

## **ITEM 4 - REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

**Committee:** Health and Housing Committee

**Date:** 4 November 2004

**Agenda Item No:** 8

**Title:** Rent Deposit Scheme

**Author:** Judith Snares (01799) 510671

### **Summary**

- 1 This report advises the Committee on the progress made to date regarding the feasibility of introducing a Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) in Uttlesford and recommends that further work be undertaken in order for a scheme to be operative in 2005/6.

### **Background**

- 2 In 2003 the Council adopted its Homelessness strategy. One of the key objectives is to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families and to ensure there is sufficient accommodation available for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. In this context the Government now measures Councils' performance against the target introduced in new legislation of limiting the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families only in emergencies and then for a maximum of six weeks.
- 3 Local Authorities are now expected to provide comprehensive housing advice and appropriate assistance not only to those who are statutorily homeless but also to those who are either intentionally or non statutorily homeless. Preventing homelessness is a high priority.
- 4 As part of the ongoing work by officers to consider different ways of assisting this client group the reintroduction of a Rent Deposit Scheme has been investigated. The Committee should note that a scheme of this type was operated in the District by the Cambridge based charity Wintercomfort but for various reasons this failed 3 to 4 years ago.
- 5 In order to show the Committee how a reintroduced RDS might operate a model of how it would enhance the current homelessness service is appended to this report. It shows a clear progression, for the client, from initial advice to being given real housing options.
- 6 This model would help meet the Council's duty regarding the provision of advice and assistance to all categories of clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and in some cases prevent the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

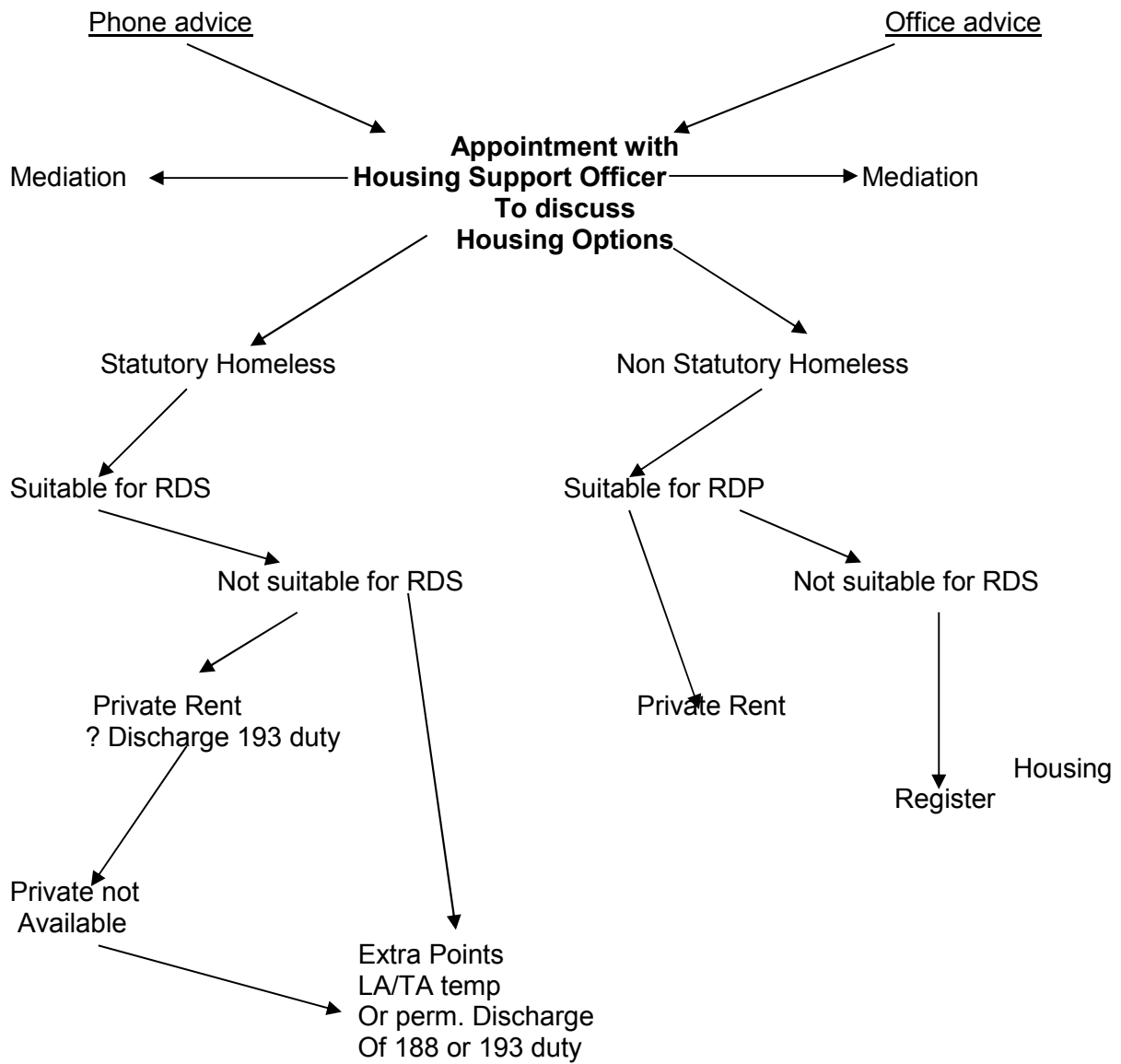
- 7 Through a RDS a number of people only previously supplied with advice could be helped to obtain accommodation within the private sector. Currently any advice given on housing options within the private sector is limited by the client's ability to pay rent deposits which can be of 4 – 6 weeks rent in advance. For many of the client groups that approach the Council this amount of money is not achievable and therefore a RDS would create housing options that may otherwise be unaffordable.
- 8 Research has been carried out to ascertain how Rent Deposit Schemes assist Councils in this Region and what type of scheme may be appropriate for Uttlesford District Council. This research has shown that Uttlesford is one of the few Authorities within the region that does not have a scheme. It appears that the various schemes currently operated have the same objectives but individual Councils tailor schemes to best fit their local situation.

### **The Way Forward**

- 9 Discussions have taken place with local agents and landlords within the District and it is felt that there could be some prepared to commit to such a scheme. Should a scheme be agreed a great deal of promotion would be required and success could not be guaranteed. In an area like Uttlesford market conditions and the type of accommodation available for rent are very major factors.
- 10 Officers have initially looked at two models for running a scheme. One would be to pay a fee to an outside agent to run the scheme for the Council, with the Council making referrals of suitable candidates and providing the rent deposit guarantee but with the agent working with the clients and landlords to arrange the actual lettings.
- 11 The other option would be to run the scheme in house, this could initially be done within existing staff resources but there could be a staffing resource issue should it prove to be successful.
- 12 Either model relies on the careful vetting of clients to ensure that they are suitable for this type of scheme and the active engagement of landlords and agents through careful marketing and advertising of the scheme.
- 13 If the Committee is minded to agree that Uttlesford should look to introduce such a scheme then the Council would need to make provision of £25k from the General Fund for 2005/6. It should be noted that this issue has been inserted in the draft Housing Services Plan 2005/6. A further report on a possible scheme for Uttlesford would then be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee recommends to the Resources Committee that £25k be budgeted for a Rent Deposit Scheme in 2005/6 subject to a scheme being approved at a future meeting of this Committee

# Threatened With Homelessness



**Committee:** Resources  
**Date:** 18 November 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 9  
**Title:** Executive Programme Office Resources  
**Author:** Sarah McLagan (01799) 510560

### **Summary**

- 1 This report updates members on progress to establish the Executive Programme Office (EPO) and provides justification for the provision of a permanent post and budget to assist the EPO with work to delivery projects emerging from the new Corporate Plan.

### **Background**

- 2 In June, the Committee noted the responsibilities of the two Executive Programme Managers (EPM) - Quality of Life and Access to Services - and confirmed the establishment of a separate heading in the Resources Committee budget called "Executive Programme Office". It agreed to adopt a project management framework, which would be incorporated into the Corporate Plan review. It also agreed that a temporary Programme Assistant post could be created and that £40k be made available from reserves to fund initial options appraisals/feasibility studies in connection with Quality of Life theme projects in the Quality of Life Corporate Plan.
- 3 However, the Committee asked that a further report be presented to it in November 2004 that justified the need for a permanent Programme Assistant post and for a permanent budget to support the cost of option appraisals, feasibility studies and other activities to implement the projects emerging from the new Corporate Plan.

### **The Programme Assistant Post**

- 4 During the summer, work was carried out to draw up a Job Description and get it evaluated for the post of Programme Assistant. As the timing of the conclusion of this work coincided with the summer holiday period, it was decided to delay advertising the post until September. During this period, work was also undertaken to appoint a Personal Assistant (PA) to collectively support the EPMs and the Executive Manager, Strategy & Performance. Funding for this post was to come from saving made by not filing a vacancy in Corporate Administration. However, there was no appropriate internal candidate to fill this post and, consequently, the decision was taken to advertise externally. Again, it was decided to delay advertising until after the summer holiday period.

