

AGENDA ITEM NO. x

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory and Support Services Committee
held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely
on Monday 4th April 2016 at 4:30pm

P R E S E N T

Councillor Anna Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith
Councillor David Ambrose Smith
Councillor Sue Austen
Councillor Peter Cresswell
Councillor Neil Hitchin
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Carol Sennitt
Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Jo Webber

OTHERS PRESENT

Emma Grima – Director, Commercial & Corporate Services
Nicole Pema – Human Resources Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Annette Wade – Customer Services Manager

85. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions received from members of the public.

86. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mike Bradley.

87. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

88. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

89. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- The Cambridgeshire-wide handyperson service was now up and running, supported by Age UK from the 1st April for 3 years. It aimed to help people over 65 years old in their own homes to prevent falls and ensure their safety. The service would undertake small jobs, charged at £25 per hour plus materials.

Councillor Jo Webber joined the meeting at this point, 4:34pm.

The service would provide a trusted person to complete the jobs with a seven-day-a-week emergency service available to help people being discharges from hospital. Contact for this service was available via Age UK or through the Care and repair service available at the Council. Leaflets explaining the new service would be made available.

- In October 2015 the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) Trading Company was established. ARP had given the go ahead for this to become incorporated and this Council had contributed a £10,000 loan. Andy Radford, the Council's Chief Financial Officer, would become a Director of the new company.

90. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS**

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the items no. 7 and 8 because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1 & 3 Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as Amended).

91. **APPOINTMENTS, TRANSFERS AND RESIGNATIONS**

The Committee received an exempt report (Q233, previously circulated) which provided details of staff appointments, transfers and resignations for the period 1st to 31st March 2016.

The Human Resources Manager advised the Committee that 3 appointments had been made, there had been 3 leavers, no transfers over that period and 1 post had been deleted. 1 person had resigned. The turnover was 1.6%, compared to 1% for the same period last year.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there had been some discussion over the frequency of this report. The reports had been brought to the Committee so it could monitor the situation regarding the staff. The new internal Connect magazine published information about staff changes so the information was readily available. As the reports did not provide any collated information perhaps it would be appropriate to receive the report every six months rather than at every meeting. Councillor Julia Huffer agreed with this last point and the Human Resources Manager acquiesced to providing this information in a future report.

Councillor Peter Cresswell took an opposite view as he preferred regular reports, as this kept the Committee abreast of staff changes. Therefore he would like to see the report continue to be presented with the same frequency.

Councillor Sue Austen concurred and reminded the Committee that she had requested the reports be brought to Committee so it knew which staff were due to leave.

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith was disappointed that few exit questionnaires were completed when staff left. This information would prove useful in finding out why people were leaving.

The Human Resources Manager pointed out that exit interviews were not compulsory and some people did not like them. They were encouraged to fill in a questionnaire even without meeting Human Resources staff for the exit interviews.

It was resolved:

That the content of the information report be noted.

92. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 29th February 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

The following items were open to the public.

93. **SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME 2016-2020**

The Committee received a report (Q234, previously circulated) which reviewed the Council's revised Single Equality Scheme which had been updated for the period 2016-2020.

The Human Resources Manager advised the Committee that Appendix 1 to the report set out the revised Scheme. It would now meet the responsibilities of equalities legislation and ensured that equality was taken into account during decision making and that discrimination was tackled. Internal consultation on the Action Plan within the document had started and, subject to agreement, it would go out for public consultation.

Councillor Neil Hitchin thought the assessment checklist was superb but needed to be used properly. For example, if this had been used for the toilets review the outcome may have been different.

Councillor Anna Bailey suggested a staff seminar be held to inform staff of this important document, and all staff needed to attend. Members should also be invited. With regards consultation, the dates in the Appendix (page 12, section 4.2) were out-of-date, so when would the consultation take place?

The Human Resources Manager stated this would be held for a six week period during April and May.

It was resolved:

That the Council's updated Single Equality Scheme be approved and that consultation commences more widely with Councillors, local residents, community groups, partner organisations, parish councils and other associations.

94. **PLANNING REVIEW**

The Committee received a report (Q235, previously circulated) which informed the Committee of the planning review.

Councillor Lis Every joined the meeting at this point, 4:47pm.

The Director, Commercial and Corporate Services, advised the Committee that the review had commenced in August 2015. A lot of hard work had taken place alongside the planning team. Significant improvements had been made to the planning service with regards what their customers wanted. Appendix A gave an update on progress to date but this would not stop as continued improvement was the aim.

Councillor Anna Bailey welcomed this review, as people were now very pleased with the service provided by the planning department. Getting consistency when dealing with people helped make the procedures easier, fairer and more transparent. Parish councils needed to become aware that part of the service now included the provision of pre-application advice to make the whole process easier.

Councillor Peter Cresswell noted the significant improvement and congratulated all concerned as this was helping the Council work its way towards a lean and efficient organisation. Appendix 1 to the report should not have been included as it was a working paper for internal use only and should not have been put into the public arena.

