

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on  
Thursday, 12 March 2009 at 4.00 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: MP Howell

### **Councillors in attendance:**

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitor: MB Loynes  
Opposition spokesmen RB Martlew and RT Summerfield

### **Officers:**

Holly Adams	Democratic Services Officer
Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Ian Cawthra	Human Resources Officer
Susan Gardner Craig	Human Resources Manager
Anita Goddard	Housing Services Manager
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer

### **25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

### **26. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **Candidate Interview Expenses (minute 20)**

The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the practice of reimbursing expenses to candidates attending job interviews had ceased from the start of 2009, as per the Portfolio Holder's decision.

### **27. INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ACCREDITATION**

The Portfolio Holder congratulated all staff and members, and in particular the Human Resources department, for the Council's achievement of Investors in People accreditation, the formal confirmation of which had been received just hours earlier.

### **28. COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITIES POLICY 2009-2012**

The Equality and Diversity Officer presented the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009-2012, noting that Cabinet had approved a previous draft prior to a round of consultation with stakeholders and partners. The Policy set out a three-year vision for equalities provision at the council, with ambitious, but achievable, plans and commitments, which saw the Council on course to meet Level 2 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government (ESLG) by June 2009 and Level 3 before the end of the policy in 2012. External stakeholders were being invited to a workshop in April 2009 with a view towards establishing an Equalities Consultative Forum to ensure that the Council was meeting the commitments it made with this policy. The Equality and Diversity Officer undertook to send the draft policy to GMB to receive that union's representations before the April 2009 Cabinet meeting.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **ENDORSED** the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009-2012 and recommended that Cabinet adopt the new policy at its meeting on 16 April

2009.

## 29. COUNCIL OFFICE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR CLOSING ARRANGEMENTS 2009/10

The HR Manager presented an overview of the 2008/09 arrangements which successfully met the right level of service to meet public demand and expectations. There had been staff consultations on the proposed 2009/10 arrangements and the majority of comments received had opposed the splitting of the concessionary day between Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The HR Manager confirmed that the purpose was to keep the offices open and services provided both mornings, then close early when there wasn't any public demand expected. Staff could opt to use flexi-time or annual leave to supplement the concessionary day and take a full day's leave on either or both days. The Portfolio Holder received confirmation that the proposals would seek staff volunteers only, and that only in situations where a service could not find enough volunteers should HR become involved. He asked that his personal thanks be extended to all staff who volunteered over the previous holiday period, particularly those at the Depot.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that:

- (a) the Council offices be open with a skeleton staff over the Christmas and New Year period 2009/10 and the concessionary day be used to close the offices for the afternoons on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The Council offices therefore would open as follows:
- Thursday 24 December 2009 – open to the public between 9am and 12.30 pm and open to staff between 8am and 1pm;
  - Friday 25 December 2009 – bank holiday, offices closed
  - Monday 28 December 2009 – bank holiday, offices closed
  - Tuesday 29 December 2009 – open regular office hours
  - Wednesday 30 December 2009 – open regular office hours
  - Thursday 31 December 2009 – open to the public between 9am and 12.30 pm and open to staff between 8am and 1pm;
  - Friday 1 January 2010 – bank holiday, offices closed;
- (b) staffing / service requirements to be determined by corporate managers; and
- (c) staffing of the Cambourne office to be on a volunteer basis.

## 30. REVIEW OF FAMILY ISSUES POLICY

The HR Manager presented this report which sought to revise and update the Family Issues Policy. It was noted that this was a timely review due to changes in the law and the fact that the Policy was last reviewed in 2003.

It was understood that the amended policy would extend flexible working rights to allow all staff to apply and would extend compassionate leave to include the loss of a close friend

### **Parental leave**

The HR Manager explained that proposed legislation would allow parental leave to be taken to look after a child who was up to 16 years of age, whilst the current age limit was 8.

### **Compassionate leave**

It was noted that all cases of compassionate leave would be handled sympathetically and practically. It was agreed that the word "close" should be added to the wording of the policy to clarify that it was only for the loss of close friends.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder

**AGREED**

- A) The revised family issues policies, with the amendment to the compassionate leave policy to clarify that the extension only applied to the loss of a close friend.
- B) To delegate authority to the HR Manager to amend the policy in line with any changes in the legislation.
- C) That policies should be drafted to cover flexible retirement, secondments and sabbaticals in order to give fair and open access to all staff in these areas.

**31. HR / PAYROLL SERVICE PLAN 2009/10**

The HR Manager presented the Service Plan for HR and Payroll, which had been published in January. She assured the Meeting that the targets in the attached Service Plan were achievable.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder congratulated officers on meeting the targets in last year's Service Plan and was hopeful that the targets in the attached Plan would also be achieved.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** the Service Plan for HR & Payroll Service 2009/10 to 2011/12.

