

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 16 NOVEMBER 2006**

Present: - Councillor S C Jones – Chairman.
Councillors R P Chambers, M A Gayler, D W Gregory,
R T Harris, A J Ketteridge, T P Knight, A R Row, M J Savage,
G Sell and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: - A Bovaird, M Brean, M Cox and P O'Dell.

OP28 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M L Foley, E Gower and V J T Lelliott.

Councillor R P Chambers declared a personal interest as a Member of Essex County Council and Chairman of the Essex Police Authority.

OP29 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to an amendment to Councillor Gayler's interest to read 'a member of Great Dunmow Town Council' and not Chairman of the Dunmow Town Strategy Group as stated in the minute.

OP30 INTEGRATED CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

Prior to the meeting Members had had the opportunity to tour the new Customer Services Centre. Members had been impressed with what had been achieved so far and noted that the works were ahead of schedule and on budget. The new contact centre staff had just completed a 4 day training course and the feedback had been positive.

Members made a few comments on improvement that could be made. It was suggested that art work for some of the walls could be provided by the secondary schools in the district, possibly by way of a competition. The Committee expressed its thanks to Mike Brean and his team, and David Demery for all their work in developing the centre and to the reception staff for carrying out their duties under difficult circumstances.

OP31 PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Andrea Oram, Human Resources, presented a report which provided an overview of the Corporate Plan project aimed at developing managers and leaders in the Council. After the restructuring in 2004 a need had been highlighted for some managers to take more responsibility for the operational running of their services so that Executive Managers could focus on strategic

aspects. The Annual Audit letter had also commented on the reluctance of a few managers to take responsibility for some aspects of their role. Cohort training had already taken place and now a specific project had been added to the Corporate Plan. This would first develop a questionnaire to identify managers' understanding of their roles, followed by a brainstorming session. The aim was to develop ideal manager criteria and assess all managers against this to identify any training gaps.

Councillor Knight said that it was commendable that this system was being put in place but questioned how subsequent performance would be measured and poor management addressed. The Chief Executive said it was expected that the assessment element of the manager's performance would be strengthened. Officers confirmed that the Audit letter had identified weaknesses in financial skills of managers and the project would assist staff in developing appropriate budget skills. Councillor Sell said that thought should be given to managers obtaining appropriate professional management qualifications.

Members questioned the progress of the implementation of the Human Resources "Snowdrop" system as this would be helpful in providing relevant management information. They were informed that most staff had now received training and it was being used on a daily basis for leave requests and recording sickness. Information relating to new recruits, and skills and competences was currently being entered on the system, but lack of resources and other demands on officer time meant that there was still data to input. It was already proving to be a very effective tool and would be even more useful once the management information had been further developed.

The Committee noted and supported the proposed actions as set out in the report.

OP32

PARISH REVIEW WORKING PARTY

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Review Working Party held on 1 November 2006 and was asked to approve the recommendations at Minute PRWP7 - Parish Electoral arrangements.

The Electoral Services Officer said that a review of electoral arrangements was carried out about every 4 years. There was little statutory guidance other than asking councils to ensure suitable arrangements were in place. Past reviews had tended to be adhoc, based on individual parish requests. The recommendations had put forward a more proactive approach.

Councillor Savage, a member of the Task Group thanked the Electoral Services Officer for his considerable efforts in conducting the review. Councillor Sell asked about the implications for parish arrangements of the additional properties to be built at Rochford Nurseries. He was advised that the Council was committed to a Parish Review, which would be started after the occupation of 200 houses. This might lead to a subsequent review of electoral arrangements. Members questioned the likely implication of the Local Government White Paper and asked for a workshop when more

information was available. Members asked about the situation for the parish of Swards End and were advised that the electoral arrangements order would be made in time for the election of parish councillors in 2007.

Councillor Ketteridge said that the new committee arrangement had led to this item being considered by too many bodies including the Task Group, Area Panels and this Committee. However, Councillor Gayler said that arrangements that affected a particular parish should be delegated to the appropriate area panel for decision.

In relation to recommendation 7, it was noted that the timescales for making any amended order were very tight and letters should go to the parishes in order for any replies to be returned early in the New Year.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The previous decision to make a grouping order establishing a new parish council of Great Easton and Tilty be noted, on the basis set out in the report.
- 2 The decision to increase the number of parish councillors in Little Dunmow to 11, with effect from the May 2007 elections, be noted until such time as a new electoral scheme could be implemented when the new parish of Flitch Green had been created by order.
- 3 The parish wards of Quendon and Rickling be abolished by order, with effect from the May 2007 elections, and seven councillors allocated to the whole parish from that date.
- 4 The proposed electoral arrangements for Saffron Walden and Swards End be noted, both in the short term, and from May 2007.
- 5 Any move to establish a parish council at Lindsell be deferred until such time as it became clear that the parish met the criteria set out in Section 16 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.
- 6 The Council adopt the criteria set out below to guide the Council's approach to parish electoral arrangements:
 - For parishes with up to 700 electors, there should be between six and eight councillors (although the statutory minimum of five continue to be allowed where justified by local circumstances).
 - For parishes with between 701 and 2,500 electors, there should be between nine and 12 councillors.
 - For parishes with more than 2,500 electors, there should be between 13 and 16 councillors.