- 5 In the meantime, the EPM (Access to Services) has been successful in securing a new position for another employer. The Chief Executive has recently confirmed the new arrangements for delivering Access to Services projects - deletion of the EPM's post and the consolidation of all of the IT functions under the management of the EM Customer Services.
- 6 Consequently, the functions of the EPO will be concentrated around projects emerging from the new Corporate Plan and corporate initiatives and objectives such as the Service Prioritisation exercise.
- 7 The EPM will require support to manage and develop the EPO. This support will be in terms of personal assistant (PA) functions and project management/programme office functions. It is suggested, therefore, that a person is appointed who can provide a combination of these two specialised functions.
- 8 However, the nature of Project Management is such that the support that is needed will fluctuate according to the level and type of work to be done. Consequently the job description will be written to reflect this and allow for the person to undertake alternative duties e.g. to provide central administration support, when there is less project management work to be done.
- 9 This approach would also allow the new Executive Manager, Strategy & Performance, to consider their own requirements for PA support within the context of their own staffing arrangements.
- 10 It is suggested, therefore, that the post of PA/Programme Assistant is created on a permanent basis at an estimated cost of £25,000 p.a. from 2005/06 and that the pro rata cost of the appointment in 2004/05 (approximately £6,000) be funded from reserves. The original funding that was envisaged from Corporate Administration has had to be used to support capacity shortfalls in the Human Resources unit.

### **Permanent Executive Programme Office Budget**

- 11 The Committee required officers to provide it with a multi-year justification for the establishment of a permanent budget to meet the costs associated with implementing the Quality of Life Corporate Plan. Members will appreciate that the new Corporate Plan is currently being consulted on and projects and budgetary requirements may change leading up to its final approval in February 2005.
- 12 As Members will have seen in the Draft Corporate Plan, it is expected that most of the 58 projects will be delivered and funded from existing resources. However, there are (currently) 6 projects within the Plan that will require additional, one-off resources to employ additional capacity to help to progress them and enable Members to make decisions about whether to proceed with them. These projects are set out in the table below.

DCP Ref.	Action	Comments	2005/06 (£000)	2006/07 (£000)	2007/08 (£000)
<b>People</b>					
9a	Skills Audit of Members and staff to understand development needs	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work	10		
<b>Customers</b>					
12a	Evaluation of requirements to introduce Smartcard technology	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To share funding with regional, county and other key players.</li> <li>○ £ still to be quantified</li> <li>○ It is not yet clear which year the study would be carried out</li> </ul>	?	?	
12b	Identification of key public transport routes to identify need for provision of buses or other modes of transport	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Shared partnership funding</li> <li>○ £ still to be quantified</li> <li>○ It is not yet clear which year the study would be carried out</li> </ul>	?	?	
13a/b	Arts/Cultural Industries Centre Study	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Shared partnership funding</li> <li>○ £ still to be quantified (Some of the work carried out to develop a new Leisure &amp; Cultural Strategy can be used to inform the study)</li> </ul>	?		
<b>Community</b>					
18	Plan for both war and peacetime civil emergencies and terrorism, including the production of Business Continuity Plans	Expert needed to support the work to produce Business Continuity Plans	15		

DCP Ref.	Action	Comments	2005/06 (£000)	2006/07 (£000)	2007/08 (£000)
23d	In conjunction with ECC, SWTC and Wendens Ambo PC, carry out a study to ascertain how to develop a safe cycle way from Saffron Walden to Audley End Station	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work	?		
23e	Identify the opportunities to provide a Country Park facility in the district	Expert needed to carry out this specialised work (Some of the work carried out to develop a new Leisure & Cultural Strategy can be used to inform the study)	?		
TOTALS			60?	?	

- 13 Due to the specialist nature of some of the studies it is difficult to quantify their costs and, in some cases, it is not clear which year the work will be carried out. Therefore, it is suggested that the Council establish a revenue budget of £60k from which the Programme Office can draw funding to meet the cost of employing additional capacity, second an employee or to purchase expertise from other authorities or partner agencies. Should there be insufficient funding available to meet the cost of all of the 6 projects, officers will make a further report to the Committee.

#### **Why the need for Additional Capacity?**

- 14 Work to evaluate and draw conclusions about the prospect to progress with the above projects cannot be done in-house by staff. There is not the expertise in these fields. In addition, Members will appreciate that the Council does not have the capacity to release staff from day to day service delivery activities to carry out such studies. To enable the Council to deliver these projects, additional capacity can be achieved by the use of external experts, arranging secondments or by buying in expertise from other authorities or partner agencies that have specific knowledge and experience of the subject matter.
- 15 It will, however, be essential to provide a clearly defined brief/Terms of Reference to ensure that the required result is produced. The brief will need to be output/results based to ensure that the Council receives value for money.
- 16 Because of the specialist nature of the required work, it will be essential that the Council recruit a person with expertise and experience in the subject matter. Whether the person is employed on a short-term contract e.g. paid at

a day rate, or on a 3-6 month contract, the Council will still have to pay the going rate for their professional expertise.

- 17 It may be possible to buy-in some expertise and advice from other authorities, either through a secondment arrangement or by purchasing paperwork/documentation that they have produced that gives information about a similar example (e.g. as we did with our PFI documentation). There would still be a requirement, however, to employ a person with expertise to pull the information together and tailor it to our own project.
- 18 The principle of requiring the production of a study/appraisal of the options associated with a project is the basis of good project management practice. It is essential that the Council adopt a practice where it requires information regarding the feasibility of a project to enable it to judge whether or not it should be initiated.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the post of PA/Programme Assistant is created on a permanent basis at an estimated cost of £25,000 p.a. from 2005/06 and that the pro rata cost of the appointment in 2004/05 (approximately £6,000) be funded from reserves
- 2 a revenue budget of £60k be created to meet the cost of employing additional capacity to carry out the work to develop feasibility studies/options appraisals associated with projects in the new Corporate Plan.

Background Papers: Programme Office file



**Committee:** Resources  
**Date:** 18 November 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 10  
**Title:** Cinema at Saffron Walden County High School  
**Author:** Sarah McLagan (01799) 510560

### **Summary**

- 1 This report provides the Committee with details of the proposal to establish a Cinema at Saffron Walden County High School (SWCHS). It recommends that, subject to the establishment of a satisfactory partnership agreement with SWCHS to establish an independent trust to manage a cinema, the Council makes a contribution of £80,000 from the Capital Programme for the purchase of equipment for the Cinema and agrees to an ongoing revenue contribution of £5,000 per annum (Index Linked).

### **Background**

- 2 The Quality of Life Plan has an objective to provide a Cinema in the Council Chamber, for which an allocation of £80k has been made in the Capital Programme. In June 2004 the Resources Committee agreed that the feasibility of establishing a Cinema in the Council Chamber was inappropriate and confirmed that further investigations should take place to consider whether a community cinema could be provided in partnership with SWCHS in their new multi-purpose hall, which is part of a £1.6m building project. It was agreed that the £80k should be rolled into 2005/06 and agreed in principle that it could be used to support the provision of a cinema at SWCHS.

### **Development of a “Cinema”**

- 3 Since June, SWCHS has progressed with the building of the new development and work started on site in early October and is due to be completed in September 2005. The plans include for the provision of five new classrooms, an extension to the Schools library, staff facilities and a new multi-purpose hall in the style of an auditorium, which includes a projection/technical room at first floor level and has the potential to house professional standard 35mm projection equipment. This would enable a full cinema facility, showing current releases, to be provided.
- 4 The development of a cinema in the multi-purpose hall would require additional works and equipment, some of which could be covered by the £80k that the Council has allocated for the project. The additional works in question include –
  - Auditorium style raked seating
  - Cinema standard “black-out” to window and doors

- Acoustic finishes to walls and measures to reduce sound transmission
  - Projection and Sound Systems.
- 5 The Council's £80k would be used by SWCHS for the purchase of most of the above which is estimated to total £90k. The School would apply for funding from relevant sources to meet the remaining costs of £10k.

### **Operation of a "Cinema"**

- 6 SWCHS has employed a freelance consultant (recommended by Screen East) to provide advice about how a cinema might operate at the School. The consultant has advised about a number of different options for the most appropriate vehicle to use to manage the facility, including the School itself, a commercial cinema operator and an independent trust. Based on this advice, the School and officers consider that the most practical and appropriate option is to establish a newly constituted, independent trust that would "lease" the auditorium from the School in return for the provision of a professional standard cinema facility. SWCHS would benefit from access to these facilities for teaching at non-public-use times.
- 7 The consultant has advised that, under the independent trust option, the most effective method of operating the cinema would be as follows –
- The cinema would be used as a public cinema facility on four consecutive evenings each week – Friday Saturday, Sunday and Monday - with additional matinee or early evening screenings on Saturday and Sunday and with scope to extend the screening programme during the school holiday periods
  - Day to day management of the cinema would be undertaken by a part-time manager – they would be responsible for financial management, stock management and staff and volunteers and their training
  - A part-time projectionist would be employed to run the projection/technical aspect of the operation
  - The box office, kiosk sales and ushering would be undertaken by volunteers
  - Programming and film bookings would be contracted out to an external provider
  - Plant maintenance, cleaning and utilities would be provided by the School at cost.
- 8 The programme of films would be on the basis of the cinema showing one main title per week, occupying four evening screenings. The two matinee or early evening screenings would be targeted at identified niche audiences – U, PG, 12 cert. films and repertory films for senior citizens etc.
- 9 On the basis set out above, it is anticipated that the cinema would be able to secure mainstream films approximately 8 weeks after national opening. The programme would be marketed through the production of a 2-monthly brochure, supported by selected local press advertising, poster displays etc. Use would also be made of the Councils website, the TIC/CICs and they would directly market the programme to the School's pupils.

