainable position in ensuring transparent, accountable decision making.

- 4.2 The proposals for savings set out in this report have been considered in the framework of the Council's corporate objectives, the further development of devolved decision making, the drive to improve the community engagement aspects of the democratic process, the need to improve planning performance and to deliver on the enhanced role of community leadership which has developed since the implementation of the

Local Government Act 2000 and the duty contained therein to develop a community strategy and the power to act for the improvement of the well-being of the district. Options recommended may impact on the constitutional framework and how decision making is exercised, with potential changes to consultation feedback, increased use of officer decision making and portfolio holder consultation.

#### 4.3 **Frequency and Operation of Key Meetings**

##### **Council Meetings**

The Council currently meets at a frequency of 9 times per year, with special meetings in addition. The Constitution states that there will be at least 7 timetabled meetings per annum. The proposal is that the frequency could be reduced to 6 times a year with minimal impact on the range of decisions that Council has to make.

##### **Cabinet and Portfolio Holders**

It is recognised that Cabinet increasingly has a significant amount of work in which it is involved, at least in terms of the range and length of reports on which it is asked simply to note.

Cabinet presently meets 11 times per year with special meetings in addition. It is proposed that this number could reduce to 6 times per year. A schedule linking to each Council meeting would be established.

By themselves, the reduction of meetings will only contribute marginally to the savings required. Greater savings are feasible if there was to be a change in the way that the decision making that is currently made by Cabinet sitting as a committee would be made instead by individual Portfolio Holders or officers.

It is therefore proposed that a review of the decisions made at Cabinet which could be delegated to Portfolio Holders is undertaken. However, if these were key decisions, they would still require input from Committee Services and would be referenced on the Forward Plan and involve public notification, recording and publication.

It is further proposed that many of the reports currently submitted to Cabinet should be sent out as information items in M.I.S. An increased use of MIS through electronic means would ensure greater member awareness of decisions made.

##### **PARC/Scrutiny**

Consideration was given to combining the PARC and Scrutiny Committees, but it is proposed that PARC and Scrutiny should be retained as the most appropriate way in which the performance, review and scrutiny functions can be delivered for the Council.

However, a review of the Terms of Reference for each committee should be undertaken to define more precisely the respective areas of work, so as to avoid any duplication or confusion. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups should be limited to two in any one year.

A reduction for each Committee to meet six times per year would help achieve some savings, reflecting the similar reductions to Council and Cabinet.

#### 4.4 Savings and Implications

The combined savings made from a reduction of Council, Cabinet, PARC and Scrutiny meetings with consequent increased decision making by Portfolio Holders are set out in paragraph 4.11.

#### 4.5 Central Development Control Committee

It is proposed that the area based decision making (ABDM) of Area Committees meeting on a minimum of 45 occasions a year should be replaced by a single central Development Control Committee that would meet for a minimum of 12 occasions a year.

A central Development Control Committee would consist of 15 members, drawn from a wider pool of Councillors representing, each of the five Area Committees. In this way, each area would be directly represented. Cabinet Members would be excluded from this Committee, but it would have to be politically balanced. The current equation used to determine committee membership would suggest 10 Conservatives, 3 Labour and 2 Liberal Democrats.

In determining the role of planning in Area Committees versus a single Development Control Committee, consideration needs to be given to the efficiency and effectiveness of the current arrangement of the five Area Committees working separately in their localities in comparison to having one central Committee that deals with all planning matters for the entire district.

The key drivers to improving planning arrangements are:

1. The speed and efficiency of decision making – BVPI 109 sets a requirement upon the Authority to determine applications within certain time scales.
2. Consistency of decision making.
3. Ability for Members to act as ward representatives (advocates) versus quasi-judicial makers.

##### 1. Speed of Decision Making

The Government's targets for dealing with planning applications means that for major applications 60% of those have to be dealt with within 13 weeks, for minor applications it is 65% within 8 weeks and for other (householder) applications 80% within 8 weeks.

