

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Portfolio Holder's meeting held on
Thursday, 20 November 2008 at 5.00 p.m.

Portfolio Councillor MP Howell
Holder:

Councillors in attendance:

MB Loynes	Scrutiny and Overview Monitor
RT Summerfield	Opposition Spokesman

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Joe Brown (Democratic Services Officer) and Susan Gardner Craig (Human Resources Manager)

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Portfolio Holder approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2008 as a correct record of those proceedings.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There was no declaration of interest in any item on the agenda.

20. CANDIDATE INTERVIEW EXPENSES

The Portfolio Holder considered a report of the Chief Executive regarding the authority's policy on the payment of interview expenses. The authority had a policy and practice of paying reasonable travel and overnight accommodation expenses to job candidates who attended for the purpose of interview. Candidates were automatically provided with interview expenses claim forms when invited for interview. Reimbursements made normally covered petrol costs for a car journey, public transport charges and in some cases hotel and meal costs where an overnight stay had been necessary.

There had recently been an increase in applications from individuals living overseas and it was believed that in the near future the authority might find itself liable for greatly increased claims should such candidates be shortlisted for interview. The report revealed that many private sector companies did not pay expenses and there was no evidence to suggest that this was influencing the decisions of candidates to apply or not.

The report considered whether a withdrawal of the practise of reimbursing interview expenses would impact adversely on applications from unemployed persons. The Human Resources Manager explained that unemployed persons were eligible to access help with interview expenses from their local job centre, and that any changes to the current policy could only be implemented as soon as was contractually possible.

The Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that:

- i. the current practice of reimbursing expenses to candidates attending job interviews should cease, and
- ii. authority be delegated to the Human Resources Manager to select the date for early implementation of the new policy.

21. EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

The Portfolio Holder considered a report of the Chief Executive, the purpose of which was to inform the Portfolio Holder of initiatives planned for 17th – 21st November 2008 to improve general employee wellbeing and to further explain that the authority was working in partnership with NHS Cambridgeshire (formally Cambridgeshire PCT) to improve the health of residents. The authority had jointly agreed an improving health plan for the district the purpose of which was to provide a plan to take forward and monitor the health priorities and objectives that had been identified in the sustainable community strategies for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire.

The overriding theme that ran through the plan was that partners needed to get "their own house in order" before "preaching" to others, thus the authority was working with staff to improve their health which had benefits for the authority as employer.

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report, **PRAISED** the initiatives and **THANKED** the Human Resources Team for their efforts in setting up the Employee Wellbeing Week.

22. PAY AND GRADING UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder considered a report of the Chief Executive/Job Analyst which gave an update on the progress made by the Job Evaluation Project Group.

The project plan and terms of reference had been formally agreed at the joint union meeting in April 2008. The Job Evaluation and Equal Pay Steering Group (JEEPSG) had been convened, and Debbie Blow, (job analyst) had joined the project in June and had commenced work on identifying and agreeing a range of benchmark posts to be evaluated. These were drawn from the whole organisation as a representative sample of traditional male & female roles, manual and office roles, managerial, professional officer and unskilled roles. A Job Description Questionnaire (JDQ) format had been agreed. Protocols and conventions had been drafted and were subject to consultation with the unions.

All benchmark jobholders had been contacted and interviewed by the end of September. A second tranche had also been completed and third and fourth tranches were scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2009.

All 'high occupancy' jobs had been included in the first tranche, which included; Sheltered Housing Officers, Refuse Operatives and General Trades. All posts which had been identified as potential TUPE transfers, in the event of a housing stock transfer had been covered by the 3rd and 4th tranches prior to the proposed tenant ballot. There had been positive feedback from jobholders who had been through the JDQ interview process. They had been willing to meet with the Job Analyst and felt well informed about project and process, this was thought to have been due to the successful and ongoing communication of the JE project.

Union comments had been positive and there was a sense of partnership within the JEEPSG. Both Unions (UNISON and GMB) had expressed confidence in the process and felt reassured that the Council had adopted the right approach. GMB regional representative had been very complimentary about the degree of progress made by the HR team in completing the initial stages of the project.

There had been initial agreement that the JEEPSG would meet monthly (commencing 4th November 2008) to ensure regular communication, co-operation and joint working with the unions throughout project. However agreement was reached with the trade unions, at the JEEPSG meeting on 4th November, that the evaluation panels would be held on a weekly

basis, commencing on 12th November 2009. The composition of the panels would be one union representative (alternating between GMB and UNISON), one staff member and an HR Chair/notetaker.

The report concluded that the Job Evaluation and Equal Pay project was a partnership between the Council, trade unions and employees and that Joint working and communication were key elements and integral to the success of the project.

The project plan, associated documents and evaluation methodology had been jointly agreed between the unions and Council and joint meetings would continue to be held for the duration of the project.

Positive feedback had been received from employees who had been interviewed as part of the JDQ exercise.

The project was on target for completion in 2010.

The Staffing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report and **PRAISED** the professional manner in which the project was being conducted.

23. REGIONAL INTERCHANGE PROGRAMME

The Staffing Portfolio Holder considered a report of the Chief Executive / Human Resources Officer on the Regional Interchange Programme

The East of England Regional Assembly had launched Interchange in Spring 2007. The aim of the programme was to offer staff within the eastern region the opportunity of developing their skills in a challenging and encouraging way. Interchange also aimed to build the capacity of local government through sharing available resources. Where a particular authority has a lack of experience in one area there is almost certainly somebody in another authority who does have that experience. A key objective of Interchange is to facilitate greater sharing of the collective experience and expertise of the local government family in the East of England (54 Local Authorities, 6 Fire and Rescue Authorities, Go East, East of England Development Agency and East of England Regional Assembly).

A network of Interchange Managers facilitated by Improvement East had been established throughout the region to coordinate Interchange within participating authorities. This engagement meant that the project would be regularly refreshed so as to continue to meet the needs of authorities and participants. Through the Interchange project, staff and members should be able to take part in; secondments, work shadowing, buddying, attachments or discussion groups.

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

24. FORWARD PLAN

The Portfolio Holder asked that the '*April 2008 – December 2008, Leavers Report*' be brought to his January meeting.

The Meeting ended at 5:48 pm.
