

28 November 2013		ITEM: 8
Standards & Audit Committee		
Green Yard Scheme for Abandoned and Stray Horses in Thurrock		
Report of: Cllr Philip Smith – Portfolio Holder Central Services		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Accountable Head of Service: Sean Clark – Head of Corporate Finance		
Accountable Director: Graham Farrant – Chief Executive		
This report is Public		
Date of notice given of exempt or confidential report: Not applicable		
Purpose of Report: At the request of the Standards & Audit Committee, this report is being presented for information purposes.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the findings of work carried out by internal audit following a request by the Chief Executive after concerns were raised by a Councillor on the use of a particular contractor for the green yard scheme for abandoned and stray horses in Thurrock. This work did not form part of the internal audit plan and an opinion was not provided as a formal report was not issued.

1. RECOMMENDATION:

- 1.1 That the Standards & Audit Committee notes the contents of the response provided to the Councillor.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 Around 2002/03, a large number of horses were abandoned in the Fort Road area resulting in horses being grazed illegally on land without the owners' consent, leaving the landowners with potential liabilities. More importantly, serious animal welfare concerns were raised, as due to the large number of horses, grazing and water were not adequate and shelter was not available.
- 2.2 In an effort to end the problem of stray horses on land at Fort Road in Tilbury, a consortium of land owners including Tilbury Power Station, the Port of Tilbury, Anglian Water, English Heritage, Thurrock Council and other interested groups got together and raised £26,000 to help pay for action. The

money raised by the Consortium was to be specifically targeted at the Fort Road Area and administered by the Council. The money was allocated to a special balance sheet code which allowed for any under spent money to be carried forward. A specific revenue code was set up to pay the invoices related to Fort Road area.

- 2.3 This investigation was carried out on the instructions of the Chief Executive following concerns raised by a Councillor on the use of a particular contractor under the green yard scheme. The Councillor requested responses to eight questions which form the basis of the update document included as Appendix A.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 A number of control issues were identified as a result of the work carried out. The main issues were:

- No payments have been made to the contractor since April 2011.
- The lack of a formal process for awarding the work to the contractor could have resulted in extra costs being incurred due to their location.
- No formal contract or written agreement resulted in a lack of information on what happened to the horses.
- Due to the above, a detailed breakdown of costs for different services charged by the contractor was not available.
- A lack of detail on invoices, and in some cases, evidence to support costs related to mileage, vets bills etc. meant it was not possible to provide assurance that the amounts invoiced were reasonable.

It was noted that a number of the issues around contracts have been tightened up due to cultural changes including the rewriting of the Constitution and additional procurement training provided to staff.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 As this work was related to concerns raised by a Councillor and was instigated by the Chief Executive, the response was sent to the Chief Executive for him to send to the Councillor. The Head of Corporate Finance was also kept informed of the findings during the investigation.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 5.1 The Council need to ensure that they revisit their policies and/or procedures in this area and ensure that there is a formal contract or agreement in place either through Essex Police or with the green yard directly.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **S Clark**
Telephone and email: **01375 652010**
sclark@thurrock.gov.uk

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report as it is for information purposes only, it is important that the authority maintains adequate internal controls to safeguard the authority's assets.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **D Lawson**
Telephone and email: **01375 652087**
david.lawson@bdtlegal.org.uk

As it is for information only, there are no adverse legal implications arising from this report.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **S DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

There are no direct diversity implications arising from this report as it is for information purposes only.

6.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

As this report is for information, there are no other implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT):

- Thurrock Council Stray Horse Protocol
- Essex Police Stray Horse Policy
- Dunn & Bradstreet Credit Report

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1: Investigation into use of green yard for abandoned and stray horses in Thurrock Council's boundaries

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