

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Portfolio Holder's meeting held on
Tuesday, 17 June 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor MP Howell – Staffing Portfolio Holder

Councillor: RT Summerfield

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:
Susan Gardner Craig (Human Resources Manager)

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Portfolio Holder noted the minutes of the meeting of Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder held on the 1 April 2008 but was unable to confirm that they were a correct record of that meeting as he had not been in attendance.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Portfolio Holder declared personal interests in two items on the agenda:

- i) item on the 'Amendment to the Council Smoke Free Policy' as a smoker, and
- ii) item on 'Service Continuity Arrangements for December and January Holiday Period' as a member of Unison.

3. SERVICE CONTINUITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR DECEMBER AND JANUARY HOLIDAY PERIOD

The Portfolio Holder considered a report which set out proposals for public access and service continuity during the Christmas holiday period (December 2008) and the New Year holiday period (January 2009).

For many years the adopted practice at South Cambridgeshire District Council has been to close the main offices and depot for the duration of the Christmas and New Year holiday period. This has meant that the offices have been closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Years Day and depending on how those dates fell in the working week, certain week-days between the 27 and 31 December were also days on which the offices were closed. This has been achieved by utilising the extra two statutory holidays as agreed and included in most contracts of employment, and by the grant of one day as a concessionary holiday. If the Council needed to be closed for an extra day over this holiday period an extra concessionary day could be granted. Entitlement to Concessionary holidays was within the grant of the authority, therefore non-contractual, and capable of being withdrawn.

Concerns were raised following a number of complaints from the public during the Christmas and New Year holiday period 2007-08, which were focused on the refuse collection service. Elected Members, having considered the service delivery arrangements for the Christmas and New Year holiday period 2007-08, have expressed a wish to provide improved service coverage for that holiday period in 2008-09, to include access to the main offices at Cambourne. Elected Members have indicated that they would like to see a 'skeleton' staffing of the Cambourne office over the Christmas period

with volunteers from 'public facing'/'business critical' service areas, these include:

- Homelessness
- Housing including Sheltered Housing
- Reception
- Benefits
- Revenues
- Environmental services
- Planning & Building Control

The services would need to be supported by appropriate levels of ICT, caretaking, communications and facilities support. Health and safety considerations would include the need to have an identified fire warden in case of emergency. There would be costs associated with opening/ running the building (heating, electricity, refreshments facilities) for a very low number of employees.

The Portfolio Holder considered the feedback from Unison members, which was wholeheartedly against any proposals to open over the Christmas holiday period, and heard representations from the Unison Branch Secretary, Mr Patrick Adams, who enforced the message that any decision to change past practice would be very unpopular amongst staff. Mr Adams pointed out that many staff had already taken on firm commitments based on expected closure over the coming Christmas holiday period.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that for this year volunteers would be sought from service areas to provide a skeleton service during the Christmas period. The extra statutory days would be added to employee leave entitlement. The concessionary day would be used to close the office on Friday 2 January 2009. For future Christmas periods the office should be open as normal and application of the concessionary day shall be decided annually by the Staffing Portfolio Holder.

4. SMOKE FREE POLICY (URGENT ITEM)

The Portfolio Holder had agreed to take as an urgent item a report on the amendment to the Council's smoke free policy, as the proposed implementation date was to be 1 July and the policy required the approval of the Staffing Portfolio Holder prior to implementation.

The report considered the Council's aspiration to attain to the National Clean Air Gold Standard, which would require the removal of the smoking shelters and a total ban on smoking within Council site boundaries. The amended policy also addressed the inequality surrounding breaks and time off work between employees who smoke and their non-smoking colleagues. The policy aim was to provide equality for all employees by banning smoking breaks during core hours as well as on all Council sites.

The amended Policy also gave clarification to smoking arrangements for employees who might work in any non-restricted area. Employees might smoke in their cars as they travelled between sites, but smoking in cars parked within the staff car park is prohibited. The Policy Holder wished enquiries to be made to ascertain if future leasing agreements might contain a smoking ban.

Unison and the GMB unions had been consulted and feedback from them was that the Council should go further to discourage smoking than it previously had done. Mr P Adams, Unison Branch Secretary commented that numerically speaking it was quite a small problem, yet a very large problem for the few employees who still smoked.

