

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 1 FEBRUARY 2007**

Present: Councillor S C Jones – Chairman.

Councillors R P Chambers, M A Gayler, D W Gregory, R T Harris,
A J Ketteridge, V J T Lelliott, M J Savage, G Sell, and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, M Brean, P O'Dell, M Perry, C Roberts,
P Snow and P Woolcott.

OP37 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M L Foley, E Gower,
T P Knight, and A R Row

OP38 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2006 were received confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

OP39 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute OP 30 – Integrated Customer Management

It was noted that the formal opening of this facility would be on Thursday
8 February.

(ii) Minute OP 31 - People Performance and Accountability

The Chairman of the Committee said that Andrea Oram had made a great deal
of progress and he was pleased with the way she had carried out reviews with
personnel, It was noted that she had slightly less than a year to stay and that the
programme needed to be completed by the end of April. The Chairman said he
thought that the experience from outside the Council was a very positive thing for
officers within the Council.

(iii) Minute OP 32 - Parish Review Working Party

The Electoral Services Officer confirmed that there was no further progress to
report on the establishment of a Parish at Flitch Green.

In answer to questions from Councillor Wilcock about the Council encouraging
people to stand for elections to parish and town councils, the Electoral Services
Officer informed the meeting that an EALC campaign was currently under way to
this end. Alasdair Bovaird added that this topic would be programmed in
Uttlesford Life well in advance of the election in an appropriate and politically

neutral manner. Councillors D W Gregory and G Sell informed the meeting that they would highlight this matter on the agenda for the next meetings of the East and the South West Area Panels.

Members noted that the Director of Communities would be requested to ensure appropriate publicity to encourage the take up of places within the democratic system for Parish Councils.

At this point the Chairman of the Committee welcomed Paul Woolcott the Investigations Officer.

OP40 **LEAD OFFICER REPORT**

The Director of Resources circulated a report providing an update on issues relevant to the Committee's work.

The Chief Executive gave a brief account of the process to be taken for appointing to the projected twelve Heads of Division posts. He anticipated they would be in post by April. In answer to a question he advised Members that it was open to them to take part in the appointment of Chief Officers only. He added that he would investigate whether adjustments were needed in this context.

Members welcomed the introduction of a Lead Officer's report but asked the Director of Resources to provide further detail in future reports.

OP41 **RETURNING OFFICER'S FEES AND EXPENSES**

The Committee considered the report of the Electoral Services Officer which recommended increases to the Returning Officer's scale of fees and expenses to be used at elections of District and Parish Councillors with effect from 1 March 2007. It was further recommended that the Director of Resources be given delegated authority in future years to increase the scale of fees in accordance with the annual pay settlement, subject to any wish by Members to carry out a further review in four years time, and that the commencement date should revert to 1 December from the next such increase to coincide with the cycle for the registration of electors. Changes had taken place as a result of the Electoral Administration Act and associated legislation, which had to be taken into account in any review. These were

- (i) Increased hours of poll for all Local Government Elections.
- (ii) A requirement to capture and retain personal identifiers from absent voters.
- (iii) The need to give all polling staff appropriate training.

Taking account of these it was recommended that a scale of amended fees and expenses be adopted as from 1 March 2007 and that the fees payable to polling staff be increased over and above the level required to keep pace with the most recent pay settlement to take account of the additional hours of poll introduced and to aid recruitment of reliable staff, as follows

- (i) For each presiding officer the sum of £175.00 .
- (ii) For each poll clerk the sum of £110.00.

It was also agreed that a new training fee for polling staff should be incorporated into the scale and that, of the two options presented, the second option should be adopted.

The report listed details of the financial implications of each recommendation. In this context, it was noted that new money had been made available by the Department for Constitutional Affairs to implement the measures included in the 2006 Act.

In answer to a question the Chief Executive described the reasons why it seemed prudent to schedule the count for the next election to be on the morning following the election.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the scale of amended fees and expenses set out in the appendix to the report be adopted, with effect from 1 March 2007, subject to the proposed changes set out below:
 - i) the fees payable to polling staff be increased over and above the level required to keep pace with the most recent pay settlement, to take account of the additional hours of poll now introduced, and to aid the recruitment of reliable staff, as follows:
for each presiding officer the sum of £175.00;
for each poll clerk, the sum of £110.00.
 - ii) insert additional paragraph 5 (c) to read as follows:
For the training of all duly appointed polling staff, the sum of £40 be payable for attending an appropriate training session, to include all travelling expenses associated with that attendance, on the basis that the appointment will be cancelled in the event of a refusal to attend.
 - iii) Insert new paragraph 5 (d) as follows:
For each person authorised to provide training for all polling staff on the basis set out in paragraph (c) above, a fee of £75 shall be payable for each such session provided.

- iv) Delete paragraphs 6 (b) and (c) and substitute new paragraphs 6 (b) and (c) as follows:
 - (b) a fixed sum of £190 is payable, for each contested ward or parish, for the remuneration of all staff engaged in the counting of votes, except for any deputy returning officer(s) so appointed; and
 - (c) a fixed sum of £95 is payable, in respect of each separate recount of votes that is required to be held, for the remuneration of all staff engaged in that count or those counts, except for any deputy returning officer(s) so appointed.

- 2 That the Council's policy be confirmed that all costs associated with a parish election (whether contested or otherwise) will be reclaimed from the relevant parishes in accordance with the duly adopted scale of fees.

OP42

ANTI-FRAUD POLICY

(Councillor R Chambers declared an interest in so far as he was the Chairman of the Police Authority).

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive recommending amendments to the Anti-Fraud Policy arising from a routine regular review.

The Assistant Chief Executive gave detailed reasons for the suggested revisions and it was noted that the current policy needed amendment to take account of a change in funding arrangements and a shift in emphasis from sanctions to recovery.

The current staff structure was unable to process all cases which were referred and which might merit a sanction under the existing policy. Officers therefore had to prioritise investigations to ensure that resources were deployed where the prospects of successful detection were the highest.

Members were informed that a prosecution guideline of £3,000, as against the DWP guideline of £2,000, was justified on the basis that the Council did not have sufficient resources to process prosecutions for cases between £2,000 and £3,000. In the absence of Government funding it was not possible within budget to employ further staff which would be required to enable prosecutions at that level to be brought.

The suggested revisions were set out in an amended policy document attached to the report.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the revised policy annexed to the report be approved and adopted.
- 2 the Officers be congratulated on the exceptionally high quality of the work of the Benefit Fraud Section and thanked for the work they do.

OP43

MUSEUM HERITAGE QUEST CENTRE : INTERIM REPORT AND TIMETABLE

(Councillor S Jones declared an interest in so far as he was a member of the Museum Resource Centre Working Group).

The Director of Resources presented this report in the absence of Carolyn Wingfield, the Museum Curator. It advised Members of progress to date with fundraising for the Heritage Quest Centre and the proposed timetable for making an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Donations and grants showed wide support from across the district, from the county and beyond. The Heritage Quest Trust was being established and registered with Entrust to enable it to apply for large grants from landfill tax credits. Once the likely outcome of these applications was known, the project team would make a formal request in March 2007 for an appropriate capital contribution from the Council so that the application to the HLF could be made. By 22 January 2007 about £100,000 had already been raised, mostly from local donations and grants. Apart from the financial aspect, this demonstrated a very good spread of funding partners and local support (which had been district-wide), which would be noted by HLF.

A workshop for members was to be arranged. The project team intended to report in March 2007 on the results of further fund-raising and on a project budget. Committees would be asked to approve a capital contribution and to give permission for the application to be made to HLF.

OP44

IT WORKING GROUP MINUTES/OPERATIONS COMMITTEE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/8-2009/10

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting of the IT Working Group held on 17 January 2007. The Director of Resources explained that a decision was necessary at this stage so that the appropriate revenue and capital expenditure could be programmed into the Council's Budget. Officers explained that they hoped over time to recoup the capital expenditure.

Members queried whether the capital item for councillors IT equipment included training. The Director of Business Transformation confirmed that it did not but that it was intended that the ICT Section would provide any assistance and training associated with improved councillors' ICT.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the proposed IT Capital Programme, attached to the report as Appendix One, be included in the overall Capital Programme for 2007/08.
- 2 a sum of £870,000 for IT developments be included in the overall General Fund Capital Programme for 2007/08.
- 3 a sum of £66,000 be included for revenue consequences of the IT Capital Programme in the IT Revenue budget.

OP45 OPERATIONS COMMITTEE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/08 TO 2009/10

Members decided to defer consideration of this report since the papers had not reached some Members until shortly before the meeting.

RESOLVED that this report be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 8 February 2007 and that copies be sent to absent Committee Members.

OP46 OPERATIONS COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2007/08

The Director of Resources presented this report drawing attention in particular to the increases in expenditure outlined in the section on the Base Budget.

Councillor Chambers asked whether the saving of £130,000 set out in para 7 of the report would be available for use in the light of other expenditure on salaries. The Director of Resources stressed that this would depend on each Director working through on the details of the Budget. He was unable to give any details then but he was hopeful that the saving would remain. The Chief Executive was still anticipating that a saving of £130,000 would be made.

Members noted the suggestion of the Director of Resources of shared phones and the lack of budgets suitable for devolving from the Operations Committee to the Area Panels.

The Committee examined the list of spending pressures and Councillor Wilcock suggested that the Chairman of the Council should have a realistic allowance.

The Director of Resources informed the meeting that the Human Resources Equalities expenditure would be about £12,000 not £25,000 as set out in the report. In answer to a question from the Chairman the Chief Executive said that workshops held a few months ago in this area had been poorly attended. Councillor Chambers suggested that such courses could be more economically planned in conjunction with another Council but the Director of Resources confirmed that Uttlesford had enough attendees to fill its own courses.

Councillor Ketteridge questioned the need for expenditure on three full time staff in Public Relations particularly since this did not cover the costs of producing Uttlesford Life, and the Director of Resources said he would find the Uttlesford Life costs out of the Communications "Direct admin" budget head of £29,900.

Councillor Gayler asked in the light of the increased provision for web site staff, for clarification of the role of consultants managing the publicity aspect regarding Stansted Airport. The Chief Executive said this expenditure would be offset and the assistance of the consultants would not continue indefinitely.

RESOLVED that the Committee approves, subject to its own further consideration on 8 February:

- The revised base budget for 2006/7 and draft base budget for 2007/08
- The spending pressures put forward, including one-offs
- The proposed savings identified in this report.

(Councillor Ketteridge abstained from voting on this item).

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.