

**INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 9 FEBRUARY 2000**

Present:- Councillor E C Abrahams - Chairman.
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, W F Bowker, G R Brown, Mrs C A Cant, R P Chambers, A Dean,
R A Merrion and A R Thawley.

Officers in attendance:- G Branchett, Mrs M Cox, Ms D Eldridge,
Mrs E Forbes and J K Mercer.

I. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R W L Stone.

I. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 1999 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

I. BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute IS29 (i) - Pension Release to Former Employee

This Council had now submitted its case and was waiting for a decision from the Secretary of State.

(ii) Minute IS29 (ii) - Members' Training

Members were advised that a draft Corporate Member Training Plan would be considered at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

(iii) Minute IS30 (i) - Telecommunications

Tenders had been received for a replacement telecommunications system and a short list of three companies had been prepared. All the tenders had exceeded the available budget and were therefore being reviewed. A verbal update would be made to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 15 February.

I. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SERVICE STATEMENT

The Sub-Committee received the Equal Opportunities Service Statements for the Committee and PR Services Business Centre. The Business Centre comprised Committee Services, Elections and Electoral Registration, and Public Relations. The purpose of the statements was to ensure that all possible customers of the services were able to access them. The statements identified areas of the service that were thought to require attention during 2000/01.

In relation to Committee Services, Councillor A Dean asked that some Council Meetings, rather than being held in the Council Offices at Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, be held in other locations throughout the District, in order to make them more accessible to the public. Members agreed that this could be tried, but the cost implications should be borne in mind. The Committee and PR Manager said it might be useful to hold a meeting in a particular location when there was an item of relevance to that area.

On Elections and Electoral Registration, Councillor Thawley asked if the Council could investigate new methods of polling and, in particular electronic voting. He asked whether this Council could put itself forward as a pilot authority.

With regard to Public Relations, Councillor Chambers asked that the setting up of citizens panels in the district be pursued.

RESOLVED that

1 the Equal Opportunities Service statements be approved.

- 2 officers approach the Home Office regarding the possibility of this Council becoming a pilot authority for electronic voting.
- 3 the setting up of citizens panels in the district be investigated as soon as possible.

It was further RECOMMENDED

that the Policy and Resources Committee be asked to consider the principle of holding meetings in different locations throughout the District.

I. PROBATIONARY PERIOD AND PROCEDURE

The Sub-Committee received a report which recommended a number of changes to the current probationary period and procedures. The need for a review had been identified by the Single Status Agreement and the Investors In People action team. Due to the growth in employment law and the increase in employees' rights, it was important that the Council had an effective probationary period in place which included regular performance reviews. It was also likely that there would be an increase in the use of temporary or short term contract working and regular career changes, which the Council would need to prepare for.

The Regional Employers' Organisation had recommended the continuation of the Council's current practice of a six month probationary period and in addition that this practice be extended to all new employees from other authorities, regardless of their length of service.

Councillor Thawley was concerned at one of the report's recommendations, that under certain circumstances the probationary period could be extended by three months. It was confirmed that this would apply only in exceptional circumstances.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the six month probationary period be adopted for all new employees including those joining the Council from other authorities.
- 2 the pro rata probationary period for temporary or fixed term appointments be adopted as follows:-

<u>Length of Contract</u> <u>(Months)</u>	<u>Probationary Period</u> <u>(Months)</u>
2 - 3	1
4 - 6	2
7 - 9	3
10 -12	4
12+	6

- 3 In certain circumstances, the six month probationary period be extended by a period of three months. The extension to the probationary period to only be applied once.

I. DRAFT CORPORATE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Members were informed of the many recent developments which had resulted in a need to review the management and operation of the way that the Council dealt with the training and development of its employees. It was proposed that the new policy would be introduced on a pilot basis in the Investors in People Business Centres - Personnel and Office Services, IT and Internal Audit. The effectiveness of the policy would be subject to a review later in the year. Members' attention was drawn to the likely resource implications that would arise from the production and implementation of the Corporate Training and Development Plan.

Councillor A Dean felt that the policy should be implemented in all the council's business centres at the outset. The Head of Personnel and Contract Services explained why the approach had been taken and confirmed that it was intended that after the review of the pilot policy took place later in the year, it would be implemented across all business centres.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the draft Corporate Training and Development Policy as set out in Personnel Policy Note 35 be implemented on a pilot basis with immediate effect for the Business Centres participating in the Investors in People standard.
- 2 A review of the effectiveness and implications of the pilot Corporate Training and Development Policy takes place by November 2000.
- 3 Subject to 2 above, the policy be implemented across all Business Centres with effect from 1 April 2001.