- That any parish wards fixed or altered as part of a future electoral review be based on principles of broad proportionality.
- 7 A further approach be made to all parish councils, drawing their attention to the adoption of the guidelines in paragraph 6 above, and providing one further opportunity to request a revised number of parish councillors, provided that an order is able to be made by no later than the end of February next year to become effective at the May 2007 elections.
 - 8 For future Parish reviews, where it relates to an individual Parish, the decision should be delegated to the relevant Area Panel.

OP33

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME AND COUNCIL REDUNDANCY POLICY

At the last meeting the Committee had been advised of changes to pension regulations which required the Council to adopt a revised approach to augmentation of redundancy payments. It had now become necessary to agree a scheme to enable the Council to make efficiency gains and promote changed ways of working. The report put forward a proposed scheme. It was emphasised that it only applied to mutually agreed redundancy or retirement in the interest of the efficiency of the service.

The Chief Executive explained the details of the scheme. All staff subject to redundancy were entitled to a statutory minimum payment based on age and length of service. The maximum permitted under the Government guidance was 104 weeks salary and it was proposed that Uttlesford's scheme would have a maximum of 78 weeks salary. The statutory minimum could be enhanced by a multiplier of 2.89 and the extent to which this was applied depended on how well the officer met specific criteria. It was conceded that this was a new scheme and as there was no consensus yet as to its application or the most appropriate criteria to used, it was suggested that it be reviewed in 12 months time.

A number of members expressed concern at the suggested criteria, as they considered them to be subjective and difficult to prove. There was also concern that the scheme was too complicated and there was a significant difference in possible payment between the bottom and top of the multiplier. Other Members hoped that this scheme would not be used as an alternative to appropriate disciplinary procedures if a manager was under performing.

The Chief Executive replied that the criteria were intended to be a negotiating tool. The authority was required to devise some criteria and these provided a reasonable range to work in. This scheme gave the authority the flexibility to create a team that fitted the organisation. By the time the matter came to the committee it would have been mutually agreed between the officer and management. Members expressed surprise that Unison would agree to a scheme based on less than the maximum permitted. The Chief Executive

made clear that they had not done so, but that in devising the scheme officers had been mindful that a 78 week maximum while less than the statutory regulations might allow, was greater than had been incorporated into some other councils' schemes.

Councillor Gayler proposed that the scheme be approved. He said that other councils had been consulted and this appeared to be the most reasonable approach at the moment although it would be subject to review.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the scheme for augmented payments as set out in the report be adopted as a temporary measure.
- 2 the scheme be further reviewed in twelve months time, in the light of the experience of its operation within Uttlesford and any emerging pattern of augmentation schemes from neighbouring and/or regional authorities

OP34

PAY AND REMUNERATION OF STAFF

The Committee was informed that at the Council meeting on 12 December 2006, Members would consider a report on management changes and a programme to transform the Council's operations. To enable the report to include accurate costings it was necessary to assess the likely future pay structure for senior officers. It was recommended that a "Chief Officers Pay Review Task Group" be set up to assess whether any change to current pay structures and levels would be necessary.

Members asked that comparisons be made with the Daventry group

RESOLVED that

- 1 the engagement of an Interim HR Advisor to the Council be noted.
- 2 A Chief Officer Pay Review Task Group be established with the following membership: the Leader of the Council, the Chairman of Operations Committee and the Leader of the Conservative Group.
- 3 the remit of the group be as follows
'to agree any necessary changes to pay structures and levels from the Council's Chief Officers.'
- 4 the Interim HR Advisor act as lead advisor to the Task Group and should support the group to complete its work in time for its findings to be incorporated into the Chief Executives report to Council in December

OP35 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the ground that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the local Government Act 1972.

OP36 **ACTION TAKEN AND PROPOSED IN RELATION TO STAFFING ISSUES**

The Committee was advised of action taken in relation to members of staff. Members asked that their sincere thanks be place on record for the service given to the Council by the Executive Managers of Human Resources, Housing Services and Quality of Life

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1 notes the terms of the redundancy agreement, agreed by the Chief Executive under delegated authority and
- 2 agrees the proposed terms of redundancy for 2 members of staff as set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 9.50pm