## Revenue Calculations

- 10 The consultant has calculated that the net cost of operating the cinema at SWCHS would be approximately £5k per annum. His calculations take into account -
- a. Predicted demand levels for the cinema at SWCHS, using standard analysis techniques and actual average audience admission data provided by 23 independent and broadly specialised cinemas across the UK
  - b. A 70:30 ratio split between the number of full-price and concessionary tickets sold
  - c. Income - based on the outcome of the above calculations applied to full ticket price of £4.50 and a concessionary ticket price of £3.50 (these charges are comparable to those made at the Haverhill Arts Centre). There would also be modest income from kiosk sales and on-screen advertising
  - d. Expenditure – accounting for film transportation and hire costs, the films booking agency fees, licences, insurances and the Performing Rights Society tariff payments, staffing, marketing, kiosk stock purchases and the lease payments to the School. It also includes a budget to meet the on-going cost of replacing/repairing equipment.
- 11 With regard to the levels of predicted demand for the cinema, officers have asked the School to employ the consultant to carry out some market testing work to be clearer about the level of use that local people would make of the facility. The Council is to pay for this work (£2k) which will involve people being asked whether and how frequently they would use the facility. Surveys will be carried out in Saffron Walden and in a couple of hinterland villages (e.g. Debden, Newport). In addition, the consultant will survey a small sample of residents in Thaxted, Stansted and Dunmow. The results of this work will be available to officers in mid December.

## Partnership Implications for the Council

- 12 SWCHS wishes to secure a partnership agreement with the Council to establish an independent trust to manage a cinema. It is envisaged that this would be achieved through a binding agreement with the School and that the Council would have representation on the board of the independent trust. To enable the cinema auditorium to be developed to an appropriate standard, the School is asking the Council to contribute £80k from its capital programme to meet the costs outlined in paragraph 4/5 above. In addition, however, to enable the facility to operate as described, it is necessary for the Council to contribute an ongoing revenue contribution of £5k per annum (Index Linked).
- 13 The School has made it quite clear that it is not seeking to profit from its position. Indeed, it would contribute £7k per annum in-kind core support, requiring the independent trust to covenant any end of year surplus back to it, up to the amount that it has provided in-kind. In addition, the School has agreed to undertake all of the employment services for the two part-time members of staff on behalf of the independent trust.

- 14 Officers have advised the School that the partnership agreement must include clauses that deal with a situation where it has become clear that the operation is not going to be sustainable. It concurs with this requirement and agrees that, for example, neither the Council nor the School would “bail-out” the operation were the deficit to increase above the originally agreed level of revenue contribution. However, the agreement would also require both parties to use its best endeavours to secure another route to make the facility available to the public for the showing of films.
- 15 Officers understand that Saffron Walden Town Council has been asked to make a financial contribution to the project in terms of a one-off contribution towards the initial start-up period of operation and an on-going commitment to revenue costs.
- 16 In the middle of October, the School held a meeting with representatives from local organisations with an interest in promoting the town and its facilities – Saffron Walden Arts Trust, Saffron Walden Initiative, a local Film society – to consider whether there is support for the establishment of an independent trust to take the project forward. The attendees showed unanimous support for the proposal and agreed to meet again at the beginning of December and bring other interested people along so to discuss and progress the establishment of the independent trust and make commitments to doing so. Clearly, it is important that the Council provides a Member representative to attend at this and future meetings to establish the trust.

### **Conclusions**

- 17 Clearly, if successful, this is an incredibly cost effective way for the Council to meet a long-standing desire/requirement of residents/young people/local film buffs for the provision of a cinema. The standard of the facility would be equivalent to other professionally run, independent cinema facilities, although it is acknowledged that it would not to the commercial standard of an Odeon or equivalent facility.
- 18 The proposal presents the ideal opportunity for the Council to achieve its objective to provide a cinema, but without the commitment that would be required if it were to seek to run it itself and/or from its own premises.
- 19 It is essential that there is an appropriate partnership agreement between the Council and the School, that they work together to establish the independent trust and that the Council and the School has representation on the independent trust to enable them to contribute to the development and management of the cinema facility.
- 20 To address potential criticism that Saffron Walden has been provided with a facility that many across the district would like to use, it is suggested that, through the partnership agreement with the School, the trust would be required to consider a mobile service to other appropriate venues in the district and opportunities to provide transportation to the facility at the School. These aspects would need to be investigated once the cinema is established/up and running and might require the Council to consider a financial contribution

towards the costs associated with provision e.g. purchase of mobile equipment, subsidising transportation costs.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 subject to the establishment of a satisfactory partnership agreement with SWCHS to establish an independent trust to manage a cinema, the Council contributes £80,000 from its Capital Programme for the purchase of equipment for the Cinema at SWCHS and agrees to an ongoing revenue contribution of £5,000 per annum (Index Linked) from September 2005
- 2 the Council appoints a Member representative to the Independent trust to operate the cinema facility.

Background Papers: Programme Office File

**Committee:** RESOURCES  
**Date:** 18 November, 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 11  
**Title:** Counter Fraud Partnership  
**Author:** Michael Perry (01799) 510416

### Summary

- 1 On 24 June, 2004 Members resolved to pursue a Counter Fraud Partnership with East Herts. District Council subject to satisfactory consultations with staff. This report is to advise Members of the outcome of the consultations and to recommend that the service is currently retained in house.

### Background

- 2 Prior to 1 June, 2004 the Benefit Fraud Team fell within the IT and Benefit Fraud Section of the Council. With effect from 1 June, 2004 the Benefit Fraud Team was transferred to Corporate Governance.
- 3 Prior to the change of responsibility the Head of IT and Benefit Fraud had been engaged in negotiations with East Herts. District Council with a view to the Councils joining in partnership to carry out benefit fraud investigations and prosecutions. The outcome of those negotiations was reported to Members on 24 June, 2004. A copy of that report is appended for ease of reference.
- 4 It is understood that the manager concerned acknowledged at the Committee meeting that there had not been proper staff consultation. At that stage the team had effectively been reduced to one full time investigator and one part time administrator following the departure of one of the two investigators from

the authority.

- 5 When staff were consulted it was clear that they were opposed to the partnership. The reason for this is that it was proposed that UDC staff would be relocated to East Herts. District Council offices and that the partnership would operate solely from that site. One member of staff was not prepared to relocate for personal reasons (she has in fact since relocated to a different department within the Council). The other member of staff raised objections on operational grounds. These may be summarised as follows -
- a. A significant proportion of investigations should be triggered by referrals from the Benefits Section. Without being present on site so that there was frequent direct contact between Benefit Fraud Investigators and the Benefits Section it was felt that there would be a dramatic reduction in the number of referrals received. It was pointed out (and acknowledged) that when the Fraud Section was based for a short period of time in the Lodge adjoining the Council Offices the working relationship between the Benefit Fraud Investigators and the Benefits Unit deteriorated and the number of referrals received was significantly reduced. The relevant officer voiced concerns that if the entire Fraud Team were based at Bishops Stortford referrals would all but dry up.
  - b. The majority of East Herts. District Council's work does in fact come from referrals. East Herts. operate a system of scoring referrals and investigating those with higher scores first. If the number and quality of referrals from Uttlesford was not at least maintained this could result in very few Uttlesford cases being passed for investigation which would have an adverse effect on the subsidy recovered.
  - c. Being based at Bishops Stortford would increase travelling time for carrying out investigations, particularly in the north of the district, thereby reducing the amount of time investigators can spend doing investigations.
  - d. Interviews and the administration of cautions must be carried out where convenient to the customer which will involve two officers travelling from Bishops Stortford to either Great Dunmow or Saffron Walden whenever these activities needed to be carried out in respect of Uttlesford residents.
- 6 The Executive Manager – Corporate Governance shares these concerns. He has canvassed the issue of referrals with both the former line manager of the Fraud Investigators and the Executive Manager, (Customer Services) who is currently responsible for the Benefits Team. Both have agreed that there is a risk that the number and quality of referrals will decline if there is not regular contact between the investigators and the Benefits Section.
- 7 These concerns have been raised with East Herts. East Herts. are not prepared to operate the partnership jointly from Bishops Stortford and Saffron Walden but will only consider it if all staff are based at Bishops Stortford.

