

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder's Meeting
held on
Thursday, 23 July 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 spokesmen: Dr SA Harangozo and Dr SEK van de Ven
Also in attendance: Mrs SM Ellington

Officers:

Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Richard Hales Strategic Sustainability Officer
Paul Knight Customer Service Co-ordinator
Pat Matthews Drainage Manager
Jo Mills Corporate Manager, New Communities
Sean Missin Procurement Officer
Dale Robinson Corporate Manager, Health & Environmental Services

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in items 2 (Awarded Watercourses Service – Tendering Results), 3 (Capital Programme – Awarded Watercourses Service) and 4 (Floods and Water Management Bill: Consultation Response) as a member of the Meldreth Parish Council Flood Avoidance Sub-Committee, and in item 4 as an elected member of Cambridgeshire County Council who had recommended to that authority joint working with South Cambridgeshire District Council on this issue.

2. AWARDED WATERCOURSES SERVICE - TENDERING RESULTS

Cabinet on 11 September 2008, in response to member concerns over the operational costs of the Awarded Watercourses Service, resolved to open the process to competitive tender, the results of which were presented to the Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder for decision. Four tenders were returned, three from external companies and one from the Council's in-house service, of which the in-house service was considerably less expensive and, when evaluated and scored in terms of reporting and programming, knowledge and experience, health and safety, contract and project management proposals and quality and capacity, had scored the highest of the four bids.

Officers confirmed that the process had been thorough and done in accordance with EU procurement procedures, which the Council was legally obliged to follow. There had been twenty-five initial expressions of interest, but although the process had been simplified as much as possible, allowing tendering on individual aspects of the service and including a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire to help the Council identify interested parties and tailor the process accordingly, no submissions had been received from local farmers and it was difficult to identify what more the Council could have done to encourage their interest. The uncertainty experienced by officers in the service during the tendering process was commented on and the Portfolio Holder appreciated their hard work and the successful outcome of the tender, which confirmed that the Council's own service was providing the

best value for money and retained with the authority invaluable local knowledge.

The Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to award the contract to the South Cambridgeshire District Council in-house team as the lowest bid and the Most Economical Advantageous Tender; and **NOTED** the changes made to working practices, terms and conditions and numbers of permanent posts on the establishment, as described in paragraphs 18 and 19 of this report.

3. CAPITAL PROGRAMME - AWARDED WATERCOURSES SERVICE

In November 2008 a tractor and flail mower owned by the authority were stolen from the depot in Lolworth where the awarded watercourses plant and equipment were stored. Replacement of the equipment or hiring of new equipment was delayed pending the outcome of the awarded watercourses services tender, and the tender documents had included the cost of providing replacement equipment.

Having compared the cost of hiring equipment versus purchasing the equipment outright, the Portfolio Holder concluded that it would cost the authority more to spot hire equipment each year and that this, coupled with the uncertainty of obtaining equipment during the fifteen-week period it was needed annually, confirmed that outright purchase was the better option. The Council was bound by certain purchasing regulations, mostly relating to health and safety requirements, which limited the range of equipment available, and it was essential that the flail mower and tractor were compatible, as the cost of custom-fitting the two pieces could cost the authority approximately an additional £1,500 annually. The initial estimate for the purchase of a new tractor and flail mower was £94,000, of which the insurance for the stolen equipment would pay about £33,000. In light of the economic circumstances and the pressures on the Council's budget, the Portfolio Holder asked officers to investigate purchasing second-hand equipment in the first instance, but, should this be unsuccessful, to be able to demonstrate that the purchase of new equipment provided the best value for money.

The Drainage Manager explained that South Cambridgeshire was unique in the amount of watercourses it had and the amount of work it undertook, so opportunities for sharing the equipment were limited, as it was essential only during a specific period each year. The Portfolio Holder was discussing with the Ecology Officer use of the equipment for maintaining and restoring ecological habitats in the district. Officers confirmed that the equipment storage facility had been moved within a compounded area with guard dogs, and with on-site staff living nearby, and that GPS tracker units had been ordered and would be installed as soon as they had been delivered.

The Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services) agreed to speak to the Accountancy service to identify a better way to publish the Awarded Watercourses Drainage Infrastructure Fund in the Council's budget book.

The Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder:

- (a) **AGREED** that £100,000 be included in the 2009/10 Capital programme on the basis that the financing of this amount be met from the insurance theft claim payment (as outlined above) and the Awarded Watercourses Drainage Infrastructure Fund; and
- (b) **REQUESTED** that the Council uses its best endeavours to purchase second hand plant and that, should this be unsuccessful, the Portfolio Holder be informed of the reasons why before any order for new plant is placed.

4. FLOODS AND WATER MANAGEMENT BILL: CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The Council had been asked to respond to the draft Floods and Water Management Bill, the deadline for which was 24 July 2009. Although he welcomed the proposals to nominate Cambridgeshire County Council as the lead authority for the county, the Portfolio Holder emphasised the need for the legislation to state clearly which authority would be responsible for the powers proposed. He expressed concern at the powers being given to local government without a support grant commensurate to the level of responsibility.

The Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services) accepted that the draft bill was strong on flooding issues but not as detailed with water management issues, but advised the Portfolio Holder to respond based only upon the services for which the District Council was responsible.

The Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency **AGREED** the consultation response provided as Appendix A to the report, with the additional comments the Portfolio Holder raised at the meeting with regards to the importance clarifying in the Bill which level of local government will have overall responsibility for which services, and a caution of the danger of giving additional powers to local government without adequate funding grant support, the exact wording to be determined by the Portfolio Holder, Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services) and the Drainage Manager.

5. **CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE CHANGE CHARTER**

Cambridge City Council had adopted a voluntary Climate Change Charter for local companies, schools, businesses and organisations to sign up to, demonstrating their commitment to eight actions to tackle climate change. The Climate Change Working Group had considered and supported the idea of a similar charter, without specific geographic references, which could be adopted across South Cambridgeshire and elsewhere. The Strategic Sustainability Officer confirmed that Parish Councils would be able to sign it, and it would work in tandem with the Council's Sustainable Parish Energy Programme. The District and City Councils would be using Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) reward grant to promote the charter through a two-year programme of events at the SmartLIFE Centre, Cambridge. The Charter would also be promoted through the economic development events the Council was running, which had been well-attended, and could even form the subject for a business forum. Members were encouraged to help raise awareness of the Charter.

The Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to the launch and promotion of an appropriately amended (i.e., geographically non-specific) version of the Cambridge Climate Change Charter for organisations, schools and businesses across South Cambridgeshire.

6. **CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2009-2012: OUTCOME OF SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The Portfolio Holder received the statistics supporting the Council's first quarter performance against its Customer Service Standards and commended officers on their achievements, drawing specific attention to the performance of Reception staff. He noted that there was room to improve, particularly in the area of avoidable contact, for which a National Indicator, NI14, had been created.

The Customer Service Coordinator explained that the Service First team was looking to move its focus away from monitoring performance to working on how the Council interacted with residents. More detailed information about NI14 was now available, including customer comments to provide context, and it was expected that work in this area would have a positive effect on the authority. The Customer Services Coordinator confirmed that a new complaints process would be ready by the autumn, for consideration

by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in October 2009.

The Portfolio Holder hoped that the Council would continue to deal openly and honestly with issues raised by residents, and that lessons were learnt from complaints and the manner in which complaints were handled, even if this affected the targets set by the national government. It was acknowledged that members also provided customer service, and members were encouraged to use their discretion when information the Customer Services Coordinator of complaints they had received directly, as there would be instances where it would be suitable for certain issues to be logged on the corporate complaints system, although most matters would be addressed without recourse to the formal complaints process.

The Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the performance against the customer service standard.

7. FORWARD PLAN

There were no additions or amendments made to the Forward Plan.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Dates of future meetings were **NOTED**. It was possible that the meeting scheduled for 22 January 2010 might be moved to 21 January 2010 and members were advised to check their e-mail for details.

The Meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.