**32. TRAVELLERS' ISSUES - POSITION STATEMENT AND STOCK CONDITION SURVEY**

The Housing Services Manager presented this application which sought approval for traveller site stock condition surveys at Blackwell and Whaddon for the purposes of seeking grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The Housing Services Manager explained that the survey would cost £20,000 and needed to be carried out by 30 June 2009 to allow the Council apply for grant funding from the HCA, which would allow both sites to be renovated and an extra pitch to be added on both sites. The Housing Services Manager assured the meeting that the £20,000 could be claimed back from the HCA.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that whilst he supported the aims of the project he needed to liaise with the Finance Portfolio Holder to identify a budget from which the £20,000 necessary to fund the project could be vired.

**33. PAY AND GRADING REVIEW - UPDATE**

The HR Manager updated the Staffing Portfolio Holder on the excellent progress being made on the Job Evaluation Project.

**Origins or review**

It was noted that a pay review had taken place in 2003/04 and an Equal Pay Audit in 2007 had indicated that a new pay and grading scheme was required. However, the Council were required by law to undergo this pay and grading review to ensure that complied with equalities legislation.

**Partnership working between unions and management**

The HR Manager explained that both GMB and UNISON had been involved in every stage of the project with Regional representatives from both unions on the Job Evaluation Project Steering Group and a union representative on each Evaluation Panel.

**Timescale of project**

The HR Manager explained that the Project was on schedule to be completed by 1 April 2010 and an officer had been trained to cover the work of the Job Analyst in the event of an unexpected absence. However, this timescale for the project was dependent on the approval of the unions.

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

**34. LEAVERS APRIL 2008 – DECEMBER 2008**

The HR Manager presented an update on the turnover of staff, covering the period 1 April 2008 to 31 December 2008. It was noted that there had been 35 leavers in this period, compared to 87 for the year 2006/07. It was agreed that the possibility of all leavers being given the option of having their exit interview conducted by someone other than their line manager would be considered in the next policy review.

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

**35. MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE - UPDATE**

The HR Manager presented this report on the action being taken to manage sickness absence across the Council.

**Long-term sickness**

The HR Manager explained that long-term sickness was being managed consistently throughout the authority and HR was involved in arranging occupational health referrals and advising on workplace adjustments where appropriate. Some cases where redeployment or workplace adjustments have not been possible have eventually led to officers being dismissed on the grounds of ill health.

**Short-term sickness**

The HR Manager explained that steps needed to be taken to ensure that all managers followed the absence management processes to monitor short-term sickness and that all officers returning to work from an illness were given a return to work interview. It was noted that good record keeping could highlight patterns of sickness that could then be addressed.

**Cost**

Councillor Summerfield reported that he understood that sickness was costing the authority £575,000.

**Comparisons with other Councils**

The HR Manager agreed to provide comparative data with other neighbouring authorities on sickness absence for 2008/09.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder expressed the hope that all managers would consistently apply the Council's sickness absence policy. He **noted** the report.

**36. MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The HR Manager presented this report on the work of the Management Development Project Group in rolling out the Management Competency Framework (MCF). It was noted that the Corporate Governance Inspection report had identified concerns with regard to managerial capacity of the Council and this project was in response to that.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **noted** the report and the progress being made.

### **37. SUPPORTING GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS**

#### **Travellers IT Project**

The Housing Services Manager presented a grant application for a project which would allow travellers on the Blackwell site and Smithy Fen, Cottenham, to access computer learning and computer based activities.

The Housing Services Manager explained that this was a pilot project and so two contrasting sites had been chosen. The Blackwell site was owned by the Council and the Smithy Fen site had the District's greatest concentration of Irish travellers.

In response to concerns about the effectiveness of a project that provided six visits over a three month period the Housing Services Manager explained that Cambridge Housing Society lent out a laptop computer to allow users to hone their IT skills in between the six visits.

It was noted that the Travellers Budget set up by Council could only be used for planning enforcement issues.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that whilst he supported the project in principle he needed to liaise with the Finance Portfolio Holder to ascertain whether there was a budget available from which the £3,000 necessary to fund the project could be vired.

#### **Buffy Bus**

The Housing Services Manager presented a grant application for a project which would allow travellers on the Blackwell site and Smithy Fen to access educational play activity sessions for the under five age group.

Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that whilst he supported the aims of the project he needed to liaise with the Finance Portfolio Holder to ascertain whether there was a budget available from which the £3,600 necessary to fund the project could be vired.

#### **Awareness Project**

The Housing Services Manager presented a grant application for a project which would raise awareness, increase understanding of Gypsy and Traveller lives and issues and dispel some of the myths surrounding the Gypsy/Traveller culture to both internal and external parties.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **rejected** this application on the grounds that at a cost of £2,000 it did not represent good value for money.

### **38. FORWARD PLAN**

#### **Staff Satisfaction Survey**

The HR Manager explained that the next Staff Satisfaction Survey would now be carried out in September instead of March and so the Staff Satisfaction Update would not now be received in May.

#### **Officer and Member Relations**

The Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that this report had been removed from the Forward Plan at his request as had become apparent that it was not possible to provide equitable treatment towards both an elected Councillor and an officer who were engaged

in a relationship.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the Forward Plan.

**39. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Staffing Portfolio Holder announced that his meetings were likely to be held after Cabinet meetings in the future.

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**The Meeting ended at 6.00 p.m.**

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