- 8 It has been established that Stevenage Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council operate Benefit Fraud in Partnership. However, investigators are based at both of the Council's offices with the Manager travelling between the two to supervise operations. The idea of all investigators being transferred to one site was apparently not considered for logistic reasons.
- 9 There are other issues which have emerged since UDC's restructuring has taken place. The first concerns the guarantee which East Herts. were prepared to offer with regard to subsidy. UDC has a subsidy target of £120,000 per annum. East Herts. were prepared to guarantee that at least 75% of that sum (£90,000) would be met and any deficit would be made up by East Herts. (It should be noted, however, that the income figure of £120,000 from subsidy is built into the Council's baseline budget). East Herts. have not confirmed that this offer is still being made. They point out (fairly) that when the partnership was first mooted and agreed Uttlesford would be taking to the partnership two experienced investigators and an administrative officer. Now Uttlesford is only in a position to bring one investigator. East Herts. asked that UDC should re-evaluate what it is now bringing to the partnership and what its expectations of the partnership are.
- 10 In the longer term there may be an issue with regard to the carrying out of prosecutions. East Herts. District Council use the services of a firm of solicitors for their prosecutions. (This firm was also used for benefit fraud prosecutions prior to January, 2002). UDC prosecutions are carried out in house by the Legal Services Team. Both the external solicitors and the Legal Services Team have excellent success rates in the courts. However, last year Legal Services carried out three times as many prosecutions as were carried out by the external solicitors in the last year they did work for this Council. The internal re-charge was one half of those solicitors costs for that period. Whilst East Herts. are content for Uttlesford prosecutions to continue to be carried out in-house by the UDC Legal Services Team for the trial period they are not prepared to commit to that should the partnership become permanent and have indicated that they may at that stage wish all prosecutions to be outsourced. It is not considered that it would be cost effective to take this course of action. Further, with benefit fraud officers based at the same site as the Legal Services Team there is instant access to legal advice which would not be available if the investigators were off-site or if external solicitors were used.
- 11 Although the former Manager determined to defer seeking a replacement for the investigator who left the Council pending a decision on the way forward with the partnership it is clear that whether or not the partnership goes ahead an additional investigator will be required. At the time of writing this report a recruitment process is underway and a verbal update will be given to Members at the meeting.
- 12 In discussions between the current investigator, the former administrator and the Executive Manager - Corporate Governance, a view has been expressed that a team of two full-time investigators could function without administrative support. Subject to the view of Members, if the partnership with East Herts. does not proceed it is intended to endeavour to run the section without

administrative support for a trial period.

- 13 If the partnership does not go ahead there will effectively be no third tier management for the investigators. This means that the work formally undertaken by the team's third tier manager together with the work undertaken by the administrator would need to be shared between the investigators. Paragraph 8 of the report presented on 24 June, suggests that it has been difficult to generate work to occupy two full-time investigators and that the establishment could therefore be reduced by half a post. If that is the case then the investigators ought to have capacity to deal with the additional tasks involved. If they do not it may be necessary to recruit an administrator on similar terms to the previous post holder.
- 14 Comparing the figures in Appendix 2 of the 24 June report assuming that the Counter Fraud subsidy target was met the difference between the partnership and an in-house service was £480 per annum. In the event that the partnership does proceed East Herts. have made it clear that it would expect UDC to fund an administrative post from the outset (in place of the post currently vacant here). If the service remains in house and the experiment is successful then there would be a net saving of £13,330 per annum to the Council.
- 15 In conclusion –
  - a. The financial benefits to the Council of a partnership are at best marginal and depend upon the partnership producing £30,000 per annum more than the figure East Herts. are prepared to guarantee.
  - b. There are operational difficulties in UDC fraud investigators being based off site.
  - c. There are longer term financial implications in the event that UDC legal work was to be outsourced by East Herts.

RECOMMENDED that Members resolve not to proceed with the proposed partnership at this stage and continue with the provision of the Benefit Fraud Service in house.

Background Papers: None



**Committee:** Resources Committee  
**Date:** 24 June 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 16  
**Title:** Counter-Fraud Partnership  
**Author:** John Mercer (01799) 510421

### Summary

- 1 This report sets out options for the future management of the Council's Counter-Fraud function. It recommends the establishment of a formal counter-fraud partnership with East Hertfordshire District Council (East Herts) for an initial period to 31 March 2006.
- 2 The proposals in this report have been discussed with managers at East Herts. The agreement of East Herts Executive Board will of course be required before the partnership can be pursued further.

### Background

- 3 Uttlesford's Counter-Fraud team was established in 1995. Its performance in identifying and preventing housing benefit fraud is one of the best in the country. In 2003/04 the following counter-fraud sanctions were issued where fraud was proven:
  - a. Prosecutions
  - b. Administrative Penalties.
  - c. Formal Cautions.

Additional housing benefit subsidy is awarded for each of the formal sanctions listed above.

- 4 The Council's counter-fraud arrangements were judged 'fair to good' by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) during a recent inspection. This is one of the highest scores awarded so far by the BFI. However, over the last two years it has been difficult to devote management time to running Uttlesford's Counter-Fraud team, as both the Head of IT & Anti-Fraud Services and the Principal IT & Anti-Fraud Services, have had to devote the majority of their time to IT-related work. As a consequence, discussions were entered into with East Herts regarding the possibility of establishing a counter-fraud partnership.

### Option One - Partnership with East Herts District Council

- 5 It is considered that there would be a number of benefits to establishing an counter-fraud partnership with East Herts. These would include:-

## APPENDIX

- Adoption of the best counter-fraud practices of each council, for example UDC's proactive investigation techniques & East Herts' success with obtaining referrals from other council departments.
  - Reduction in management costs ~ by having one Counter-Fraud Manager responsible for both councils, management costs at both sites would be reduced.
  - Improved flexibility – the partnership would have the ability to direct staffing resources where they are most needed, for example, for targeted fraud drives.
  - Increasing capacity ~ although no direct cost savings would result from this proposal, it would free up management time to be spend on other Council priorities.
- 6 It is proposed that East Herts would be the lead authority for the partnership. The current Counter-Fraud Manager at East Herts would manage the partnership staff on a day-to-day basis, and would report to the Head of Revenues at East Herts. The current anti-fraud management (Adrian Webb & John Mercer) at Uttlesford would not be involved in the new partnership and their duties would be transferred to East Herts' Counter Fraud Manager.
- 7 Under Uttlesford's new management arrangements, responsibility for counter-fraud matters have been transferred to the Executive Manager – Corporate Governance. Although the Executive Manager would have no line management responsibility for the counter-fraud team, he would act as the client officer for Uttlesford. The role of the client officer would be to:
- Liase with the Counter-Fraud Manager, resolving any problems or issues that might arise.
  - Monitor the performance of the partnership, ensuring that agreed performance targets are being met, etc. It would be necessary to establish a formal Service Level Agreement between Uttlesford and East Herts.
  - Report counter-fraud related issues to Uttlesford's Members & Executive Management Team. It should be noted that it is not proposed to establish any form of 'joint-board' arrangement, as exists for the Internal Audit Partnership.
- 8 It is proposed that the partnership staffing levels should reflect the caseloads of the respective partners and trends in levels of fraud resulting from recent legislative changes. In particular, it is felt that there are opportunities for East Herts to increase subsidy & reduce the level of fraud within its district. Additional staffing would help achieve this and it is therefore proposed that its counter-fraud establishment be increased by one and a half posts. Conversely, it has been concluded that Uttlesford no longer needs two full-time investigators. It has been difficult to generate sufficient work in recent months to keep two full-time investigators occupied. This is mainly due to the deterrent effect of previous fraud work, and the current high levels of employment in the local economy. Despite this, the team was able to get

close to its internal performance targets in 2003/04 (£110,000 compared to a target of £120,000). It is therefore felt that the establishment can be reduced by half a post. It is also felt that current subsidy levels could be maintained, provided there is an increase in the number of referrals received from the Council's benefits team. Such referrals should form the majority of case work of a counter-fraud team. However, at Uttlesford, they account for only 32% of the team's workload (compared to a national benchmark of 70%). If referrals could be increased to these levels, by adopting the working practices of East Herts, it should be possible to retain existing subsidy levels and still reduce the staffing establishment. A proposed staffing structure for the partnership is attached as appendix one, along with details of existing staffing structures at both councils.

- 9 It is proposed that the whole team is based at Bishop's Stortford. This would make management of the team easier, and ensure that staff working on the Uttlesford caseload are not isolated from their colleagues. Consultation is presently taking place with staff on this issue.
- 10 Wherever staff are based, interviews under caution (IUCs) will still need to be carried out at a convenient location for the claimant. The option of using Bishop's Stortford for some of Uttlesford's IUCs may actually increase choice of locations for claimants.
- 11 It is proposed that the partnership is set up for an initial trial period to 31 March 2006. For the trial period, Uttlesford staff would remain on the Uttlesford payroll on their existing terms and conditions. Thereafter, if the partnership is made permanent, staff would transfer on their terms and conditions applying at the time, in accordance with the provisions of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment Regulations) 1981).
- 12 The loss of internal counter-fraud staff will create one problem. There will no longer be any in-house resource to carry out internal, non-benefit related investigations, such as minor thefts from offices etc. It is recommended that this responsibility is transferred to the Internal Audit partnership.