The current arrangements of 45 Area Committees per year mean that in many instances it is 5 to 6 weeks between an Area Committee meeting for any one particular area. Given the current cycle of Area Committee meetings, it is increasingly difficult for applications to be dealt with within the prescribed periods, taking into account:

1. Member call-in arrangements
2. Consultation with statutory bodies
3. Administration of applications

In respect of item 1, Member call-in arrangements have been revised and the call-in period has been reduced from 28 days to 21 days.

For item 2, there is no scope for amending the time period within which statutory consultees can respond. However, the Member call-in period and the consultation for statutory consultees is now in accordance. At present a maximum of 10% of applications which go to committee are determined within the statutory time scales although overall we are achieving our BVPI 109 target. The main factor with the 'poorer' performance of applications that go to Area Committees is the time-cycle of Area Committee meetings. In comparison with authorities across Hertfordshire, and in particular those who have good performance levels, the majority have planning committees which meet with a frequency of between 3 and 4 weeks, but these are centralised and not area.

With regard to item 3, there is a constant improvement in the way that we process planning applications and booking in and handling of applications normally now occurs within 3 days of receipt. This element of service delivery will continue to be kept under review by the Head of Service.

## **2. Consistency in Decision Making**

At present, the five Area Committees act in a quasi-judicial regulatory manner to determine planning applications across the district. It is essential that there is consistency of sound planning advice provided to Members of the various area committees for the handling of applications in order to ensure proper decisions are made. In the past there have been instances where decisions in one area of the district have not been consistent with other areas. This becomes problematic in an appeal situation where appellants can use such different interpretation of policy to seek to justify proposals that the Council does not wish to support. While the Council's appeals record is good, it could be improved further through more consistency in decision making that can be better achieved through a central Development Control Committee.

## **3. Advocate Versus Decision Maker**

In the current system, all Members of the Council are decision makers in respect of planning matters. This can lead to conflict between this regulatory role and the role of community advocate. In responding to any planning application, Members have clear guidance in the Planning Code of Practice, which is designed to assist them in having particular regard to issues of predetermination and perception of bias. This supplements the Code of Conduct.

These cannot avoid all potential threats of unlawfulness in the Council's planning functions but officers are of the view, supported by experience in other authorities, that the establishment of a central Development Control Committee would enable those Members who are not Members of the Development Control Committee to act as local advocates in a less restrictive manner, not being bound by the same constraints as if they were a decision maker. It should also be noted that a member cannot act as an advocate before the Development Control Committee if they have a prejudicial interest.

### **4.6 Savings and Implications**

A move to have all planning applications determined by a central Development Control Committee would significantly reduce the level of Planning Officer time needed to service and advise the Committee.

For example, at present, Area Committee planning business time on average is 75 hours per year in the actual meetings, but this excludes officer travel, set up and take down times. Indeed, Planning Officers often attend for a full Area Committee meeting which takes up considerable more time. A central Committee meeting 12 times a year for an average of 3 hours concentrating solely on planning issues, could operate much more effectively.

Arising from this, it is proposed that there are officer related savings to be made that equate to £3,500 per year.

It is, however, recognised that there may well be further savings to be made in the way in which planning decisions are determined, eg: through collaborative working with Anite and subsequent changes in working practices. Further examination of the wider Planning and Development budgets are required that are outside the scope of this report.

#### **4.7 Changing Functions of Area Committees**

Each Area Committee meets at least 9 times per year and in addition to their regulatory function of planning and development control, they have the community leadership and engagement role in which they can establish closer links with the communities that they serve.

However, in the event that the development control function no longer lies with the Area Committees, there will not be the need for them to meet on so many occasions. Within the range of proposals presented in this report, it is suggested that the Area Committees only need to meet a maximum of 6 times a year, commensurate with the frequency of other Council Committees, except Development Control.

Without the regulatory function, and though they may meet less frequently, the Committees will, nevertheless, have greater scope for developing their scrutiny function and, principally, that of community leadership, well-being and engagement.

The development of such actions and approaches is well documented in the present discussions on the Lyons Review and the LGA 's Closer to People and Places – A New Vision for Local Government. There is also a strong focus on improved community leadership within the recently published Government White Paper.