Accepting this point the Portfolio Holder wished to assure all employees affected by this Policy of the Council's continuing support.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to amend the Smoke Free Policy as follows:

- i. The smoking shelters be removed.
- ii. The Council implements a total site ban on smoking and applies for the National Clean Air Gold Standard
- iii. To prohibit employees from taking a break during core hours to smoke. Line managers and supervisors will be looked upon to regulate this new requirement to ensure it is not abused to the detriment of non-smoking staff.

5. **EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY**

The Portfolio Holder considered a report on the recent Staff Satisfaction Survey and expressed his disappointment with the results. It had been four years since the previous full employee satisfaction survey and many areas, when compared to those 2004 results, showed a decrease in satisfaction levels.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder considered the 2008 Staff Satisfaction Survey Report, noted the communication process in line with the suggested action plan and timetable and **AGREED** to:

- i) the approach of referring the results to local management team forums for consideration and for Corporate and Service Managers to be responsible for identifying local actions and 'quick fixes' and for developing action plans
- ii) undertake the staff satisfaction survey, in its current format, in March 2009 and annually thereafter

6. **SICKNESS ABSENCE APRIL 2007 – MARCH 2008**

The Portfolio Holder considered a report of the Chief Executive that provided an analysis of the sickness absence figures for the period April 2007 to March 2008. A monitoring function of the Portfolio Holder.

The sickness performance indicator for the period 1 April 2007– 31 March 2008 was 10.15 days per full time equivalent against a target figure of 10.25. The Human Resources - Payroll team had active involvement with the management of 50 cases of sickness absence during 2007/ 08, the majority of which involved long term sickness or disability issues.

The report suggested that South Cambridgeshire District Council's sickness policy, was fit for purpose, and long-term sickness absences were managed effectively but repeated short-term absences appeared to be tolerated, and that Corporate Managers needed to discuss with their management teams the issues concerning the managing of attendance and what help was required. Attendance management needed to be seen as a performance indicator for all levels of management. Anecdotal evidence suggested some managers found the conversations required for effective attendance management difficult, and would prefer not to have them. Under the Disability Discrimination Act the Council

was obliged to make reasonable adjustments as a good employer.

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the sickness performance indicator for the period 1 April 2007– 31 March 2008 was 10.15 days per full time equivalent and stressed that attendance management needed to be seen as a performance indicator for all levels of management.

7. LEAVERS APRIL 2007 – MARCH 2008

The Staffing Portfolio Holder considered the leavers report for 2007 – 2008 which showed a performance indicator value at 9.54 % against a target for voluntary leavers of 11.0 %. The figure was lower than estimated because of an increase in headcount over the year. Voluntary leavers did not include; redundancies, ill health retirements, ending of fixed term contracts, or people opting to leave at 65, or internal transfers. The rate of leavers taking into account all leavers was 11.45 %.

The information was recorded from Leavers Forms forwarded to HR/Payroll for processing after exit interviews. During the period HR/ Payroll had received 22 exit interview forms.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report

8. OVERVIEW OF TRAINING 2007/ 2008

The Staffing Portfolio Holder considered a report of the HR Manager which gave an overview of staff training within the authority for 2007 -2008.

In total 283 days of training had been delivered through the corporate training programme during 2007 - 08.

Corporate areas were responsible for producing Personal Development Plans through the appraisal process and for addressing specific training needs. Copies of Personal Development Plans were sent to HR to allow better planning of corporate training. Some managers had not made best use of the training provided through the corporate training programme, having arranged for employees to attend external courses, where internal courses were offered. The Council does not have a dedicated learning and development officer and the HR Manager and HR Officer provides such support. The HR Officer had just completed a qualification in management development and was working with the Management Development Project Group to improve management development within the Council.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report and congratulated officers on the results.

9. FORWARD PLAN

The Portfolio Holder identified the following items for consideration within his portfolio during this municipal year:

- i) Car Leases
- ii) Equal Pay – update
- iii) Succession Planning
- iv) Absentee Action Plans
- v) Officer Member Relationships
- vi) Schools Work Experience

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Unable to set a precise date, the Portfolio Holder suggested that the next meeting should be arranged for a date at or near to the end of September 2008.

The Meeting ended at 11:05am