### **Computer systems**

- 13 The two councils operate different anti-fraud computer systems. As a longer-term objective it would be advisable, for cost, support and integration reasons, to consolidate on one of the systems. A view on the relative merits of the two systems would need to be taken during the trial period before the decision was taken.
- 14 Uttlesford and East Herts use different benefits and Council Tax systems (SX3 and Academy respectively). This is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future and consequently staff would need to receive training in both systems. They will also need training in both the document imaging systems currently in use. It will also be necessary to establish computer links from the UDC system to East Herts and vice versa (dependent upon the working patterns of investigators).

## Legal Issues

15 Partnership powers within the Local Government Act can be used to overcome any difficulties with East Herts carrying out work on behalf of Uttlesford. These powers have been used by the London Borough of Greenwich to provide counter-fraud services to the London Borough of Bromley, who do not have their own team. In particular, Greenwich use the LG Act powers to:

- Investigate Bromley's cases.
- Obtain access to Bromley's computer systems, case files, employees etc.
- Interview Bromley's claimants.
- Authorise RIPA requests for surveillance at Bromley.
- Attend court on behalf of Bromley.

It is apparent from discussions with the two councils that the partnership, which has been operational since April 2002, works well.

16 It is noted that East Herts use external solicitors for prosecutions. Uttlesford in contrast, use its in-house legal team. Both legal services are extremely professional and effective, with excellent prosecution success rates. Uttlesford would not be prepared to return to using external solicitors during the trial period. However, it is not felt that this should pose a significant problem for the partnership.

## Financial Issues

17 It is important that there is no overall increase in costs to either Uttlesford or East Herts as a result of establishing the partnership. Furthermore, Uttlesford presently makes a net 'surplus' from fraud investigation i.e. the sanction subsidy received outweighs the direct costs of the Anti-Fraud team. Uttlesford can not afford to be any worse off as a result of the partnership. Consequently, the following is proposed:

- (a) Uttlesford reduce its baseline costs by cutting its establishment by half a post.
- (b) East Herts increase its subsidy income by employing additional staff, which in turn will generate additional caseload & subsidy, in excess of the employment costs. This approach has been used very successful at Uttlesford over a number of years. .

18 Financial detail are attached as Appendix Two.

19 Sanctions subsidy would continue to be paid by the Department of Work & Pensions directly to the respective councils. However, for Uttlesford, there is an element of risk associated with this arrangement. Should the joint counter-fraud team fail to meet the agreed subsidy targets, Uttlesford could be financially disadvantaged. It is proposed therefore to cap this risk by agreeing a minimum level of subsidy Uttlesford could expect from the partnership. It is proposed that this is set at 75% of the agreed target. If this level was not achieved, East Herts would compensate Uttlesford accordingly. Hopefully the

need for such a safeguard would be purely academic. Conversely, should the team exceed Uttlesford pre-agreed target, East Herts would receive 50% of the additional sum.

### **Option Two – Retain service in-house**

- 20 As an alternative, it would be possible to continue to run a team in-house. As previously stated, responsibility for counter-fraud services has been transferred to the Executive Manager – Corporate Governance. Line management responsibility could rest within his section although the amount of time that the postholder could devote to counter-fraud would be considerably less than the dedicated Counter-Fraud Manager under Option One. For this reason, it would not be possible to reduce the number of investigators from the existing level, as more management-type work would have to be carried out by the investigators. As one of the investigator posts is currently vacant, an advertisement would need to be placed for a full-time replacement.
- 21 For the team to continue to meet its targets under this option, additional measures would need to be put into place to ensure a higher level of referrals from the benefits team. Without this higher level of referrals, the counter-fraud team would struggle to meet its financial targets.

### **Conclusions**

- 22 Establishing a counter-fraud partnership with East Herts would help to ensure that the current high quality of counter-fraud work is maintained. It would also enable the two councils to share expertise, use staff resources more flexibly and reduce management costs.
- 23 Alternatively, retaining the function in-house would retain direct control over the performance of the team, helping to minimise risks of financial targets not being achieved. However, the considerable advantages of joint working, as outlined in paragraph 5 would be lost. Also, more senior officer time would need to be devoted to the function than under option one. For these reasons, it is felt that option one, the creation of a counter-fraud partnership, should be pursued.

RECOMMENDED that

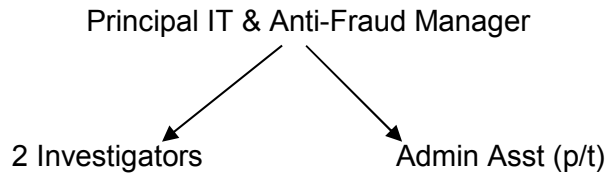
- 1 a counter-fraud partnership between East Herts and Uttlesford be pursued, for an initial trial period to 31 March 2006. The trial to start at the earliest possible date after appropriate committee approvals have been obtained.
- 2 East Herts provide the management for the partnership.
- 3 the staffing structure in Appendix One be adopted.
- 4 a further report be submitted to the Committee before the end of the trial period, recommending long-term management arrangements.

Background Papers: None

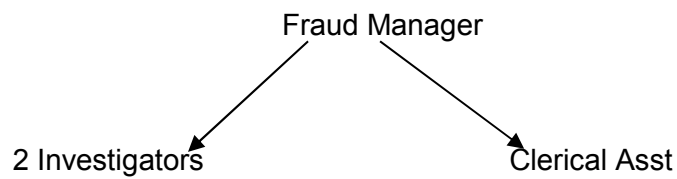
Appendix One

1. Current Staffing Structures

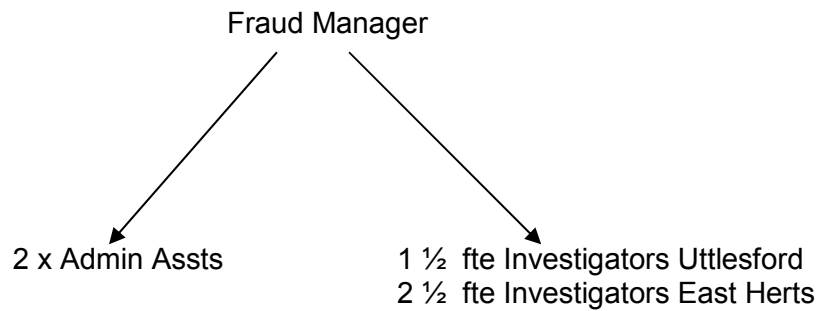
a. Uttlesford District Council



b. East Herts District Council



2. Proposed Staffing Structure



**Appendix Two – Impact of Proposals on Costs****Option One – Partnership with East Herts District Council**

	<b>2004/05 Existing Budget £</b>	<b>2004/05 Revised Budget £</b>	<b>2005/06 Revised Budget £</b>
<b>Costs</b>	0	8,470	14,520
Proportion (38%) of East Herts Counter-Fraud Manager ~ note 1			
Investigators x £30,000 each (maximum) Note 2	55,020	36,680	40,020
Admin Asst (P/T)	13,810	13,810	13,810
Direct Costs Note 3	10,500	10,500	10,500
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>	<b>79,330</b>	<b>69,460</b>	<b>78,850</b>
<b>Subsidy</b>	120,000	110,000	120,000
Counter-Fraud Subsidy			
<b>Net Surplus</b>	<b>-40,670</b>	<b>-40,540</b>	<b>41,150</b>

**Notes**

- The allocation of the Counter-Fraud Manager's costs is based upon the respective caseloads of the two councils ~ Further details are provided below.
- The costings take account of the current vacancy within the counter-fraud team, and the proposed reduction in the number of investigators by half a post.
- It is assumed, for the purposes of this report, that direct non-staffing expenditure will remain unchanged.

**Caseload Statistics**

	<b>No of Cases</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
East Herts District Council (HB & CTB)	9,000	62
Uttlesford District Council		
• Housing Benefit	2,400	38
• Council Tax Benefit	3,100	
	<b>14,500</b>	<b>100</b>

Therefore allocation of Counter-Fraud Manager's costs: 38% UDC & 62% EHDC

## Option Two – Continuation of in-house service

	2004/05 Existing Budget £	2004/05 Revised Budget £	2005/06 Revised Budget £
<b>Costs</b>	0	0	0
Proportion (38%) of East Herts Counter-Fraud Manager			
Investigators Note a	55,020	46,680	55,020
Admin Asst (P/T)	13,810	13,810	13,810
Direct Costs	10,500	10,500	10,500
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>	<b>79,330</b>	<b>70,990</b>	<b>79,330</b>
<b>Subsidy</b>	120,000	112,000	120,000
Counter-Fraud Subsidy			
<b>Net Surplus</b>	<b>-40,670</b>	<b>-41,010</b>	<b>-40,670</b>

Note a. ~ for the purposes of this option, the cost of two full time posts has been included.



