

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 18 November 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Simon Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Roger Hall and Mervyn Loynes

Opposition spokesmen: Richard Summerfield

Also in attendance: Ray Manning and Nick Wright

Officers:

Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Philip Bird	Revenues Manager
Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Dawn Graham	Benefit Manager
Jill Mellors	Human Resources Officer

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

28. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2009 were signed as a correct record.

It was noted that the Relocation Assistance Policy had been agreed with the unions.

29. ANTI THEFT, FRAUD AND CORRUPTION POLICY

The Executive Director for Corporate Services presented this report, which invited comments from the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder on the updated Anti-Theft, Fraud and Corruption Policy, before being determined by Council.

Reporting concerns to the police

It was agreed that the policy should instruct employees of the Council to report any concerns to the relevant manager before contacting the police, to avoid wasting police time on a misunderstanding. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder agreed that the proposed amendment to the Policy in Section 4 should read "that employees of SCDC should not contact the police before reporting the matter to the relevant manager ..."

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To approve the revised Anti-Theft, Fraud and Corruption Policy, as detailed in appendix B of the report, with the revision above.

30. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Executive Director for Corporate Services presented a report on treasury management performance, which suggested changes to the Investment Strategy, to be

considered by Council in February 2010.

It was agreed that the Council should not be investing with organisations that do not have a satisfactory credit rating. However, it was noted that the number of institutions that met the criteria in the Council's Investment Strategy was declining due to mergers between banks and building societies and the decision to remove unrated institutions from the Strategy. To counter this it was noted that the Council could consider investing with overseas institutions. It was noted that such an addition would require Council approval.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED

- A) To endorse the practice of not investing in organisations which do not have a credit rating or do not have a satisfactory credit rating.
- B) That future Investment Strategies formally take account of the requirement for credit and other ratings and include proposals for additional organisations in the category.

31. REQUEST TO WRITE OFF DEBT

The Revenues Manager introduced this report, which requested that the Portfolio Holder write off two debts that were in excess of £25,000. It was noted that both debts related to Non-Domestic Rates. One debtor has absconded and despite the best efforts of the Council, which had seized some assets to reduce the amount owed, the authority was unable to recover this debt. The other debtor had gone into insolvency.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED

- A) To write off £49,488.34 of Non-Domestic Rate debt owing from Mr M Oxley T/A Formula One Storage.
- B) To write off £27,668.97 of Non-Domestic Rate debt owing from The Burlington Press Ltd.

32. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING 2009-10: SECOND QUARTER

The Human Resource Officer presented this report on the Council's sickness absence for April to September 2009. It was noted that the sickness figure for this period per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was 4.44 days, which represented a continued improvement from 2008/09. It was understood that the target figure for the end of 2009/10 was 12 days per FTE.

The meeting examined the benchmark figures by corporate area in paragraph 5(b) of the report and noted the improvement in the Health and Improvement area.

The meeting examined the table showing sickness absence by reason in paragraph 5(d) of the report and concern was expressed regarding the number of staff absence due to stress. The Human Resource Officer explained that there was no evidence that the number of staff suffering from stress had increased at the Council and that a well-being week was being launched for 23 – 27 November in an attempt to reduce staff sickness.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder welcomed the reduction in sickness absence at

the Council and **NOTED** the report.

33. LEAVERS REPORT 2009-2010: SECOND QUARTER

The Human Resource Officer introduced this report on staff who had left the Council between April and September 2009. It was noted that the number of leavers had decreased, which in part was due to the decision to restrict recruitment to internal applicants in the first instance, to reduce redundancy payments.

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

34. REVENUES QUARTERLY COLLECTION PERFORMANCE REPORT 2009/10 - SECOND QUARTER

The Resources Manager introduced a report on the current performance of the Revenues and Benefits Section. He explained that legislation allowed businesses to defer up to 60% of any increase in last year's Business Rates and this partly explained why the Council was not meeting its target for this performance indicator.

The Benefit Manager explained that there had been a decline in the number of benefit claims being received by the Council, but the number was still in excess of two years ago.

It was noted that there was still approximately £14,000 remaining in the budget for Discretionary Housing Payments. The Executive Director for Corporate Services volunteered to check that this grant scheme had been advertised in the recent version of South Cambs magazine.

The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder congratulated the Resources Manager and the Benefit Manager for their efforts in improving performance following the departure of the Head of Revenues. He **NOTED** the report.

35. FORWARD PLAN

It was noted that the Integrated Business Monitoring and Financial Update report would go to the next meeting in December.

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

36. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was **NOTED** that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 16 December at 6pm.

37. REVENUES AND BENEFITS

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, members of the public (including the press) be excluded from the discussion of the following item on the grounds that such discussion would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

The Executive Director for Corporate Services presented this report on the introduction of a shared service for the delivery of the Council's Revenues and Benefits services with Uttlesford District Council.

Savings

The Executive Director for Corporate Services explained that half of the projected £590,728 savings would be realised by removing the duplication of costs. It had been assumed that the rest of the savings would be realised through further economies of scale, including the removal of 10 posts. He stated that he was confident that at least £300,000 of savings would be realised in the short-term. However, there was a potential for further savings, not least through the possibility of other authorities joining the partnership.

Partnerships with other authorities

The Executive Director for Corporate Services explained that there were no alternative Partners currently available to the Council which could deliver the savings to the same timescale that were currently being offered via the partnership with Uttlesford District Council.

Redundancies

The Executive Director for Corporate Services explained that officers from Uttlesford District Council would not be automatically entitled to redundancy pay as their current place of work was less than 25 miles from this authority's offices in Cambourne. He explained that any decision on redundancy on these grounds would be for Uttlesford District Council but that he would not recommend that this authority contribute to any redundancy cost relating to staff from Uttlesford District Council on these grounds.

The Benefit Manager explained that whilst staff had concerns regarding integrating with officers from Uttlesford District Council, partnership working was seen as a preferable way of making savings compared to redundancies.

Quality of service

The Executive Director for Corporate Services assured the meeting that, like this authority, Uttlesford District Council were performing well in this area and no decline the quality of the service provided to our residents was expected. The aim was to improve the quality of service delivered. It was also noted that the caseloads of the two Councils were also similar.

The proposal had the support of all members present and the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder announced that the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee had agreed that this matter should be discussed at its next meeting on Thursday 3 December.

It was agreed that the word "joint" should be added to the final recommendation in the report to emphasise the fact that both Councils were involved in the submission of the bid.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED That

- A) The Executive Director Corporate Services' Supplementary report of the Outline Business Case be noted.
- B) The Outline Business Case be approved as a basis for:
 - i) The delivery of the £350,000 savings target in the Medium Term Financial Strategy; and
 - ii) Progressing the shared service project.
- C) The procurement process of a contractor for the change management aspects of

the project be commenced as soon as possible.

- D) The procurement process for a supplier for a common software platform be commenced as soon as possible.
- E) A joint bid be submitted to Improvement East for funding from the Shared Services Fund.

The Meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.
