

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 17 February 2010 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

Officers:

Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Philip Bird	Revenues Manager
Adrian Burns	Head of Accountancy
Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Susan Gardner Craig	Human Resources Manager
Dawn Graham	Benefit Manager
Paul Howes	Corporate Manager, Community and Customer Services

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

41. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the fourth paragraph under the heading "Future Provision of Members' Diaries" on page to read:

"The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder stated that the £646 provided for expenses in Members' Basic Allowance ..."

War widows

It was noted that housing benefit was paid to all war widows.

42. TREASURY MANAGEMENT & INVESTMENT STRATEGY UPDATE - (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Accountancy introduced this report which detailed the Investment Strategy for 2010/11 and requested that the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder recommended it to Council.

It was understood that the investment gradings listed in appendix 2 formalised the existing policy. It was noted that under the terms of this Strategy the Portfolio Holder, not Council, would receive quarterly reports, whilst the Council would receive the annual report.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder amended paragraph 4.4 of the Investment Strategy to state that the Corporate Governance Committee, instead of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, would be responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies.

With this amendment the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL The Investment Strategy for 2010/11 in the Appendix and requested that the Portfolio Holder be given delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Strategy in the event that the final guidance from the DCLG differs from the draft guidance.

43. DWP CONSULTATION ON SUPPORTING PEOPLE INTO WORK; THE NEXT STAGE OF HOUSING BENEFIT REFORM

The Benefit Manager presented this report, which sought agreement on the Council's response to a Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) consultation on Housing Benefit reforms.

Concern was expressed at the 70% increase in the amount paid in Housing Benefit in South Cambridgeshire from the 2004/05 total of £13 million to an estimated £22 million for 2010/11.

The Benefit Manager explained that the DWP were proposing a simplification of the system, which from an administrative point of view was to be welcomed.

It was noted that the Broad Market Rent Area assumed that rents from Littleport in the north to Saffron Walden in the south were approximately the same. This made it more difficult for those receiving housing benefit in many of the areas of South Cambridgeshire to find affordable rentable accommodation. This problem was even more apparent in the City of Cambridge.

It was noted that if implemented by the DWP, these changes would not come into effect until 2012/13.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED the consultation response to the Department for Work and Pensions as laid out in Appendix 1.

44. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES: FINANCE AND STAFFING PORTFOLIO - (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Accountancy distributed this report at the meeting, which recommended no increase in fees and charges in this Portfolio.

It was noted that if the Government decides to call a General Election on the same date as the Local Elections the parish council elections will have to be held on a separate date and this will increase the costs to the parish councils. Whilst recognising the unfairness of this the Finance and Staffing Portfolio decided that subsidising the costs of the parish council elections would not be an appropriate use of the Council's resources.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder

AGREED

- (a) Explicitly to no increase in the fees and charges relating to this Portfolio;
- (b) That in future years, discretionary fees and charges for the forthcoming year are formally considered by the relevant Portfolio Holder at the same time as the expenditure estimates are considered.

45. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING 2009-10: THIRD QUARTER

The Human Resources Manager introduced this report which provided data on the sickness absences at the Council for April to December 2009. She reported that sickness per Full Time Equivalent had increased from 4.44 at the end of the second quarter to 8.28 at the end of the third, which had increased the end of year estimate to 11.04. It was noted that this was probably due to the impact of the restructuring within the Council adding to the general uncertainty regarding officers' future employment.

Concern was expressed regarding the number of staff off sick with stress, although the scale of the problem was unclear, as it could manifest itself in other illnesses and sometimes a sufferer would be reluctant to admit to their sickness. It was suggested that the table showing sickness by reason should include the number of staff and not just the percentage figures for each section.

The Human Resources Manager explained that the Council paid sick pay under the national Green Book terms and conditions. These were being examined nationally and she did not recommend that the Council attempted to adopt its own local conditions at this time.

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

46. LEAVERS REPORT 2009-2010: THIRD QUARTER

The Human Resources Manager presented this report, which analysed the number of leavers between 1 April and 31 December 2009. The number for the end of the third quarter was 4.9%, which was lower than originally predicted, although certainly not unexpected due to the current economic climate. It was noted that all employees were encouraged to fill out an exit interview form, although it was unclear how open and honest the responses were.

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

47. REVENUES QUARTERLY COLLECTION PERFORMANCE REPORT 2009/10 - THIRD QUARTER

The Revenues Manager presented this report on the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Section. He stated that by 31 December 2009 88.4% of the Council Tax had been collected, compared with 88.5% the previous year. He was pleased to report that the Council was on course to meet the end of year target of 99.1%.

The Revenues Manager stated that Business Rates collection at 31 December was 89.6%, compared to 90.2% at the same stage last year. It was noted that businesses could defer up to 60% of any increase on last year's charge over the next two financial years, this equated to 0.4% which was included in the figures but could not be collected.

It was noted that the number of fraud cases had increased.

It was explained that the Government had requested that Councils attempt to pay invoices within 10 working days, whilst this authority had opted for the more challenging target of 10 days, which unfortunately was not being achieved. It was noted that most invoices were being paid in 12-3 days. It was agreed that the Council's target should be brought into line with the Government's target.

Staff were congratulated on maintaining a high level of performance despite the economic downturn.

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

48. INTEGRATED BUSINESS MONITORING REPORT (APRIL-DECEMBER 2009) AND UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION 2009/10 (APRIL '09-JANUARY '10) - (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Corporate Manager – Community and Customer Services presented this report which enabled the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder to consider the current financial position alongside the current performance measures in 2009/10 Corporate Plan.

It was noted that the capital budget was projected to be underspent by 11.54% due to a decline in the acquisition of dwellings. The figures for the Actual Income and Expenditure to 31 December 2009, as at 15 January 2010 were amended from £1,071,270 to £1,310,000.

It was noted that the Corporate Management budget will be overspent by £35,000 due to increased External Audit fees due to advice and additional work in the closure of the Statutory Accounts.

The Corporate Manager – Community and Customer Services explained that only two Performance Indicators were projected to be red at the end of the year. These were:

- To introduce our own Best Kept Village Competition by December 2009
- Improved street and environmental cleanliness – levels of detritus.

It was understood that there were plans to introduce the Best Kept Village Competition by the end of the municipal year. It was also understood that the level of street and environmental cleanliness could be improved but this would require increased expenditure. It was noted that part of the purpose of CorVu was to allow the Council's decision makers to consider where extra resources were most required.

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

49. FORWARD PLAN

It was agreed that the Corporate Asset Management Plan would be discussed at the next meeting on 17 March 10 meeting. The item on the Travellers' Issues – Position Statement was removed from the forward plan. It was agreed that a report showing the end of year performance, defined by targets set in the Service Plans relevant to the Portfolio, should be received at a future meeting of this portfolio holder.

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

50. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17 March 2009 6pm in the Monkfield Room.

The Meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.