**Committee:** Resources  
**Date:** 18 November 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 12  
**Title:** Employee Development  
**Author:** Carole C W Hughes (01799) 510407

## Part 1

### Summary

- 1 The ODPM Pay and Workforce Strategy emphasises the need for authorities to work together on local and regional activities in order to implement comprehensive and cost effective workforce / people strategies. It identified five priority areas critical to developing the local government workforce to secure the delivery of better and more efficient customer focused public services and the key area referred to in this document is:
  - a) **Developing Leadership Capacity** – among both officers and members.
  - b) **Developing the skills and capacity of the workforce** – across the corporate centre of authorities, specific services, management and the frontline workforce.
  - c) **Developing the organisation** – to achieve excellence in people and performance management, partnership working, equality and diversity and the efficient delivery of services.
  - d) **Resourcing local government** – ensuring that authorities recruit, train and retain the staff they need.
  - e) **Pay and Rewards** – Having pay and reward structures that attract, retain and develop a skilled and flexible workforce
  
- 2 Members are requested to consider the recommendations outlined below in support of developing employees, and leadership in particular on this occasion.
  - a) The purchase of a competency framework from Essex County Council (ECC) for £4000. Details for the framework will be sent out to Members separately to this report and available on a Power Point prior to the meeting.
  - b) If above agreed to purchase up to two days consultancy time from ECC to align the framework to Uttlesford District Council, at £450 per day.
  - c) Consultancy support, at £450 per day for up to 10 days, to the first cohorts of leaders in order to assist them to undertake a skills audit of their teams.

## Background

- 3 Members are requested to consider the recommendations in support of developing a competency approach and to leadership development within the organisation.
- 4 The personnel, (now the HR) strategy stated that we will advise our managers and leaders of the behaviours and expertise we expect them to display to meet the current and future needs of the organisation and to reflect the principles outlined in the strategy and that we will offer training and development to our managers to meet these expectations. A competency framework will enable this.
- 5 As a small authority we could pay for external consultants to work with the organisation and develop a competency framework to meet our needs. Such an approach would be time consuming and costly when other options more partnership orientated are available to us.
- 6 We currently work in partnership or undertake joint work with Essex County Council. They currently have a framework that they are willing to sell to UDC, for a relatively small sum of £4000. I have been trying to obtain funding from the Employers Organisation to assist with the purchase but I have not been able to gain any or part support at this time. There may be an update prior to the meeting of Resources however.
- 7 ECC are able to provide consultancy at £450 per day in order to complete any work necessary to align the framework to UDC. This will ensure for example the language is appropriate to our use and issues such as the five themes are threaded through the framework.
- 8 If the framework is purchased it will be used to develop the appraisal scheme. At the same time it is anticipated that the appraisals will become more personal development plans aligned to meet the needs of both the individual and the future of the organisation. The framework will also be used to ensure core competency requirements are recorded and assessed on job descriptions and person specifications. It is anticipated any development of appraisals, personal development plans will have the full involvement of the cohort(s).
- 9 JMT have been consulted on a leadership development programme proposal developed by ECC in conjunction with the Executive Manager (HR). Please see attached for the proposed programme, it is yet to be amended following consultation but the 'flavour' will be the same. The first cohort will also be asked to feedback on the relevance, quality of consultants etc prior to other cohorts beginning their programme and it is anticipated that they will begin the programme very early in the New Year.
- 10 Each employee undertaking the leadership programme will be asked to be part or to lead/co lead on a task and finish group created to develop the organisation. For example Investors in People, Equal Opportunities or Reward.

- 11 In addition the JMT leadership development programme Members may be aware that the Essex group of authorities made a bid to the capacity building fund of the ODPM. The proposal was for a middle manager/future leadership development programme, to include mentoring and involving the Essex authorities as a group. The bid was successful and nearly £100000 obtained. UDC is now able to select two middle managers or leaders of the future who will attend the programme at a heavily subsidised rate of £1000.
- 12 Attendance at both programmes includes an expectation that the learning will be transferred to the work place. Evaluation will take place and is likely to follow Kirkpatrick's four levels model:
- How did the participants react to the programme?
  - What did the participants learn?
  - What are the longer term effects on job performance?
  - What has been the organisational impact?

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Members approve the purchase of a competency framework from Essex County Council (ECC) for £4000, and if agreed that
- 2) Up to two days consultancy time from ECC be purchased to align the framework to Uttlesford District Council. At £450 per day.
- 3) Members note the success of the ODPM bid and agree an additional £2000 be made available to support to middle managers/future leaders to attend the new Essex wide programme.
- 4) Members approve consultancy support, at £450 per day for up to 10 days, to support the cohorts of leaders undertake a skills audit of their teams.

## Part 2

### Summary

- 1 Members are requested to consider the creation of an index linked education fund of up to £12,000 per year to support employees gain qualifications and accreditation in professional and technical areas that are relevant to the business and service needs of the Council.
- 2 In support of Life Long Learning Members are also requested to support the offer of interest free loans, under the rules of the Inland Revenue to enable employees to train and attend courses in areas which are not work related but are of interest or importance to them.
- 3 If Members agree to 1 above they are further asked to agree the recommendation that EMT working with JMT identify the areas to be supported, the maximum amount to be supported and to set any policy or procedure that will be followed.

### Background

- 4 An unstructured and ad hoc approach currently exists to support employees gain qualifications or accreditation. Some areas such as environmental health have supported team members to gain environmental health qualifications. Planning offered employees the opportunity to apply for a trainee planning officer post and day release to undertake the necessary planning qualification.
- 5 There is no structure or focus to such support and dependent upon which team an employee sits depends on whether there will be a budget large enough to support further education. It is suggested that this is neither equitable nor is it structured towards the meeting the current and more importantly the future needs of the organisation.
- 6 Currently anyone offered supported funding is required to pay the funding back to the Council on a reducing 1/24 amount if they leave UDC within 2 years of completing the course. Anyone failing to complete is also required to repay funding to the Council. It is not suggested that this situation changes.

### **Proposal**

- 7 If members agree to create a fund in support of employees gaining technical and professional qualifications required by the organisation or which will enhance the service delivery of the Council then support is requested for two possible avenues of support:
  - a. 100% funding, up to a yet to be identified amount\*, plus supported structured time off, to gain qualifications both professional and technical which are required by the organisation to perform its core functions. This may be for example in especially hard to recruit areas such as planning or training and accreditation toward Corgi gas registration. It should also be in areas senior managers are aware are developing and may be problematic within 3 years.
  - b. 50% funding plus some supported structured time off to gain qualifications the organisation recognises but where the area is not hard to recruit to nor hard to retain employees and there are no future issues identified. Any time off to be offered on a 50/50 basis unless there are service needs which preclude support.

*\* MBAs could cost up to £15000.*

- 8 In addition to the above and in support of Life Long Learning it is recommended that Members agree the use of reserves to provide interest free loans, within the rules of the Inland Revenue to enable employees to gain qualifications and accreditation in areas that are non work related. No time off to be offered in these occasions. It is recommended that the period of repayment be based on the length of the course for example each 12 months toward a degree in astronomy be repaid over 12 months via deduction from payroll.

- 9 Where the Inland Revenue rules prevent an employee accessing an interest free loan it is recommended that Members offer an alternative on the same interest rate as that applied to car loans at any time.
- 10 By taking the above actions the organisation will support employees to develop their careers, gain qualification and accreditation and will support succession planning. It is likely to increase staff retention and may attract future applicants to us too.
- 11 The restructuring and the prioritisation exercise Members are undertaking has and will continue to cause some employees concern over the future. Although Members and the Chief Executive have expressly advised that there is no intention to reduce employee numbers there may be a need in the future to realign the skills and knowledge of employees towards the areas of Members focus. Ensuring that employees have the opportunities to develop the professional and technical expertise the organisation wants for the future may alleviate some concerns employees have.
- 12 Although it is suggested that the fund be called an education fund it is not suggested that any panel allocating the fund assess on the value of the qualification rather it should assess the relevance of the area of qualification or accreditation to the high priority areas of the Council. For example it will be important to ensure that qualifications leading to degrees or diplomas etc do not take priority over funding toward for example an NVQ level 3 in a high priority area.
- 13 Naturally any funding offered will be due to repayment to the Council as is currently the case if the employee leaves within two years of completing the qualification.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Members support the creation of an £12000 education fund and
- 2) If 1 above is agreed that they task the Chief Executive and the Executive Managers to identify the core areas for 100% funding during 2005/6 and to create an assessment panel, reporting to Members on outcomes.
- 3) Members support the use of Reserves to provide interest free loans, following Inland Revenue rules in support of Life Long Learning and if agreed, that
- 4) Where the Inland Revenue rules prevent an employee accessing an interest free loan Members support the use of Reserves to offer a loan on the same interest rate as car loans

**Committee:** Resources  
**Date:** November 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 13  
**Title:** Partnership in Performance Improvement Statement  
**Author:** Carole C W Hughes on behalf of the Local Joint Council  
(01799) 510407

### **Summary**

- 1 This report is written on behalf of the Local Joint Council (LJC). The attached statement (Appendix A) is a statement of Partnership in Performance Improvement, which was agreed by the Regional Council, encouraging partnership working in the pursuit of performance improvement. The Statement is recommended to Members by the Local Joint Committee and Members are requested to support the document and recommend adoption by Council.