I. REVIEW OF ELECTED MEMBERS MENTORING SCHEME

Members recalled that the Sub-Committee had in 1999, approved the concept of mentoring support to newly elected Members. Following the District elections last year eleven senior officers had been trained and allocated as officer mentors to each of the eleven newly elected Members. Elected Members had also been sought, but due to the limited response received, it had been agreed that group leaders would provide support and guidance as required.

A questionnaire had recently been sent to each of the new Members to receive feedback on the scheme's effectiveness for future use. The comments received had generally been favourable and further areas of support that Members felt would be beneficial had been highlighted. The officer mentors thought the scheme had been worthwhile but felt that the mentoring period should be shortened.

Councillor Mrs Bayley believed it would be useful for the new Members to be contacted after about a year to address any outstanding questions/problems. She also felt that the induction workshops should be held after Members had obtained a basic understanding of the workings of the Council. She also asked that councillors be provided with a map of the Council buildings and perhaps a guidance handbook.

Councillor Chambers thanked all those officers that had taken part in the Mentoring Scheme. He felt they had provided very good advice and had been of great help to the newly elected Members.

RESOLVED that the Elected Members Mentoring Scheme be made available to future newly elected Members, with amendments to take into account the suggestions received.

I. SCHEDULE OF STAFF MOVEMENTS

The schedule of staff movements to 16 January 2000 was received.

I. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 1, 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12 A of the Act.

I. ASSISTANT VISITING OFFICER AND CLERICAL ASSISTANT - INVESTIGATIONS TEAM

The Head of Audit and IT Services advised the sub-committee that in February 1992 the posts of Assistant Visiting Officer and part-time Clerical Assistant had been established on a two year fixed term contract, within the Internal Audit Investigation Team. The approval had been subject to a successful bid for part funding to the Department of Social Security Challenge Fund. This had been successful and the two posts were created on 1 June 1990 with the requirement that the contracts be reviewed six months prior to expiry. Both posts had contributed significantly to the success of the Investigation Team over the past twenty months. During this period the Assistant Visiting Officer had carried out a large number of visits and the Clerical Assistant had been vital in handling the paperwork associated with the increased visits and investigations. The creation of the posts had resulted in an increase in the level of identified fraud in the District.

The sub-committee was asked now to approve the continuation of the posts. The method of determining subsidy by the Department of Social Security would be similar for 2000/01. However, it was now understood that from April 2001 a completely new anti fraud incentive framework would be developed for local authorities. It was therefore proposed that the two contracts be extended for a further fixed term of one year, commencing on 1 June 2000. A further review would be carried out once the Government's intentions became clear.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the extension of the current contracts for the Assistant Visiting Officer and part-time Clerical Assistant for a further fixed period of 1 year, commencing on 1 June 2000, to be reviewed prior to the end of the period.

I. **STAND-BY AND RECALL TO WORK PAYMENTS**

The Head of Personnel and Contract Services informed Members that stand-by and recall to work payments had evolved over the years through custom and practice which had resulted in inconsistent levels of payment between different employee groups. The report recommended the adoption of a consistent approach and set out the proposed levels of payments. Nearly all the payments currently made were for voluntary stand-by. There was a minimal requirement for contractual stand-by, but as part of the Single Status Agreement it was necessary to plan for any future situations.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the proposed voluntary stand-by and recall to work payments be adopted as set out in paragraph 8 of the report with effect from 1 April 2000.
- 2 the proposed contractual stand-by payments be adopted as set out in paragraph 10 of the report with effect from 1 April 2000.

I. **INTERNAL AUDIT SECTION**

The report set out the activities of the Internal Audit Section over the preceding 7 months. Some of the audits had identified areas that needed attention and the Head of Audit and IT Services confirmed that in cases where specific recommendations were made, there was a system of formal follow ups.

With regard to the audit into car leasing and car allowances, Councillor Thawley was of the opinion that the Council should pay employees' lease car insurance. He was advised that a review of the car lease scheme was currently being undertaken as part of the Single Status Agreement and would be reported to a future meeting the of Sub-Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.