Notwithstanding this 'direction of travel', there still remain significant savings to be made to reduce the costs of democracy and the main element of these will be through a rationalisation of the administrative and organisational officer support given to fewer Area Committees.

To this end, in the illustrative examples set out below, Option 1 proposes to reduce the number of Area Committees by combining the present five to become four, while Option 2 suggests a reduction of five committees to three.

Either way, if the principle of retaining fewer Area Committees is agreed, then further consideration can be given as to the detailed composition of each, especially in the light of changed ward boundaries.

### Option 1

Committee	Member Composition	Comments
Royston and District	7	Retention of same Member numbers, reflecting existing balance between urban and rural wards.
Baldock and District	6	As above.
Letchworth and District (formerly part of S. Rural)	Letchworth 13 From SR eg: 5	18 Assumes new Member representation after Boundary Review and includes new Chesfield Ward.
Hitchin and District (formerly part of S.Rural)	Hitchin 13 From SR, eg: 5	18 Assumes new Member representation after Boundary Review.

### Option 2

Committee	Member Composition	Comments
Royston, Baldock and District	Royston 7 Baldock 6	13 Amalgamation of Royston and Baldock and rural areas. Creates a more balanced area committee numerically, though covers a very big geographical area.
Letchworth and District	Letchworth 13 From SR, eg: 5	18 As in Option 1.
Hitchin and District	Hitchin 13 From SR, eg: 5	18 As in Option 1.

The Royston and Baldock Committees already have a structure that provides a balance between the local urban and rural areas, so a similar principle can be applied to Letchworth and Hitchin, helping to build stronger linkages between their urban areas and their neighbouring rural hinterland. By merging the rural wards nearest to the respective urban areas, the Southern Rural Area Committee would no longer exist.

While Option 1 reflects the existing Committees of Royston and Baldock with their own specific identities and issues, nevertheless, in terms of member representation, each Committee is less than half the composition of Letchworth and Hitchin. Option 2, therefore, suggests an amalgamation of Royston and Baldock to achieve a more equitable balance of Councillors in comparison to Letchworth and Hitchin.

The above options are only two illustrations of possible revised Area Committee combinations and there are other permutations that can be considered within the overall principle of reducing the number of Area Committees.

#### 4.8 Savings and Implications

It is estimated that staff savings of £53,000 could be found through a reduction of management, administrative and development support given to the Area Committees.

However, it must be appreciated that with a reduced level of support, the remaining three or four Committees will not be resourced to the same level as they might have been in the past. Such support includes community development, member services and non-committee based planning work. There will have to be a change in expectations as to what can be delivered through a reduction in workload that reflects the capacity of a reduced workforce.

A detailed assessment of the service reductions required to match the staffing savings has still to be completed. Implicit in this approach is that there will need to be fewer items dealt with in the formal Council and Committee settings. Without a reduction in decisions being made, there is a danger that the length of meetings may increase or that additional meetings may be called, for which there would be no administrative support.

#### **4.9 Enhanced Community Leadership**

During 2006 there has been a number of government driven, national initiatives that have considered, amongst other things, the idea of community leadership within a changing relationship between central and local government.

For example, in May, the Lyons Inquiry on National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement was published and there are several suggestions within this that echo the Council's established ambitions to engage more effectively with its local communities.

Also in May, the Local Government Association produced a report entitled 'Closer to People and Places – a new vision for local government', which asserts a bold and radical approach for the future of local government, and in particular develops the concepts of community leadership by local councillors.

The Government White Paper on new forms and functions for Local Government was published in October. Amongst the proposals are those to:

- offer a stronger role for local authorities to lead their communities, shape their areas and bring local public services together
- enable Councillors to better act as advocates/champions for their communities
- publish a revised statutory model Code of Conduct for Councillors, to allow Councillors to speak on licensing and planning issues,
- encourage Councils to provide Councillors with small budgets

All three reports have been considered within the preparation of this report, but the Council will still need to review and determine its position in meeting the new challenges.