### **Background**

- 2 At the February 2004 Meeting Unison asked Members of the LJC to consider committing to the Partnership in Performance Improvement statement. The statement was agreed by the Regional Council at the start of the Best Value regime, to endorse the principles and good practice of partnership working throughout the Best Value process. It was subsequently reviewed and broadened to encompass partnership working generally, specifically between employers, employees and trade unions.
- 3 It was agreed that it appeared to be consistent with the aims of the Council. Following further opportunity to consider the statement, it was agreed at the May meeting that the final version of the statement be approved for submission to Members for adoption.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

1. Members agree the attached statement: 'Partnership in Performance Improvement, and if agreed
2. recommend its adoption by Council.

### **Background Papers:**

Attached Appendix A statement: Partnership in Performance Improvement  
LJC Minutes

**Committee:** Resources  
**Date:** 18 November 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 17  
**Title:** Home Computing Initiative (HCI)  
**Author:** Adrian Webb (01799) 510661 & Carole Hughes (01799 510407)

### Summary

- 1 This report recommends the approval of a Home Computing Initiative scheme for Uttlesford District Council employees.

### Background

- 2 A HCI scheme involves the Council purchasing computing equipment, be it a personal computer, laptop, printer or some other form of peripheral device, on behalf of the employee, for personal use at home. The equipment is leased by the Council to the employee who pays the Council, via salary deduction over a set period of time, a sum equal to the cost. At the end of the lease period the employee has the choice of either buying the equipment for a nominal sum, usually around £50 for a computer, or returning it to the Council.
- 3 HCI schemes are enabled by the Government's 1999 tax exemption on loaned computers, which allows employers to implement a tax-exempt loan scheme for computer equipment for their employees to use at home.
- 4 The benefits for the employee are numerous:
  - a. Using the purchasing power of the Council, high specification equipment can be purchased at relatively low cost.
  - b. The tax exemption means that combining tax and National Insurance Contribution (NIC) savings could effectively reduce the cost of obtaining computer equipment by up to 33% for basic rate taxpayers and up to 41% for higher rate tax payers.
  - c. HCI schemes help simplify choice for those employees who might need extra support in acquiring a computer.
  - d. All computers will come with a 3 year next day home support contract.
- 5 There are also significant benefits for the employer:
  - a. HCI schemes strengthen relationships with employees by making their salaries go further, which may assist staff retention.
  - b. Home computer users typically have a wider range of IT skills which are of benefit in any modern work place. Equally training provided by the employer may be transferable to the home environment.

- c. There will be reduced employer NIC costs relating to those employees who take part in the scheme.
  - d. A HCI scheme would be an addition to the existing staff benefits package with little actual cost to the Council.
- 6 In order for the HCI to be established it is necessary for the Council to work in partnership with one or more IT related suppliers. The Council is currently in negotiation with two suppliers who offer a HCI scheme:
- a. Dell Computers Ltd
  - b. Stone Computers Ltd

Both of these companies are longstanding suppliers of IT equipment to the Council.

- 7 The maximum value of equipment that can be purchased without a taxable benefit being incurred is £2,500 with the lease period being set by the Council. It is felt that the lease period should be no more than 3 years.
- 8 In the event of an employee leaving the Council before the end of the lease period all outstanding payments would become due. A maximum payment of 50% of final salary towards the outstanding lease will be made. Any remaining lease costs will usually be spread over a period of 6 months following the employee's last day of service.
- 9 The initial cost of setting up the scheme will depend upon the number of employees wishing to participate. A similar sized organisation had 30 staff join the scheme as soon as it was launched.

RECOMMENDED that the Council introduce a Home Computing Initiative Scheme with the initial cost being met from reserves.

Background Papers: None

**Committee:** Resources

**Date:** November 2004

**Agenda Item No:** 18

**Title:** Amended Travel Plan

**Author:** Bronwen Stacey (01799) 510363, on behalf of the Travel Plan Working Group members:  
Cllr W Bowker, Denise Greenwood, Jeremy Pine, Mary Rowe, Jan Sanders, Bronwen Stacey, Alex Stewart.

### Summary

- 1 The initial findings and Report of June 2004 of the Travel Plan Working Group (TPWG) have been separated into two Reports, this and a Report to Transport and Highways Committee.



Please refer to the Report to Resources Committee of June 2004, for details of the initiating surveys and their findings, and the related issues identified therefrom.

- 2 This Report addresses the following issues:
  - a. To attempt to increase other modes of travel.
  - b. To decrease/reduce personal travel and work-related travel,

and makes recommendations for immediate implementation and others for subsequent review on a six-monthly basis.

## **Background**

The rural nature of the district means that the average travel-to-work distance (one way) for Council employees is 12.5 miles, but of even greater significance is the finding that the two largest groups of respondents, totalling 48%, live between 10 and 30 miles away from their work-base, and most of whom, of necessity, travel by car. In addition, many employees are Essential Car Users who need to travel around the District frequently in the course of their work.

Similarly, the majority of Members live several miles away from the Council Offices, and their methods of travel are dictated by personal circumstances and the time available. In addition the times of meetings are a factor to be considered in relation to public transport services.

In addition, although over 40% of visitors to the Council live locally in Saffron Walden, only 11% currently walk to the Council Offices. Members of the public who do not drive to the Council Offices tend to be older people who have time to walk, or perhaps who do not have a car. Those who drive are likely to be busy people who are time-impooverished.

## 3 TO INCREASE MORE SUSTAINABLE MODES OF TRAVEL

### 3.1 Employees

Walking and cycling (even occasionally) for staff who live within practical proximity is being encouraged in the following ways:

- A cycle stand, positioned in the grounds, has recently being provided by Essex County Council.
- A hairdryer has now been provided in the staff shower, for staff who cycle to work.

A further initiative which could help to encourage alternative modes of travel to work would be to provide secure clothes lockers for walkers and cyclists.

### 3.2 Members

Survey responses indicate that those Members who live close enough to walk or cycle to meetings already do so when possible. Bus routes and timetables are not conducive to increasing the incidence of travel to meetings by public transport;

An increase in other sustainable forms of travel may be achieved by initiating a “Green Target Mileage Scheme”, which could be a variation of the proposed Service-related scheme, to a Committee-related version (see below). There would be no cost attached to implementation of this scheme.

#### 4 TO DECREASE/REDUCE CURRENT LEVELS OF MILEAGE

##### 4.1 Employees

Reductions in the current levels of mileage undertaken by staff to get to work may be achieved by one or more of the following:

- **Car Share Register:** The Car-Share Register has been radically overhauled by an IT specialist, and been relaunched. It is accessible on Desktop, on all Citrix servers. The facility allows access to either view or enter a wide range of information, to facilitate as wide a usage as possible. Although currently only a small proportion of the workforce have registered, employees are now being encouraged to consider registering even if they may only wish or be willing to share transport very occasionally, or for emergencies. If most employees only car-share on occasions, the saved miles will be beneficial, and it may be that a greater frequency of car-sharing grows over a longer period of time, through growing familiarity and possibly the use of incentives/targets (see below).
- **9-day working fortnight and Homeworking:** Although these are examples of interventions which relate to general Service Improvements, flexibility and Family Friendly policies, there will be environmental benefits, as they are introduced.
- **Video Conferencing:** The active promotion of Video and Audio Conferencing could reduce the mileage of both employees and Members, although obviously dependent upon the availability of appropriate resources, venue and interest by relevant parties.
- **‘Hotdesking’:** the practice of employees using more conveniently-situated bases, other than in the Saffron Walden Office, could be increased in appropriate situations. This could help to reduce current levels of mileage, where the ‘hotdesk’ was situated nearer to home or the day’s visits. ‘Hotdesks’ could be set up at CICs, or other Council-owned properties.
- **Working practices may be modified** in order to reduce the overall mileage between home and the first, and/or last visit of the day, where this is not happening currently.
- **‘Green’ Vehicles:** Subject to appropriate negotiations/agreements by officer groups through Single Status etc, ‘green’ vehicles, which both are more economical, and more environmentally-friendly, with maximum CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 145, could be inbuilt as part of formal Council Vehicle policy and practice. Essential Users, the UDC Car Purchase scheme, and Council-owned vehicles could all be considered. Research could also be undertaken into the viability of a pooled car system

- **Car Travel and related payments:**The Single Status group has begun to review and agree guidelines for car travel and related payments
- **Green Service Target Scheme:** All Services be asked to reduce miles travelled, relating to personal, “Essential” and “Casual” mileage, to meet a specified “Service Target”. “Service Targets” could be set and calculated as follows.
  - Each Service be asked to calculate (in fairly rounded terms), a total of usual weekly (or monthly or annual) mileage (both home to work and work-related) for all members of staff. This information to be ‘publicised’, as the starting point, for measured improvements.
  - A Target of saving on total miles travelled by all employees in the Service, to be set by a Green Travel panel. The Target could be eg 5% saving during the first 12 months. How savings are made has purposefully been left open, (subject to the guidance below on what may be counted), for decision at Service level. Targets could be modified in relation to:
    - the actual % saving to be made
    - The length of the period of time given for the improvement.
 The targets could be tailored to each Service to recognise or require greater savings to be made by Services where the nature of their work entails regular travel around the District.

