

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Tuesday, 25 August 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: SM Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Opposition spokesman RT Summerfield

Officers:

GJ Harlock	Chief Executive
S Gardner Craig	HR Manager
A Burns	Head of Accountancy
P Bird	Revenues Manager
G Moody	Democratic Services

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Hall, MB Loynes and RB Martlew.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of 7 July 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

19. WORKFORCE PLAN

The HR Manager presented a report to request that the Portfolio Holder approve a revised Workforce Plan for 2009 prior to submission to Cabinet on 10 September 2009. The Plan had been refreshed to reflect the outcome of the Housing Futures ballot.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that Stonewall was an organisation that championed the issues faced by gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in the wider community. By becoming a Stonewall Champion the Council reflected its commitment to meeting the needs of those groups.

Concerns were expressed at the low percentage of the workforce aged less than 25 years and the Portfolio Holder was advised that those joining in that age bracket tended to leave after 3-4 years due to the lack of progression opportunities.

Staff turnover was discussed and the Portfolio Holder was advised that, at 5.5%, it was thought to be the lowest ever and below a level generally regarded as healthy for an organisation. Uncertainty over the Housing Futures project had had an impact on staff turnover and the Portfolio Holder expressed a desire to see turnover increase to an acceptable level.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that the Council were exploring flexible retirement options that could allow for an individual to retire and draw a pension whilst remaining at

work on reduced hours in a post with reduced responsibility. It was believed that adoption of the policy could create movement, and opportunities, within the Council.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the action plan associated with the Workforce Plan included flexi-working and outputs from the staff satisfaction survey.

The Portfolio Holder commented that he was pleased that there had been an increase in the number of ethnic minority workers in the workforce. He was also pleased to note that Modern Apprenticeships and sponsored internships were being considered as a way to replenish the Council with new talent.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that a succession planning report, together with costings, had been presented to EMT and that options for providing training were being explored internally. No date had been set for the implementation of the plan.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the 'Duty to Consider' Policy was a national initiative.

In reply to a question about the level of spend on staff training the Portfolio Holder was advised that the spend had been appropriate to the training needs identified within each service area's plan. Each service area had its own training budget. Effectiveness of training was through the performance review process and attendees completed feedback forms. The Portfolio Holder was advised that more effective management of staff training would require dedicated resource within the HR team.

In reply to a further question the Portfolio Holder was advised that flexible working practices had been benchmarked from other local authorities, award winning employers and CIPD best practice. The Portfolio Holder was further advised that future flexible working practices would take Government Connect into account. Benefits of flexible working would include a reduction in CO2 outputs, less pressure on car parking and a better work life balance for employees.

The Portfolio Holder requested that the profile of the Investors in People award be raised by including the achievement in the introduction to the Plan and by expanding the narrative to include a description of the award with details of how it had been achieved and what it meant to the Council, its staff and its customers.

Action: Paul Swift / Susan Gardner Craig

The Portfolio Holder further requested that the date labelling of the Workforce Plan be clarified.

Action: Paul Swift / Susan Gardner Craig

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **ENDORSED**, subject to the amendments discussed at the meeting, the draft Workforce Plan, and **AGREED** to recommend that Cabinet adopt the Workforce Plan in September 2009.

20. UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION

The Head of Accountancy presented a report to provide the Portfolio Holder with a monthly position statement on the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Expenditure.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that there had been an increase of £358,000 in the projected overspend in the General Fund since the June update and the principal reasons for this were identified in the covering report.

The Portfolio Holder was advised of a change to the administration of the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive grant that had benefited the Council. In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was further advised that it would be impossible to plan for a specific amount of grant in future years.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the measures identified to achieve savings of £325,000 would be reported at a later date. It was anticipated that the measures would lead to a permanent reduction in spend.

The Portfolio Holder expressed concern at the amount of interest earned by the Council's reserves. In reply to a question it was confirmed that the level of reserves in long-term investments did not match the Portfolio Holder's expectations. The Portfolio Holder expressed a desire to see the Council's money working harder.

The use of reserve funds was discussed and the Portfolio Holder was advised that previous assumptions regarding the use of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant were no longer valid as there was a requirement for consistency with the Medium Term Financial Forecast. However it was confirmed that, barring intervention overspends / shortfalls in income in Development Control and Building Control would be met from reserves.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that blanket indemnity to private firms performing land searches had been withdrawn and that this had resulted for more business for the Council, leading to Land Charges income being more than expected. The Portfolio Holder was advised that the Principal Solicitor was confident of further gains in the market share.

The Portfolio Holder expressed a desire to see positive action to achieve savings, and suggested that Corporate Managers, especially from those service areas where income had reduced, should be tasked with working up practical solutions. The Chief Executive proposed that the topic be discussed at the Leader's meeting on 28 August and this was agreed.

The Portfolio Holder wished for his concerns to be noted and expressed a determination to address the financial issues facing the Council.

The report was **NOTED**.

21. REVENUES COLLECTION PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 1

The Portfolio Holder welcomed Phil Bird, Revenues Manager, to his first Portfolio Holder's meeting.

The Revenues Manager presented the Revenues Service Quarterly Performance Report for the first quarter 2009/10 and the Portfolio Holder was advised of the following key points:

- The reduction in collection levels for Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) reflected a national trend, showing a significant drop from levels achieved in 2007/08.
- The government had issued NDR Deferred Scheme Notification legislation and, so far, 50 applications had been received from small businesses. The potential

impact on reported collection rates was unknown at this stage.

- The number of tenants shown as being more than 7 weeks in rent arrears (475) was incorrect, as it included garage rents and former tenant's arrears. The number should be 233, 4.08% of tenancies.
- The Rent Collection team would be fully staffed from w/c 31 August and that the collection monitoring process had been broadened. There was a high degree of confidence that the rent collection target of 98.6% would be achieved for the year.
- The response times for benefit claims had reduced from their peak in May and were at 25 days for a new claim against a target of 20 days, and 9.62 days for change in circumstance against a target of 8 days.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the information available from Corvu would not be as detailed as that shown in the current report. The Portfolio Holder expressed a desire to see data presented from Corvu and agreed that the report should be produced in both formats for the Quarter 2 review for comparative purposes.

Action: Phil Bird

The Portfolio Holder requested that the narrative of the report be presented in the standard template format for future meetings.

Action: Phil Bird

The report was **NOTED**>

22. SICKNESS ABSENCE

The HR Manager presented a report to provide information for the Portfolio Holder on the management of sickness absence for the period 1 April – 30 June 2009.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the report was produced as a regular quarterly update, and was further advised of the actions that had been taken to drive down sickness absence levels.

Attention was drawn to the projected end of year absence figure of 6.92 days (per full time equivalent employee) although a caveat was given that an expected upturn in Swine Flu cases in autumn could have a negative impact. The Portfolio Holder was advised that there had been two confirmed cases of Swine Flu within the Council. An awareness campaign and improved hygiene regime, including providing handwash stations, had been introduced. It was expected that these measures would produce side benefits in terms of reducing absences for other illnesses, such as Seasonal Flu.

The Portfolio Holder commented positively on the performance in reducing sickness absence, and the report was **NOTED**.

23. FORWARD PLAN

The Leavers Update item and the Relocation Policy were rescheduled for the September meeting.

The Head of Accountancy mentioned that, with having meetings at the beginning of the month, it may not be possible to report on the financial position up to the end of the

previous month within the few days available.

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

Since the meeting the Relocation Policy item has been further rescheduled to the October meeting to allow time for consultation.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The meeting schedule for the remainder of the civic year was agreed as follows:

8 September 2009	Monkfield Room
6 October 2009	Monkfield Room
3 November 2009	Council Chamber (tbc)
1 December 2009	Monkfield Room
5 January 2010	Monkfield Room
2 February 2010	Monkfield Room
2 March 2010	Jeavons Room
6 April 2010	Monkfield Room
4 May 2010	Jeavons Room

All meetings are on Tuesdays and will start at 10am.

The Meeting ended at 11.30 a.m.