However, one practical outcome if the proposed changes to Committees were to be implemented is the reduction in time that Members, particularly back-benchers, would be spending attending meetings. To compensate for this loss of 'responsibility', alternative approaches to the work of councillors will need to be considered. As the White Paper suggests, there could be a new role for Members who will:

- Be the recognised champions for the area, identifying and helping to resolve local concerns
- Act as community leaders who provide direction for their area, mediating between and helping to reconcile competing views and interests, encouraging and aiding people and communities to resolve local problems themselves
- Foster effective relationships with public, private, voluntary and community organisations in their area

Members will need new and different levels of support to enable them to be effective in this changed role. Officers, such as Community Development Officers, would be able to provide some of the professional support that might be needed. However, as noted in 4.7 above, while there may be differing expectations of Members in a new role, further consideration would need to be given to the more limited levels and type of support Members could be able to receive from a reduced workforce.

#### 4.10 Summary of Key Changes

##### Option 1

Committee	Present Frequency of Meetings	Proposed Frequency of Meetings	Net increase/ Decrease	Savings
Council	9	6 (see note 1)	- 3	
Cabinet	11	6 (see note 2)	- 5	
PARC	9	6	- 3	
Scrutiny	10	6	- 4	
Area Committees	45 (9x5)	24 (6x4)	- 21	
Planning	0	12	+12	
<b>Net Reduction</b>	<b>84*</b>	<b>60*</b>	<b>- 24</b>	

##### Option 2

Committee	Present Frequency of Meetings	Proposed Frequency Of Meetings	Net increase/ Decrease	Savings
Council	9	6 (see note 1)	- 3	
Cabinet	11	6 (see note 2)	- 5	
PARC	9	6	- 3	
Scrutiny	10	6	- 4	
Area Committees	45 (9x5)	18 (6x3)	-27	
Planning	0	12	+12	
<b>Net Reduction (2)</b>	<b>84*</b>	<b>54*</b>	<b>- 30</b>	

Note 1 – this includes the budget meeting and Annual Council leaving four meetings for regular business

Note 2 – this includes the budget meeting leaving five meetings for key decisions

\* To these totals should be added an approximate figure of 30, which represents other meetings that meet either less regularly or on an ad-hoc basis, eg: Highways Panel, Standards Committee, Licensing and Appeals Committee, Audit Sub-Committee.

#### 4.11 Summary of Savings

The savings shown are cashable savings and it is anticipated that further non-cashable efficiency savings will be found as a result of the changed working practices, (e.g. Members may be aware that a number of planning officer posts are currently funded from Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) which expires in 2007/08). These will be identified in future year's service and financial planning process.

The main savings emerging from these proposals are:

##### **Central Development Control Committee & 4 Area Committees:**

Salary savings from rationalisation of Officer support to Cabinet, Council, PARC, Scrutiny, Area Committees, Planning, etc.	£59,050
Reduction in general Committee Administration Costs	£2,730
Total	£61,780

##### **Central Development Control Committee & 3 Area Committees**

Salary savings from rationalisation of Officer support to Cabinet, Council, PARC, Scrutiny, Area Committees, Planning, etc	£59,450
Reduction in general Committee Administration Costs	£5,740
Total	£65,190

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 By recommendation to the Council, the Cabinet has powers under the scheme of delegation to advise on the allocation of functions to the Committee. It is clear from this report that consultation will need to be undertaken before the Cabinet make a recommendation to the Council to alter the Constitution.
- 5.2 Under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, only the Council can authorise changes to the Constitution.

## 6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The 'costs of democracy' are contained within direct cost budgets held in the Democratic Service codes in the Chief Executive's Department and others which have recharges applied from across the Council. The total amount of this budget for 2006/07 is £1,628,150 (£428,160 direct and £1,199,990 indirect) (See Appendix 1 for fuller details).
- 6.2 The need for the Council to find year on year savings reductions requires a clear understanding of the strategic priorities to be identified and then achieved.

