

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 17 March 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Simon Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Opposition spokesmen: Richard Summerfield

Officers:

Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Stephen Hills	Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Paul Howes	Corporate Manager, Community and Customer Services
Laura Lock	Electoral and Support Services Manager
Graham Smith	Best Value and Management Accountant

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

52. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 February 2010 and 17 February 2010 were agreed as correct records.

53. CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN, INCLUDING ALLOCATION OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT BUDGET

The Corporate Manager for Affordable Homes presented this item on the Council's Asset Management Plan, which detailed the management of South Cambridgeshire Hall and the authority's landholdings for the three-year period from 2010/11 to 2012/13. He explained that £10,000 of the Plan's capital elements were included in the Capital Strategy, which would be discussed later in the meeting.

The Corporate Manager for Affordable Homes explained that the Council's offices at Cambourne were now five years old and the Asset Management Plan needed to anticipate the ongoing repair bills.

It was noted that whilst there was a backlog of maintenance work, as expressed in table 3, it had not impacted on the condition of the internal floor space.

CO² emissions increase

The Corporate Manager for Affordable Homes agreed to ascertain why the CO² emissions at the Council's offices at Cambourne had increased this year.

Risk register

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder reviewed the risk register and welcomed the focus on operational issues.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder, approved the renumbering of the tables depicting the Action Plans for 2009/10 and 2010/11 on pages 18-9 to 10 and 11 respectively, and

AGREED The Corporate Asset Management Plan 2012-13, including Allocation of Facilities Management Budget.

54. FINAL SERVICE PLANS 2010/11: COMMUNITY & CUSTOMER SERVICES SERVICE PLAN 2010/11

The Corporate Manager for Community & Customer Services drew the meeting's attention to parts of the Community & Customer Services Service Plan 2010/11 that gave details on the elections and he highlighted the parts of the document relevant to the portfolio.

Promotion of the democratic process

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder suggested that the operational plan for Electoral Services should include some Performance Indicators or SMART targets. It was noted that with the limited resources at its disposal the Electoral Services section had promoted the democratic process by ensuring that letters had been sent out with information from the Revenues and Benefits section, which encouraged residents to vote. The summer edition of South Cambs Magazine would explain the difference between multi-member and single member wards, whilst the spring edition had included a picture of a polling station as its front cover. The sending of birthday cards to residents on their 18th birthday, reminding them that they could now vote, had cost £3,000 in postal costs and had been discontinued due to cost savings.

Covering unexpected absence

In response to concerns regarding absence cover it was stated that a part-time Electoral Services Assistant had been an Electoral Service Manager at a previous authority and provided resilience. The Returning Officer takes an active role in the planning process and the Executive Director for Corporate Services had experience as a Deputy Returning Officer at another authority.

Electoral costs

The Electoral and Support Services Manager explained that the Government paid the costs of a parliamentary election and so in the event of two General Elections in the coming year, which was a possibility if the forthcoming election resulted in a hung parliament, the Council would not incur any extra costs, although there would be implications for officer time.

The relevant budget costs, which had been agreed at the last meeting of Council, were circulated at the meeting.

Cost of parish council elections

The Electoral and Support Services Manager was pleased to report that if the Parliamentary and Local elections were held on the same date, thus forcing the parish council elections to be held a separate date, the additional costs that would not have been incurred if the Parish elections were on 6 May would be met by the Ministry of Justice and not the parish councils. Parish Clerks had been informed.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED The elections aspect of the Community & Customer Services Service Plan 2010/11.

55. FINAL SERVICE PLANS 2010/11: CORPORATE (SUPPORT) SERVICES

The Executive Director for Corporate Services presented the Service Plan 2010/11 for Corporate (Support) Services. He explained that Performance Indicator BV99 measured

the number of Notice of Seeking Possessions (NOSP) served on tenants. This had increased but the number of evictions had decreased. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder agreed that a local performance indicator was required to show that the increase in NOSPs was having the desired effect.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder decided to remove the reference in the Executive Summary regarding planning appeals as the data showed that the Council did not have an excessive number of appeals and that it was proper that Councillors would, on occasion, reject officer advice.

The Executive Director for Corporate Services reported that the Council's ICT section had gone through a restructuring over the last year and it was hoped that staff satisfaction would now improve.

Legal services

The Executive Director for Corporate Services advised that a benchmarking exercise for legal services would need to use qualitative as well as quantitative research methods, due to a fluctuating workload and the different challenges facing local authorities. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder advised that a shared service initiative should only be considered if there were no clear conflicts of interest regarding the provision of legal advice for the authorities it involved.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder requested that in future any changes in improvement plan from the previous year should be highlighted in the report.

On the request of the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder, the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder agreed to remove the reference in the Service Plan Overview to political instability due to changes in the Cabinet make-up and the reference to portfolio holder meeting being used for policy discussions.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED

- (a) the following minor amendments to the Service Plan:
 - to delete the bullet point: "Need to persuade Members to reject planning advice less often and thus reduce cost of appeals" in the Executive Summary, under the heading "Legal and Democratic Services",
 - to delete the bullet point: "Possible political instability; changes in Cabinet make-up" in section 2.a), "the Context for Our Plan – External Drivers", under internal drivers;
 - to delete the bullet point: "Misunderstanding of the role of the public Portfolio Holder meeting, i.e. not for informal early-stage policy discussions" in section 2.c), "The Context for Our Plan – Our Strengths and Weaknesses", under Weaknesses.
- (b) to give delegated authority to the Executive Director for Corporate Services to include a local performance indicator in the Operational Plan, which recognised the correlation of the Council's low eviction rate to the increase in the number of Notice of Seeking Possessions (NOSP) served on tenants.
- (c) The Service Plan 2010/11 for the Corporate Support Services, as amended.

56. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2010/11

The Best Value and Management Accountant presented this report on the Capital Strategy and associated Core Data.

The Executive Director for Corporate Services explained that the Council had used its debt free status to fund part of the Capital Strategy without taking out a loan. It was noted that the Council was still waiting for the Government's announcement regarding the allocation of approximately £164 million of the national housing debt. If agreed this would impact on the Council's budget for 2011/12.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED Capital Strategy 2010/11.

57. PAYMENT OF INVOICES

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED to authorise a change in the target to paying 70% of undisputed invoices within ten working days from receipt to the destination bank account with effect from 1st April 2010.

58. UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION 2009/10 (APRIL '09-FEBRUARY '10)

The Executive Director for Corporate Services presented this report on the financial position of the General Fund, Housing Revenues Account and Capital Expenditure up to January 2010, with a verbal update up to February 2010.

It was noted that whilst the budgets were underspent when compared to the revised figures, the budget would be overspent when compared to the original estimates, although within the 3% target.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

59. FORWARD PLAN

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder removed the Capital Strategy from April's agenda, as this item had just been discussed. He also removed the Review of the Budget Setting Process from the list of unscheduled items, as this issue had been reviewed by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's Task and Finish Group.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the revised Forward Plan.

60. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the programme of meetings for 2010/11 would have to be agreed following the elections in May.

The Meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.