Targets could have (eg) a 10 year time span with annual increments.

- Savings made through **homeworking** and **car sharing** as well as flexidays (whole days only) and other whole days off work (TOIL etc), may be counted. Annual leave days should NOT be counted in the savings, as all employees currently do not travel to work on a/l days. Car-sharing miles saved may be calculated as follows: where two people car-share, the total number of miles saved by one person be divided between the two, and each person claims to have ‘saved’ half the total miles saved. Where three people car-share, add the total number of miles saved by person B to those saved by person C, and each of the three car-sharers may claim a third of the total miles saved.
- Each week, the total of miles saved per week should be recorded, and compared against the starting point total.
- Services could be asked to produce a total “Miles Saved” Report quarterly, six-monthly or annually, along with Best Value Performance Indicators.
- If tighter restrictions were considered desirable, at some stage, limits could be placed on the % of times per month each Essential Car User starts journeys from the Office, and/or ends work-related journeys at the office.
- Further Guidance would be provided on implementation and application of this Scheme, prior to its commencement.

- **Green Bank Scheme:** Alternatively, or additionally at a later stage (it is not proposed that this be implemented initially, but rather, as an incentive to individuals to improve their personal mileage savings, when other reductions have reached a plateau):
  - For each return home to work journey walked, cycled, or where public transport used:  
Each employee claim 1 x credit.
  - For each return home to work car-share journey, (whether sharing with a colleague or getting a lift with someone outside the Council), 1 x credit to be claimed by each UDC employee involved.
  - Credits: each credit may be entered into a draw every 6 months, the prize being a (holiday) voucher to the value of (eg)£100. There would be no limit to the number of credits each employee could enter into the draw – the more credits a person enters, the more likelihood they have of winning.
  - Credits may require validation, the method of validation to be agreed.

## 4.2 Visitors

It is difficult to suggest ways in which members of the public may be encouraged to **reduce Council-related mileage**; on-line payments are already encouraged, and it is acknowledged that payments made in person are linked to demographics, and will in time decrease naturally. However, this process could potentially be speeded up by reviewing the existing arrangements and improving where possible:

- Renewed/greater publicity for on-line payments of all council services, and the simplification of explanations for payments remotely. This could be undertaken simultaneously with the provision of an incentive (eg:one-off reduced charge) to encourage conversion to paying remotely.
- Improve on-line access to Council Services such as Planning applications; A telephone help line for general enquiries and a familiarisation training session for members of the public in how to use the internet to access information and pay bills.  
However, from an equal opportunities perspective we must accept that some members of the public will always require alternatives to on-line information and payments.
- Consider providing an incentive (eg: one-off reduced charge) to encourage conversion to paying remotely.

## 4.3 Members

- **Initiate a Member Car-Share Register:** In order for each Committee/group of Members to maximise the opportunities for car sharing, it could be useful to have a version of the new Car Share Register (currently an icon on the Citrix Desktops, for staff) adapted specifically for

Members, and placed on Members laptops; they could then access details of other members who travel the same route as themselves, and could liaise directly by phone with the individual(s) to arrange travel to the meetings.

In addition, the Car-Share idea could be enhanced to improve the % car-sharing, by, for example,

- Appointing a Member on each Committee or Working Group as a **Travel-co-ordinator**, to 'chase' and organise the transport arrangements of Members.
  - agreeing a **target for Car-sharing for each Committee** or Group, to improve the % of car sharing. Possibly having an incentive for the most improved Group of Members or those reaching the target first, etc.
- Where/if appropriate, for full committee meetings or those where sufficient Members attend scheduled meetings, a minibus could be organised to run from/return to major communities along travel corridors, picking up/dropping off Members en route. The drawbacks of this suggestion are acknowledged:
    - as Members live all over the District, there is no 'main' travel corridor;
    - individuals' journey time will take longer if undertaken in this manner.
    - there would be a cost associated with a 'communal' mini bus.
  - As a result of poor mail services recently, a twice-weekly Courier Service to Members has been introduced to ensure their timely receipt of Council information. This entails approximately 1000 miles per month. It is recommended that this service be reviewed, on a six-monthly basis, for potential to save/reduce current mileage, as the continuation of this service may not be compatible with a Green Travel Policy.
  - Greater use of IT and on-line facilities could be made, and consideration could be given to implementation of Video Conferencing between Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, to increase alternatives to travel, and to decrease current levels of mileage undertaken by/on behalf of Members.
  - Members may wish to recommend to the remuneration panel that some consideration be given to a **travel expenses incentive**, whereby mileage allowance is biased towards car-sharing, and away from single-occupancy journeys.

## 5 DISSEMINATION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Consideration be given to the identification of a Lead Member and a Lead Officer, for co-ordination/lobbying of an integrated transport resolution.

## 6 CAR PARKING

### 6.1 Employees:

Car-parking for employees works satisfactorily at present. However, any car-park overcrowding for day-time users will be eased by the following proposals: homeworking, hotdesking at other bases, modifications to existing working practices, car-sharing, and the use of alternative modes of travel to work.

- If a problem does arise in the medium term, for staff parking, a 'staff car-park waiting list' for all new employees could be considered. This would operate by informing all candidates at interview, that there would not be a parking place available immediately, but that their name would be put on a waiting list, for a space in the London Road Offices car park, and when their name reached the top they would be offered a parking pass. It is acknowledged that this suggestion may make recruitment even more difficult.

## 6.2 Visitors:

Visitors should be divided into two categories:

- residents of Uttlesford, who visit the Council offices to use Council services. On average, 32% stay less than 5 minutes, 67% stay less than 20 minutes.
- visitors who have been invited to meetings in the course of council business. Only 14 % of visitors stayed longer than one hour. In the survey undertaken, no distinction was made between residents using Planning Services, requiring a longer stay, and visitors who were on council business.
- As the majority of visitors require only short-stay parking, we should endeavour to meet their requirements, and be more stringent in implementation of suitable arrangements for work-related visitors.
- **Short stay time limits?** Following implementation of the visitors overflow car park after 10.30am and improved parking around the circle, it is difficult at this time to determine whether there will still be a need to consider indicating a short-stay time limit (eg 15 minutes) for visitor parking. There will always be a small risk of abuse of our car-parking facilities by visitors who leave their vehicle for long periods whilst going down into the town, who would be unlikely to be deterred by anything other than parking enforcement. As enforcement is not recommended during the week; any limitations would be purely 'advisory requests'.

If future monitoring of the situation reveals continuing difficulty for the short-stay visitors, it may be necessary to consider posting signs and/or time limits. It is recognised that this would not be an ideal solution, if it penalised users of the Planning Services and enquiries, however, advanced technology and on-line planning services facilities should reduce the need for personal visits of this nature.

- **Visitors on Council Business:** Although there is already guidance and requirements in place (reminders are issued by the room-booking facility) for officers to notify their clients/customers/colleagues etc that they should park at one of the alternative town car parks, and maps may be printed off to send to all visitors, this requirement is not consistently adhered to by staff. New guidance should be prepared, and all employees made fully aware of the requirements for visitor-parking: for meetings involving more than one vehicle, all visitors must be told that there is no on-site parking, and asked to use a town car

park. Visitors for meetings should not park in the 'designated' short-stay spaces.

- **Swan Meadow Parking Passes:**

In order to further encourage visitors for 'bulk' meetings to park off-site, whilst not causing annoyance to local residents by parking on local streets, the TPWG proposed that free passes for Swan Meadow parking be allocated in advance for specific events or meetings. However, pre-Resource meetings with some Members have indicated that such a recommendation will not be supported.

RECOMMENDED that the following proposals be implemented as soon as is practicable:

- Green Service Targets
  - A car-share register for Members
  - A Green Target Mileage Scheme for Members
  - To agree that further work be undertaken to identify the cost/effect of an incentive payment to encourage conversion to remote payments
  - Greater publicity for on-line payments of Council Services.
  - Short-stay parking time-limit notices be posted in the visitors parking area if further problems arise.
  - Lockers for use by cyclists, walkers, bikers, be installed.
  - Allocate a Lead Member and a Lead Officer, for co-ordination/lobbying of an integrated transport resolution.
- 2 That the following, plus any of the above not implemented at this stage, be reviewed on a six-monthly basis, with a view to considering its implementation:
- A Green Bank Scheme
  - For major meetings, a mini bus collection of Members along major routes.
  - Implement a 'staff car-park waiting list' for newly-recruited employees
  - Green Vehicles with specified CO2 emissions to be inbuilt as part of formal Council Policy, as described
  - A review of current courier services for Members.
  - Travel Expenses Incentives, for Members, to bias towards car-sharing and away from single occupancy.

**Background Papers:**

Report to Resources Committee, 24 June 2004 ref RE21