- 6.3 The original savings target of £50,000 for 2006/7 is unlikely to be achieved, though every effort will be made to reduce the gap. The savings shortfall has been accommodated within the overall financial position of the Council as set out in the report on 2005/6 Annual Statement of Accounts, that was reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006. This savings target was assessed as a medium risk when determining key budget risks for 2006/07
- 6.4 However, it is anticipated that as part of the Service and Financial Planning Process for 2007/8, linked into the additional work that is proposed, then the savings that are required will be implemented for 2007/8 and beyond.
- 6.5 The effective implementation of Area Governance is seen as being central to the democratic engagement and accountability of the Council to its citizens. Failure to do this could result in damage to the reputation of the Council, to its ability to manage the regulatory planning environment, and to deliver on a key strategic objective.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Any improvements to Area Governance and decision making will have to be made within a changing organisational structure, where there will need to be new ways of working and approaches adopted.
- 7.2 A number of the recommendations and ensuing actions have been developed to improve opportunities for those whose views are often excluded from the democratic process and to encourage their greater participation, eg: Actions 30, 33 and 35.
- 7.3 There are likely to be a range of staffing changes that will impact on the way the Council delivers its services. Formal consultation with both the Trade Union and Staff Consultation Forum has commenced with those who will be effected.
- 7.4 The emerging agenda for local government emphasises the need to promote greater equality and diversity and to improve engagement with minority communities and those who often do not become fully involved in the democratic processes. The changes proposed for North Hertfordshire aim to enable such engagement.
- 7.5 Reducing the number of decisions made may in turn reduce the hours spent at committees thus helping to improve the work-life balance for both officers and members. However, the implications of smaller staff teams in Community Development and the Committee Secretariat to cover for sickness, annual leave, emergencies will have to be considered in planning workloads.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 Scrutiny have requested consideration of this report at the earliest opportunity and any recommendations will be forwarded to Cabinet.
- 8.2 The report will be submitted to all Area Committees for their comments prior to a further report back to Cabinet.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 Cabinet is asked:

- 1) To agree the principles of the key proposals of the report as set out in Section 4;
- 2) To agree either Option 1 or Option 2 with regard to the establishment of a central Development Control Committee and a reduction of Area Committees;
- 3) To consult with Area Committees on the finer details of the report and its implications;
- 3) To agree that the Leader of the Council consider a greater delegation of responsibilities to Portfolio Holders;
- 4) To request the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to prepare a report on the constitutional implications of the proposed changes as set out in this report;
- 5) To note that a further report on detailed proposals and timescales for implementation will be submitted with recommendations to Council in February 2007.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To ensure effective implementation of the new Area Governance and decision making arrangements.
- 10.2 To ensure that savings identified within the context of the Service and Financial Planning process for 2006/7 and beyond are achieved.

## **11. APPENDICES**

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Summary of Costs of Democracy.

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### **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 13.1 Report to Cabinet on Area Governance May 17 2005
- 13.2 Report to Cabinet on Area Governance March 15 2005
- 13.3 Report to Area Committees on Area Governance, December 2005
- 13.4 Area Based Decision Making (ABDM) – IDeA Planning Advisory Service 2006
- 13.5 National prosperity, local choice and civic engagement – Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, May 2006.
- 13.6 Local Government Association – Closer to People and Places – a new vision for local government.

**APPENDIX 1 – Summary of Costs of Democracy**

<b>Cost of Democracy Code Description</b>	<b>Projected Outturn 2006/07</b>
Training	14,790
Car Allowances	8,630
Printing	78,430
Postage	16,030
Telephones	5,030
Member allowances	211,230
Miscellaneous	45,750
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>379,890</b>
Recharges:	
Chief Executive (including democratic services)	429,520
Customer Services MSU	103,300
Amenity Administration	17,850
Finance and IT	51,320
Environment	29,800
Engineering	7,040
Housing	58,370
Building Services	9,500
Office accommodation	97,780
Legal	11,530
Audit and Financial Services	28,490
Development Control	349,820
Environmental Health	5,670
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>1,199,990</b>
Chairman's Office	43,330
Leader's Expenses	4,940
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>48,270</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,628,150</b>