

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Thursday, 24 September 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: TD Bygott

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitor: MJ Mason
Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitor and Mrs BZD Smith
Opposition spokesman:
Opposition spokesman: Dr SEK van de Ven

Officers:

Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Paul Knight Customer Service Co-ordinator

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven declared a personal interest in Item 11, Policy for Handling Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complaints, as having been involved in a long-standing issue which fed into the creation of the policy.

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Portfolio Holder signed the minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2009 as a correct record.

Further to Minute 2, Awarded Watercourses Service – Tendering Results, Councillor MJ Mason commented that the maps produced for the tender had been of a far higher quality than before, and Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven expressed appreciation on behalf of parishes and local residents for the work of the Land Drainage Manager and his team for works carried out.

11. POLICY FOR HANDLING UNREASONABLE OR UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS

The new policy for identifying and handling unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants was drafted with the intention of providing all ratepayers equal opportunity to have their complaints resolved fairly, without a minority of complainants pursuing their issue in ways that could impede the investigation of their complaint or could impose a significant and disproportionate resource requirement on the Council. It was intended that the policy be used sparsely and the Customer Services Coordinator predicted that, based upon data from recent years, it would be unlikely that more than 5-10 cases per years would be identified under this policy.

The policy was considered in detail and it was felt that the role of members should be included, as members often acted as intermediaries between the complainant and officers, although it was acknowledged that local members often were already involved in an issue and could become the subject of harassment.

The Customer Services Coordinator confirmed that a copy of the policy would be sent to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CPALC) to ensure that the organisation was aware that such a policy existed and that the policy could be amended for use by parish councils. The Standards Committee would also receive a copy

of the policy, especially the list of behaviours which could lead to a complainant being identified as unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, to demonstrate the difficulties which district and parish councillors and officers sometimes faced.

The following amendments were agreed for inclusion:

- Appendix A:
 - Attempting to use the complaints procedure in order to pursue a personal vendetta against an employee, team *or Member*.
 - Making repeated groundless complaints about the officers *or Members* handling their complaint.
 - *As an obstructive action*, pursuing the same complaint with multiple authorities / bodies at the same time...
 - Raising, at a late state in the process, significant information which was in the complainant's possession when he or she first submitted a complaint, and which the complainant knew to be of relevant to the case *but withheld deliberately to be obstructive*.
 - Seeking to coerce or intimidate staff, or abusing or distressing them by the language and tone of voice or behaviour, including body language, in personal contacts, telephone conversations *or e-mails*.
- Appendix C:
 - Amend "Name of Customer" to "Name of Complainant"; and
 - Include the name of the officer or member who has initiated the process to have a complainant identified as unreasonable or unreasonably persistent.

The Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to adopt and publish the policy for handling unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints, subject to amendments made at the meeting.

12. CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE PROJECT PLAN

The Portfolio Holder, noting that customer service was one of the Council's core values, explained that the government's new CSE project provided a framework against which the Council could measure its performance against the customer service targets it set, and reminded members that Cabinet had approved Council-wide CSE accreditation as an action for 2010/11. The aim was to bring consistency to customer service standards across the authority, and it was noted that, so far, only Fenland District Council had achieved Council-wide CSE accreditation.

The Customer Services Coordinator confirmed that the financing for the project would come from the existing 2009/10 and 2010/11 budgets for the Service First project and that a willingness to achieve the accreditation had been expressed across service areas. He explained that the project would significantly improve services to residents and should bring about efficiency savings through internal partnership work. The Council was in the process of interviewing an assessment centre to see the authority through the accreditation process, and which would provide guidance to all departments to avoid misinterpretation of any of the criteria.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the primary aim of the authority was to provide excellent customer services; the CSE project happened to agree with this aim, but the Council would have continued with its customer service improvements regardless. Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven asked that it be noted that she had expressed concerns about the possible public perception of funding the project at a time when grants for local projects had been frozen. Councillors MJ Mason and Mrs BZD Smith supported the aims of the project.

The Portfolio Holder **SUPPORTED** and **ENDORSED** the achievement of Council-wide

Customer Service Excellence accreditation within the next financial year 2010/11 and **NOTED** the current position of the project.

13. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was **NOTED** without amendment.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was **NOTED**.

The Meeting ended at 11.20 a.m.
