PART A ITEMS

284. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

285. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors David Brackenbury, Sean Lever and Colin Wright sent apologies.

286. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

287. **COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

The Committee received a summary report of the Organisational Assessment undertaken by the District Auditor. It was noted that the findings would constitute part of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter which would be considered at the next meeting, but as the assessment had been published on the Oneplace website Members needed to be aware of its findings.

The report included the overall organisational assessment, managing performance and the use of resources scores. The Council had achieved a score of 2 in all these areas according to the new criteria, and Members noted that this equated to a score of 3 under the previous criteria. It was also noted that the report included a lot of praise for the Council and a number of improvements had been highlighted.

Concerns were raised about the public perception of a score of 2 so the Committee discussed whether the Council should work towards attaining a score of 3 and the resource implications this would have. It was considered that the increased work involved could detract from service provision and that the Council’s primary aim was to achieve excellence in the eyes of the community. It was noted that very few Councils had achieved a score of 3. Concerns were also raised about the Council’s direction of travel and whether, due to the impact of the recession, maintaining a score of 2 would be possible.
Members also questioned why there had not been Member involvement when the report had been challenged and why Members had not been appraised of the management response. It was requested that, in future, Members would be involved in such discussions.

288. COUNTERING BENEFIT FRAUD

A report on the work of the Benefit Counter Fraud Section for the period to the end of September 2009 was submitted for consideration. The Committee noted that the amount of overclaimed benefit that had been recovered was slightly lower than the previous year but that this reflected the economic situation, increased levels of fraud, and the Counter Fraud Section’s success at identifying where benefit had been overclaimed. The report highlighted the increased amount of legal action that had been taken against those who had overclaimed as larger amounts were being overclaimed by individuals than previously. Members noted that the number of solicitor’s letters sent had dramatically increased as two were sent now instead of one in order to give overclaimants more opportunity to pay the money back and to avoid rising Court costs.

It was noted that income of £62,779 had been generated during this financial year by recovering overpayments which had lessened the burden on the Council Tax payer. Members commended the Counter Fraud team for their work.

A publicity campaign in the Nene Valley News had been very successful. The fraud hotline had received 74 calls up to 30 September 2009 of which 20 led to investigations. The Committee were pleased to note that the number and quality of referrals had been much improved.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and noted.

289. BENEFITS COUNTER FRAUD STRATEGY

The Benefits Counter Fraud Strategy was reviewed by the Committee. It was noted that the revised document contained amendments to the Performance Framework and included a number of minor alterations to the text of the document to make it clearer and more concise. The Counter Fraud and Internal Audit teams were satisfied it met the needs of the service.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Benefits Counter Fraud Strategy be adopted.

290. WELLAND INTERNAL AUDIT CONSORTIUM – PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a progress report from the Audit Manager of Welland Internal Audit Consortium (WIAC), on the progress and performance of Internal Audit compared to the Annual Audit Plan and an overview of the key findings and recommendations from the issued reports. The Consortium was performing well and had delivered planned work broadly in accordance with the Plan. Available audit evidence showed that the Council had put in place effective arrangements to manage its risks and where weaknesses had been identified, appropriate action was being taken. Members noted the assurances given by the Audit Manager that there were no outstanding issues for the Committee to consider and that the results for all areas audited this year so far were good or sound. These included waste
management, management and maintenance of public spaces, customer services and land charges.

The IT Service’s risk management planning was discussed by the Committee. It was noted that measures had been put in place to make the Council’s IT systems as secure as possible and to deal with any problems (GovConnect requirements, SecTech penetration testing, the Business Continuity Plan).

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress of the Consortium be noted.

**291. RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered a revised draft of the Risk Management Strategy, which had been altered to reflect comments made at the last meeting. The changes were discussed in detail and an alteration agreed. Members were particularly concerned about embedding risk management into managers’ everyday work and risk owners taking ownership of the risks involved with a project.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Risk Management Strategy be adopted, subject to the substitution of ‘major’ for ‘significant’ in section 6.4.

**292. RISK MANAGEMENT REPORTS**

The Committee received the standard reports on new primary risks, residual primary risks, risk profile and outstanding actions. It was noted that the terminology would be updated in accordance with the newly adopted Risk Management Strategy for the next meeting.

Some of the risks on the register, those relating the Manor Park and Greenway projects in particular, were discussed in depth. Concerns were raised regarding gaps in the register and items that had not been updated within the last twelve months. Members asked that risk owners be encouraged to update the action plans on the register as in a number of cases action plans had been put in place but not logged in the register.

It was agreed that the Chairman would propose to the Constitution Review Group that Lead Members be asked to look at risks on the register that were covered by their service area and alert officers or the Audit and Risk Management Committee if any issues were to arise.

**RESOLVED:**

That the submitted reports be noted.

**293. LABV**

The Committee noted a working group had been set up to look at all areas of this project including the risks.

**Chairman**