Councillor Neil Hitchin thought the review had restored Members' confidence in the service and had helped restore that of the public. Small developers could not differentiate between officers and Members in the process but, as people experienced the new service, confidence in it would be built.

Councillor Jo Webber had been dealing with the planning department for a long time and a lot of its work was statutory. Recently a planning officer had spent a few minutes on the telephone sorting out a problem, which was a reflection of the new improved service provided.

It was resolved:

That the contents of the planning review report attached at appendix A be noted.

95. **HANDLING OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

The Committee received a report (Q236, previously circulated) which detailed the revised Customer Complaints Policy and handling process and also detailed a draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainers.

The Customer Services Manager advised the Committee that the policy had three changes. These were: to centralise the complaints system to provide a consistent service across the Council and to give monitoring of the complaints received; to introduce a procedure whereby lessons could be learned from feedback from the complaints to understand underlying problems and thereby improve services; to introduce a new policy to handle vexatious complainants. Although there were few exceptional cases of vexatious complaints, the Council had a duty to protect its staff and Members. The intention of the new policy was not necessarily to limit such complainers contact with the Council but to help deal with them fairly and honestly. The policy documents were quite hefty so a short guide was tabled to help understand the processes.

Councillor Anna Bailey was nervous about the policy but the draft was very positive, as it had safeguards in. It was important that staff and Members were protected. It was to be hoped that it would not be necessary to use the new policy very often. It would be useful to receive an update in around six months to see how the new policy was faring.

In the revised Complaints Policy it was suggested that there would be no automatic response to comments made. However, it was vital that people receive a response. Any response to a complaint sent to the Local Government Ombudsman should also be copied to the relevant Service Lead, so this should be added into the Policy.

Regarding the new Persistent Complainants Policy contact details for local Members should be included, so Members could act as arbiters and support people through the process. Persistent complainers could lodge a number of complaints over a period of time over a number of various service areas. In this situation this should come under the control of an officer put in charge and batch the complaints as one so that officer could respond in totality. The 'scattergun' approach in itself should not be considered unreasonable.

Although any complaint could be considered by the Council as 'unimportant' this language was not helpful, so a more suitable word should be used. Any complaint was always important, particularly to the complainant, so this section needed re-wording to reflect that.

Councillor Jo Webber deemed it really important to have these policies, as robust policies would help protect the complainant as well. The appeals

procedure was good and the whole thing was good for Members to show to the public.

Councillor Neil Hitchin thought that conflict resolution was easier if done privately and not subject to public scrutiny.

The Customer Services Manager explained that the intention was to reply but not to every single complaint. Single incidents were not unacceptable but the proposed centralised system would highlight persistent complainants. The intention was to resolve formal complaints as swiftly as possible.

The Committee then considered the report recommendations with the amendments suggested by Members and these were agreed.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the revised Customer Complaints Policy and handling process be approved, subject to the following amendment:
 - Paragraph 4.7 - Relevant Service Leads to receive a copy of any response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) following a LGO complaint;
- (ii) That the draft Policy for Handling Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants be approved, subject to the following amendments:
 - Paragraph 3.2 - Local Member contact details to be offered to the complainant;
 - Appendix A (page 20) – Complaints cutting across different service areas to be responded to as one complaint by the officer in charge;
 - Appendix A (page 21) - The word ‘unimportant’ to be replaced with a more suitable word.

96. **FORWARD PLANNING FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTING**

The Committee received a report (Q237, previously circulated) which considered the forward planning of performance management reporting.

The Director, Commercial and Corporate Services, reminded the Committee of the new concept for performance management for the Council. It had been found that the timetable for it did not fit in with the Council’s budget timetable. This made it difficult to align service delivery against budgets, so a new performance management timetable had been drawn up to line up with the service delivery plans, as Appendix A to the report.

It was onerous for Service Leads to provide six monthly reports to the Committee about service performance based on the current template. Therefore a new reporting template had been devised, as Appendix B to the report, to show service performance at the halfway point in a simplified way.

A revised set of recommendations were tabled.

Councillor Peter Cresswell noted that discussions on the process had taken place and the new timetable and template were the right things to do.

Councillor Anna Bailey was pleased with the revised template as it would highlight exceptions in performance at the six month stage.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the current performance management reporting framework be revised, specifically:
 - The timetable set out in Appendix A to align the performance reporting with the Council's budget cycle;
 - The reporting template set out in Appendix B to highlight progress against the agreed baseline and targets.

It was resolved TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:

- (ii) That these revised arrangements, as set out in Appendix A and B be adopted by all relevant Committees.

97. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received its Forward Agenda Plan.

The Chairman advised the Committee of a number of changes to the forward agenda plan.

The forward agenda plan was noted, with the following changes:

- 13th June 2016 – the Home Working Policy Review report to be withdrawn;
- 13th June 2016 – the Avoidable Contacts report moved to September's meeting;
- 13th June 2016 – the Public Relations report to be presented by John Hill, Chief Executive;
- 5th December 2016 – add the Update on Complaints report.

The meeting closed at 5.18pm