

INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 7 FEBRUARY 2001

Present:- Councillor D M Jones – in the Chair.
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, W F Bowker, 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 M A Gayler.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, M Brean, Mrs L J Crowe, Mrs C Hughes and J K Mercer.

IS31 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E C Abrahams and A Dean.

IS32 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

IS33 **BUSINESS ARISING**

Minute IS24(i) – Workload and Staffing in Development Control

The Chairman reported that the personnel for the posts of Planning Assistant and Clerical Assistant in the Development Control Business Centre had now been appointed.

IS34 **IT WORKING PARTY**

The Minutes of the meeting of the IT Working Party held on 1 February 2001 were received.

(i) IT16(i) – Replacement Telephone System

In reply to a question from Councillor Stone, the Head of IT and Audit Services said that the problem of overuse of Voicemail during office hours was being actively addressed. The new internal telephone directory would remind staff not to use Voicemail during office hours.

(ii) IT16(v) – Members’ Home Computing

Councillor Chambers suggested that all agendas and Minutes should be circulated by e-mail. Councillor Mrs Cant raised the problem of receiving Development Control Sub-Committee papers by e-mail due to the large amounts of paper involved. Members agreed that it was not practical to circulate Development Control Sub-Committee papers by e-mail.

Members also discussed the need to be aware of confidential papers and it was agreed that “confidential” in large bold letters should be printed on the top of confidential pages. Councillor Jones asked if documents received on e-mail could be endorsed with the date and time.

The Head of IT and Audit Services informed Members that the IT Section was investigating further possibilities of specialist e-mail for Councillor Bowker.

Councillor Merrion asked for Members’ comments on enhancements to the ICT Service provided to Members.

IS35

WORK BASED TRAINEES

Councillor Row declared a pecuniary interest in the following item as he worked for a company in competition with this scheme.

Members received a report seeking Members’ views on the establishment of rates of pay for non-employed work based trainees (WBTs) and establishment of a central budget for payment for an agreed number of WBTs. Work based training was offered as an alternative to study for young people leaving school for whom the traditional academic path was not a preferred option. By attending work based training it was intended that they would achieve a nationally recognised vocational qualification (NVQ).

Members were asked to consider making two placements available for local young people. Each WBT received a training allowance of £40 per week. Many employers topped up this basic balance but to date the Council had not done so. Members were asked to consider offering a performance award of £40 per week rising to £50 per week after one year. This initial award would be based on performance and could be paid six months after the young person started the training programme. In answer to Members’ questions the Head of Personnel and Office Services said that, although it could not be guaranteed, the WBTs would primarily be Uttlesford young people.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council offer two work based trainee placements to local young people leaving school.

- 2 Trainees be offered a performance award of £40 per week after six months, subject to performance, and that this be increased to £50 per week in year two.
- 3 the general budget be used to fund the above, monitored by Personnel Services.

IS36

STAFFING AT THAXTED CIC

Councillor Chambers declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item as a member of the Police Authority.

Members received a report which explained the need for the establishment of the post of Community Information Centre Assistant to enable the development of the Thaxted Community Information Centre (CIC). Following the Policy and Resources Committee meeting in December 2000, it had been confirmed that a CIC would be established in Thaxted in co-operation with Essex Police. The Centre would be used jointly by the two organisations to provide support and information to the local community, visitors to Thaxted and the surrounding villages.

A budget of £20,000 was available to meet the cost of providing the Centre including the cost of employing a Community Information Centre Assistant for 14 hours per week and paying a grant to Thaxted Parish Council to pay the clerk for the work that she did to manage the volunteers who operated the Thaxted Information Centre. Initially, the CIC would only be open on Friday mornings. This was in order to ascertain demand for opening the Centre at other times. One of the Assistants currently employed at the Dunmow CIC had agreed to work additional hours at Thaxted on a temporary basis to enable this assessment to be made. 60% of the costs of running the Centre would be met by Essex Police.

Members expressed concern that the need for the CIC should be monitored carefully. The Chief Executive explained that the Assistants in the Dunmow CIC recorded queries received and similar records would be kept by the Assistant at the Thaxted CIC. In answer to a question from Councillor Merrion, the Head of Personnel and Office Services said that the CIC Assistant post was not graded to supervise staff. Also, the volunteers operating the Thaxted Information Centre, under the supervision of the parish clerk, were working well.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the initial arrangements for staffing the Thaxted Community Information Centre be as set out in Paragraph 5 of the report, and
- 2 the Officers, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee and the Internal Services Sub-

Committee, be authorised to establish the post of Community Information Centre Assistant to be based at the Thaxted Community Information Centre on Scale 4 at the appropriate time.

IS37 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 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

IS38 FRAUD INVESTIGATION TEAM

Members received a report outlining changes to the subsidy arrangements for anti-benefit fraud work and recommending changes proposed to the staffing structure of the Fraud Investigation Team.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the post of Trainee Investigator be redesignated Investigations Officer, the duties of the post changed to reflect the increased responsibility and the post be regraded to Scale 5, subject to job evaluation.
- 2 The post of Clerical Assistant be redesignated Administrative Officer and be regraded Scale 4 subject to job evaluation.
- 3 The changes recommended in 1 and 2 above be effective from 1 April 2001.
- 4 The post of Visiting Officer be transferred to the Revenues Business Centre in accordance with the timetable for implementation of the Verification Framework.
- 5 A new post of Assistant Investigator be created to replace the Visiting Officer at a date to be agreed.
- 6 The three existing posts of Investigations Officer, Clerical Assistant and Visiting Officer be made permanent.

IS39 REVENUE SERVICES AND THE HOUSING BENEFITS VERIFICATION FRAMEWORK

Members received a report updating them on the Government's Housing Benefit Verification Framework. The report detailed the current position

regarding the additional work involved in implementing the framework and the likely future changes to the scheme. The report also covered other staffing issues within the business centre. The Revenue Services Manager said that the framework was not mandatory but local authorities were being pressurised into implementing it. The Leader of the Council said that Members would look forward to receiving a further report in due course. The additional costs would be covered by increased income resulting from the approved changes in fraud investigation arrangements and from Court costs awarded.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the appointment of a Senior Benefits Officer with effect from 1 April 2001 be approved,
- 2 the post of Inspection Officer be redesignated Inspection and Benefits Advisor and be regraded as Scale 4, subject to job evaluation, with effect from 1 April 2001,
- 3 the extra expenditure of £9480 be approved for an Overpayments and Visits Assistant with effect from 1 April 2001 to be funded from additional income from increased court costs,
- 4 the principle of the introduction on a modular basis of the Housing Benefit Verification framework in 2002/03 be approved,
- 5 further progress reports concerning the Housing Benefit Verification Framework, including the development of modules and funding arrangements, be submitted to Members as required.

IS40

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Following discussions after previous meetings the Chief Executive presented a report to Members which asked them to approve the details of the process for implementing the new Senior Management Structure of the Council. The Leader of the Council proposed a number of amendments to the recommendations contained in the report. Members considered the proposals before them with particular reference to the timing of the implementation of the new structure.

In answer to a question from the Chief Executive, Members confirmed that they were satisfied that they now had all the information they needed to make a decision in this matter.

RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee approve the proposals contained in the report, as amended at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.