

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Tuesday, 21 July 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Simon Edwards

Councillors in attendance:

Opposition spokesmen: John Williams

Officers:

Katie Brown	Revenues Manager
Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Dawn Graham	Benefits Manager
Sally Smart	Principal Accountant Financial & Systems

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder confirmed as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2015.

3. POLICY FOR GRANTING DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder considered a report about the proposed amended policy for the granting of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

The Benefits Manager referred to the recent High Court Judicial Review concerning the decision in *Hardy, R (on the application of) v Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council* [2015]. The facts in that case had related to Disability Living Allowance being taken into account when looking at income available to the claimants and assessing entitlement to DHP. As a result, officers were proposing that minor amendments be made to South Cambridgeshire District Council's Policy for granting DHP.

The Benefits Manager explained the reasons for the amendments. In particular, she drew attention to paragraph 5 of the Policy, which proposed the following amended wording:

“Awards shall be limited to a period up to 31 March of the year in respect of which the application is made, but may also be awarded for a shorter period of time. New applications may be submitted once the current award ends, although applicants should note that there is no guarantee that an application will be renewed and there is an expectation that applicants will be actively taking other steps to resolve the household's housing or financial issue.”

This new wording recognised the fact that a new budget would be available in each financial year.

The Benefits Manager indicated that a further review should take place at the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder meeting in January 2016 in order to assess the likely implications of changes being made nationally with effect from April 2016.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **adopted and endorsed** the amended Policy for

the Award of Discretionary Housing Payments, attached as an Appendix to the report from the Executive Director (Corporate Services).

4. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a report about the performance of the Treasury Management function.

Councillor John Williams referred to Minute 4 (Treasury Management Review) of the meeting on 21 April 2015. The Principal Accountant explained that, because of a number of internal resource pressures, and the fact that, unlike with some other Authorities, South Cambridgeshire District Council did not use external advisers to determine where to invest, it had not been possible for officers to draw up the list that had been requested. The Portfolio Holder agreed to carry this matter forward until such time as a list of ethical investments was available for presentation to the Portfolio Holder and other interested Members.

The Principal Accountant presented the report, highlighting a number of key points, including the status of South Cambridgeshire District Council's financial relationship with South Cambs Ltd (Ermine Street Housing).

The Executive Director (Corporate Services) gave advance notice of the need to recast the Housing Revenue Account as a result of the recent Budget announcement. He said that there was likely to be a significant impact on South Cambridgeshire District Council's Capital Programme for the period leading up to 2019-20. Cabinet would be considering a report at its meeting in September 2015.

The Principal Accountant highlighted key aspects in Appendix A, and explained the implications of the Risk Reports contained in Appendix B.

Councillor John Williams referred to paragraph 10 of the report. At its meeting on 19 November 2013, Cabinet had approved the advance of £7 million to South Cambs Ltd for the purchase of property to support the Council's objectives. As at 30 June 2015, counterparty investments of £6.23 million had been made to the company. The Executive Director (Corporate Services) explained that, within the next few months, the Council would be seeking to redefine its financial relationship with South Cambs Ltd, protecting its loan with a Debenture.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder congratulated the Principal Accountant and her Team for the continued excellent performance of the Treasury Management function.

5. **REVENUES QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 4: JANUARY - MARCH 2015**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a report setting out the current performance of the Revenues & Benefits Section using statistical information and further explanation where required.

The Revenues Manager commended the report to the Portfolio Holder, pointing out that the high level of performance had been achieved notwithstanding Revenues and Benefits staff taking an increasing number of telephone calls from the Contact Centre. The Executive Director (Corporate Services) said that South Cambridgeshire District Council had the fifth highest Council Tax collection rate in England and the twentieth highest collection rate for Business Rates.

The Benefits Manager summarised that part of the report relevant to the responsibilities of her staff, and explained how Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) funding worked.

Officers undertook to investigate how Discretionary Housing Payments could be used to make one- and two-bedroom properties available by helping residents to find alternative accommodation in the private sector.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder described the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Teams as exceptional and excellent.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** the Work Programme attached to the agenda, and added the following:

- Discretionary Housing Payments review in January 2016
- Organisational Development Strategy refresh in October 2015

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Those present **noted** that the next Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 20 October 2015, starting at 6.00pm.

The Meeting ended at 6.45 p.m.
