

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Tuesday, 7 July 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: SM Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: R Hall

Opposition spokesmen: RB Martlew
RT Summerfield

Officers:

Greg Harlock	Chief Executive Officer
Susan Gardner Craig	Human Resources Manager
Ian Cawthra	Human Resources Officer
Lee Phanco	Head of Revenues

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr MB Loynes.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

It was confirmed that the Forward Plan had been amended as requested.

11. UNSPENT BUDGET ROLLOVERS FROM 2008-09 TO 2009-10

The Chief Executive Officer presented a report requesting that the Portfolio Holder approve requests for rollover of unspent budgets from 2008-09 to 2009-10.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the total amount of rollover was lower than in previous years.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that paragraph 3 in the report, the rollover rules, as extracted from the Constitution, should read, 'Rollovers may then only be used.....and that there are no *other* sources of funding, including virement.'

The Portfolio Holder was advised that rollovers that remained unspent in 2009-10 could not be further rolled into 2010-11.

The Portfolio Holder was advised of the latest income forecasts. Based on figures to date, Planning income would be down by £400,000 against estimates, Building Control income down by £100,000 and Land Charges by £65,000. With the reduction in interest rates this could result in a potential shortfall in income of £750,000 against forecast for the year.

The Portfolio Holder undertook to liaise with the Planning Portfolio Holder concerning the reduction in planning income.

The Portfolio Holder **APPROVED** for the budget rollovers, as summarised in Appendix A, be carried forward into the 2009-10 financial year, subject to final confirmation by the Section 151 Officer being given on an individual basis at the appropriate time during the year.

The rollover requests total £72,820 on General Fund revenue budgets, £170,760 on the Capital Programme and £40,000 on the Housing Revenue Account.

12. **BENEFITS SERVICE WORKLOAD AND PERFORMANCE**

The Head of Revenues presented a report to inform the Portfolio Holder of the impact of increasing numbers of claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit and of arrangements put into place to minimise the effect of delivery of benefits services, which included employing additional temporary benefits assessors to provide cover for maternity leave. Additional funding of £85,025 had been received from the DWP.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that whilst the number of enquiries for benefit had increased by 26% over the first two months of last year, there were few new payments being made. Additional workload was also being incurred as a result of customers progress chasing their claims.

Questions and Comments

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that with the slippage to 30 days to process an enquiry there had not been a commensurate increase in the number of complaints. Customers' expectations were being managed and customers were advised of the probable waiting time on first contact with the Council.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that an appointments process was not in use for ad hoc enquiries received at reception. A 'full interview service' was not offered and evidence suggested that many of the callers were Cambourne residents calling in 'on spec'.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the likelihood of receiving an inspection from the Audit Commission was low. The Council's performance was in the upper quartile and not thought to be sufficiently high to warrant inspection as part of a bench marking exercise being undertaken by the Commission.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that it would be impossible to set up a phantom account for mystery shopper purposes. The Portfolio Holder expressed a desire to use Mystery Shopper to assess the effectiveness of the Council's service and was advised that it might be possible to implement some form of mystery shopper research at reception.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that targets were still achievable, although a more accurate assessment could be made at the end of the second quarter.

The report was **NOTED**.

13. **PAY AWARD 2009**

The HR Manager presented a verbal update of the pay negotiations for 2009-10.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that nationally an offer of 0.5% had been tabled. This offer had been subsequently withdrawn, as the Unions had not responded. Negotiations were ongoing, but regional advice suggested that they were close to stalemate and would be referred either to arbitration or to Ministers for resolution.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that locally the Council recognised both GMB and Unison and the unions had proposed a 1.5% pay increase. The Council's response had been that Members were looking for a 0% increase. The local Unison secretary had requested the opportunity to address the Leader's meeting and had done so.

14. FORWARD PLAN

Pay Award 2009-10 to be added to the Forward Plan for consideration at a future date.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 11 August 2009. The meeting will commence at 10 am and be held in the Jeavons Room.

The Portfolio Holder expressed his thanks to Head of Revenues, Lee Phanco, who would be leaving the Council on 24 July, and wished him well in his new role at Bedfordshire Borough Council.

The Meeting ended at 10.35 a.m.
