

**EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS
(Report by the Head of Financial Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Each year the Panel receives an Annual Audit and Inspection Letter which provides a summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council. This year's Letter is attached as Annex A and it will be presented to the Panel by Nigel Smith from the Audit Commission.
- 1.2** The second report is the Audit Strategy for the 2008/09 Accounts (Annex B) which is about to commence. It will be presented by Paul Winrow or Liz Sanford from Grant Thornton.

2. CONTENT

Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

- 2.1** For completeness, the Letter includes reference to the audit of the 2007/08 accounts and last year's Use of Resources results, both of which have previously been reported to the Panel.
- 2.2** The new information is in the section on "How the District Council is performing" on pages 5 to 9. The comments recognise that the Council had made significant improvements and this is summarised in paragraph 1 on page 3. However some of the comparisons are now becoming dated and there are examples (e.g. speed of determining planning applications) where there has been subsequent improvement.
- 2.3** The letter criticises the variation between years of the number of new affordable homes completed. A large proportion are on section 106 sites where the developer passes land over as the private homes are built. Thus, the speed of completion reflects the developers' changing perceptions of the demand for new homes in the area and so is largely outside of the Council's control. In the last 3 years, affordable homes have averaged 186 per year and in 2009/10 more than 300 are predicted.
- 2.4** It was inevitable that this council would be judged as below average for length of hostel stays as the authorities without homeless hostels, or with self contained ones, are given a zero which is the top score. The indicator was deleted for 2008/09 as it is not a meaningful measure of the performance of an authority's wider homelessness prevention and housing options services.
- 2.5** The Letter will be circulated to all members following the Panel's meeting.

Audit Strategy for 2008/09 Final Accounts

- 2.6** The report outlines one long standing risk and two new ones that Grant Thornton will be able to address as part of their audit. The document also outlines a range of general matters relating to the audit.
- 2.7** The audit will cover the main Council audit and the separate audits of the Leisure Centre Committees for the last time. Now that the separate Joint Committees have been dissolved the Leisure Centres will in future be an integral part of the main audit.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Planning statistics held in the planning division
Housing statistics held in the housing division

Contact Officer:

Steve Couper, Head of Financial Services ☎ **01480 388103**