

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Tuesday, 21 February 2012 at 6.00 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Simon Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Roger Hall and Tumi Hawkins

Also in attendance: Ben Shelton

Officers:

Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Adrian Burns	Head of Accountancy
Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Susan Gardner Craig	Human Resources Manager
Dawn Graham	Benefit Manager
Sally Smart	Principal Accountant Financial & Systems

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

68. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the words "part of" to the first sentence of the second paragraph of minute 62 so that the amended sentence reads: "The Head of Accountancy explained that part of the £422,000 which had been allocated to putting photovoltaic cells on the roof of the Council's Headquarters..."

69. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2011/12 - Q3

The Principal Accountant Financial and Systems presented this report which compared the actual and committed revenue and capital expenditure for the Finance and Staffing Portfolio with the working budget for 2011/12 and reported on the service performance for the third quarter.

The title of the report was corrected to read "and Financial Performance for 2011-12..." and it was noted that an extra appendix had been added after the report had been published, which meant that the end of paragraph 6 should read "... **Appendices Bi to Bvii.**"

Payment of undisputed invoices

It was noted that the target for payment of undisputed invoices had been amended from "within 10 days" to "within 10 working days" whilst the % target had become more challenging. It was hoped that the extension of the electronic payment system across the Council would lead to the quicker payment of invoices.

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

70. FINANCE MONITORING REPORT FOR ALL SERVICES 2011/12

The Head of Accountancy presented this report which provided the Finance and Staffing

Portfolio Holder with a monthly position statement on the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Expenditure.

Underspends as projected at the end of December 2011

It was noted that the 6.53% underspend on the Capital account and 2.24% underspend on the General Fund were in part due to "slippage" of expenditure that had been expected to occur in 2011/12 but was now expected to take place in 2012/13.

Land Charges overspend

It was noted that Land Charges were estimated to have an overspend of £48,200 due to a one off refund of income that all Councils with a land charges function were expected to incur.

Local Government Agency (LGA)

It was noted that the LGA had reduced the Council's subscription fees by £2,000, which was in line with the reduction of the Government's formula grant.

Great Shelford car park

It was expected that Great Shelford Parish Council would take ownership of the car park by April 2002.

PC Virtualisation Project

It was expected that this would be complete by March 2012 and so the expenditure would be paid this financial year.

Disabled Facilities Improvement Grants

It was noted that £60,000 had been uncommitted of the Council's improvement grants scheme due to a delay in assessments being carried out by Occupational Health. It was understood that the Housing Portfolio Holder was considering the use of Council's funds to expedite these assessments in order to allow improvements to be carried out.

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

71. REVENUE COLLECTION PERFORMANCE 2011/12 - Q3

The Benefit Manager presented this report on the current performance of the Revenues and Benefits Section.

Council Tax collection

The Benefit Manager reported that the Council Tax collection rate was 89.8%, which was an improvement on the figure of 88.5% at the same time last year. The end of year target of 99.1% remained realistic.

Business rates collection

The collection rate for Business rates was 89.9%, compared to 90.4% for the same time last year. The Benefit Manager explained that the difference was attributed to legislative and inflation factors and so the performance represented an excellent achievement.

Rent collection

The collection rate for rent was 98.29% compared to 98.11% for the same time last year. It was noted that the rents collection team continued to achieve consistently high results.

Sundry debts

The percentage of invoices in arrears is 8.2% compared to 7.6% at this time last year. The number of invoices paid in full at this stage was reported as 85% compared to 78.7% at

this time last year.

Processing of benefits claims

The Benefit Manager reported that the Council's performance in the processing of claims and changes was improving despite the continuing increase in the number of benefit claimants. Performance was expected to continue to improve throughout the rest of the year, but the lower performance recorded earlier in the year, due to the section being under-staffed, meant that the Council was unlikely to meet the performance target for 2011/12.

Fraud

It was noted that the fraud team continued to perform well with cases of claimant error being investigated, as well as more serious cases of fraud. It was suggested that the performance indicators regarding counter-fraud action could be clarified by being expressed purely in figures, instead of per 1,000 cases.

Business rates empty property analysis

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder reviewed the Business rates empty property analysis at appendix c of the report. The Benefit Manager agreed to find out details of the single crown property referred to in the analysis. Councillor Tumi Hawkins suggested that information regarding empty properties in the District should be shared with planning officers who could then advise relevant applicants of empty properties in their area.

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

72. WELFARE REFORM

The Benefit Manager presented this report which updated the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder of the progress of the Welfare Reform Bill through parliament and the impact of the proposals with regard to service provision.

Benefit cap

It was noted that there were currently 8 families in the District who would be affected if child benefit was counted as income. If the Lords' amendment was accepted then there would be no families in the District affected.

Claimants of benefit

It was noted that nationally there were 62% of claimants of working age and 38% of claimants of pension age. This contrasted with those in the District where there were 44.81% of claimants of working age and 55.19% of claimants of pension age.

Worked examples

The Benefit Manager explained that because the District had a different demographic make-up to the national average the reduction for working age claimants would have to be larger than average to realise the necessary savings. It appeared likely that each Council would have to decide how to implement the cuts imposed by the Government. The Benefit Manager suggested that the Council should do all it could to incentivise people to work.

Publicising changes

It was noted that the Council would be publicising the forthcoming changes when they became known and training would be organised for Councillors.

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

73. LEAVERS REPORT 2011/12 - Q3

The Human Resources Manager presented this report which analysed the number of leavers between 1 October and 31 December 2011. It was noted that the leavers' rate for the period was 1.6%, which made a cumulative figure of 5.0% for the year up to the third quarter. It appeared that the Council would be below its annual target for voluntary leavers of 10%.

Exit interviews

The Human Resources Manager explained that exit interviews were compulsory, unless it was inappropriate and there had been three such cases in the third quarter.

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

74. SICKNESS ABSENCE 2011/12 - Q3

The Human Resources Manager presented this report which stated that the sickness absence at the Council for the period 1 October to 31 December 2011 was 2.81 days of sickness per full-time equivalent. This was the lowest quarterly figure this year and was lower than the third quarter figure for the previous year which was 3.56 days.

Health and safety

It was noted that 25 staff had been TUPE transferred from Veolia, where a less stringent attitude to health and safety issues had been prevalent and this explained a higher accident rate amongst these staff compared to the Council's existing DLO staff. A full induction and training sessions on manual handling had taken place for this group of employees.

Long-term sickness

The Human Resources Manager reported that long-term sickness had dropped by 33.2% since the last quarter, which was an impressive achievement.

Sickness absence by reason given

It was noted that sickness absence due to stress had reduced. The Human Resources Manager explained that staff who gave the reason "other" for their sickness were encouraged to be more specific.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder congratulated the HR team and welcomed the reduction in staff sickness levels and expressed the hope that this improvement would continue. He **NOTED** the report.

75. LEARNING FROM CUSTOMER FEEDBACK (CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND SHARING BEST PRACTICE)

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder requested that any customer feedback relevant to his portfolio be reported under this standing agenda item.

76. FORWARD PLAN

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

77. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 20 March at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.
