

INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 6 DECEMBER 2000

Present:- Councillor E C Abrahams – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, Mrs C A Cant, R P Chambers,
R A Merrion, A R Row, R W L Stone and A R Thawley.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor R J Copping.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, Mrs M Cox, A Forrow, Mrs C Hughes,
J K Mercer and B D Perkins.

IS21 **CAROLE HUGHES**

The Chairman welcomed Carole Hughes, the new Head of Personnel and Office Services, to the meeting.

IS22 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W F Bowker, A Dean and D M Jones.

IS23 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

IS24 **ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

(i) Workload and staffing in Development Control

At the meeting of the Planning and Development Committee on 30 November 2000, Members had been advised of the current situation with regard to workload in the Development Control Business Centre. This had increased markedly and a considerable amount of overtime was being worked. This situation had meant that performance levels were down. This situation was not sustainable and it had been unanimously agreed that an additional full-time planning assistant and clerical support post should be established. The total cost of the proposals would be about £40,000 in a full year. This would be off-set by the increase in planning fee income.

RESOLVED that the posts of Planning Assistant and Clerical Assistant in the Development Control Business Centre be approved.

(ii) Gardener/Supervisor for Bridge End Gardens

At the Amenities Sub-Committee on 16 November 2000, Members had agreed to the extension of the contract of the Gardener/Supervisor for Bridge End Gardens. Members commented on the improvement that had been made to the gardens since the post holder had been in place. The total cost of the contract for 2001/02 was £18,800, though some income was expected through the New Deal arrangements.

RECOMMENDED that the contract for the Gardener/Supervisor for Bridge End Gardens be extended for one year from May 2001 – to May 2002.

IS25 IT WORKING PARTY

The Minutes of the meeting of the IT Working Party held on 20 November 2000 were received.

(i) IT12(v) – Members' Home Computing

Councillor Copping stated that he was very satisfied with the assistance he had received from staff in the IT Section.

(ii) Minute IT12(ii) – Replacement telephone system

Councillor R P Chambers mentioned some problems with the telephone system which he would discuss with the Head of IT and Audit Services after the meeting.

IS26 DRAFT IT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2001/02

The Sub-Committee received details of the various IT projects being considered for inclusion in the draft 2001/02 IT Programme. The total cost of the proposed programme was £113,090, which was in line with IT investment levels for previous years. The list of projects had been drawn up from items already included in the Capital Programme for 2001/02 and the approved IT Strategy 1997/2002. Consideration was also being given to establishing a reserve to fund new IT development. Such development would be required to result in tangible revenue savings.

Councillor Row questioned whether the video projector for the Great Dunmow office was essential. He was advised that the current projectors at the Saffron Walden office were heavily used and rarely available for the Dunmow offices. Also it was hoped that the new projector would be used for presentations at the Development Control Sub-Committee. The IT Working Party had expressed some concern at the proposed in-house development in relation to the 'e-government' project. Members were assured that all options would be explored before action was taken in this area.

RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee approve the draft IT Programme 2001/02.

IS27 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(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 Paragraph 1 Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

IS28 INTERNAL AUDIT SECTION

The Sub-Committee was advised of the activities of the Internal Audit Section over the preceding eight months. Members asked a number of questions on the audits and reviews that had been undertaken.

At this point, all officers except the Chief Executive, the Assistant to the Chief Executive and the Head of Personnel and Office Services, left the meeting.

IS29 REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive on the implementation of the revised management structure which the Policy and Resources Committee had approved in principle on 26 September 2000. The Chief Executive explained that the report addressed the concerns expressed by Members at the Sub-Committee's last meeting in relation to timescale, process and financial and other implications. The Sub-Committee had delegated authority to decide five of the report's recommendations if it so wished but the sixth recommendation, on finance, would have to be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee. Members indicated at the outset that they considered that all the report's recommendations should be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor Copping did not consider that the report did address Members' concerns. In his view, new political decision-making structures should be in place before new management structures. There was no doubt that best value reviews would result in proposals for changes in services and organisation over a period of time. The report stated that the review of the Council recently carried out by the Improvement and Development Agency had emphasised the need to value and develop further management expertise and for there to be an emphasis on supporting and developing staff and quality management. Councillor Copping considered that the proposals in the report did just the opposite. The report said that there was never an ideal time to make major change to organisational structures and that Members' concerns had been taken into account in the timetable now proposed. Councillor Copping

considered that there was a clear timetable for only one of the report's proposals. Finally, he would like to have information on the ongoing benefits of the proposals as well as the potential costs. In his view, the proposals did not represent value for money.

The Chief Executive clarified a particular financial issue raised by Councillor Copping and answered other financial questions from Councillors Mrs Cant and Row.

Councillors Mrs Cant and Thawley were extremely concerned at the proposed timing of some of the proposals which they feared could affect service delivery. Anxieties were also expressed at the potential effect on some members of staff, although it was acknowledged that the amended recruitment procedure now being recommended would mitigate this. It was also suggested, however, that the Sub-Committee was in danger of allowing the effect of the proposals on certain individuals to cloud the issue of what was best for the corporate body of the Council. Councillor Chambers echoed this view while acknowledging the strength of Councillor Copping's feelings. He then proposed the recommendations contained in the report, with the rider that the Members' appointment panel suggested in recommendation 3 should consist of 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 Conservatives and 1 Independent. The proposal was duly seconded.

The view was expressed that considerations of political balance should not apply to recruitment procedures. However, officers confirmed that the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 required local authorities' decision-making bodies to be politically balanced.

There was further debate on what was the right balance between looking to the Council's longer term corporate needs and the perceived short term needs of individual services. Councillor Copping stressed that he was not against change but this was not the right time to implement it. In this context, the Chief Executive reported that officers were reviewing the Best Value Review Programme and, for a variety of reasons, might be recommending changes.

Councillor Chambers' proposal was then put to the vote and carried.

It was therefore

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the Policy and Resources Committee approve the recommendations contained in the report, and
- 2 the Members' appointment panel referred to in recommendation 3 consist of 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 Conservatives and 1 Independent

IS30

SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Chairman wished all those present a Happy Christmas and, on behalf of Members and Officers, Councillor Chambers replied in kind and thanked the Chairman for the way in which he had conducted this and previous meetings.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm.