

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Select Committee held on
13 April 2011 commencing at 7 p.m.

Present: Cllr. Harrod (Chairman) in the Chair.

Cllrs. Abraham, Cole, Darrington, Davison, Lankester, Mrs. Parkin, Pett and Piper.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Arnold, Mrs. Broomby, Brown, Bruce, Ryan, Scholey and Underwood

37. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 25 January 2011 be approved and signed by the Vice-Chairman as a correct record.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

39. FORMAL RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET FOLLOWING MATTERS REFERRED BY THE COMMITTEE

None.

40. ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Report No. 4)

The completed actions were noted.

41. FUTURE BUSINESS, THE WORK PLAN 2010/11 AND THE FORWARD PLAN (Report No. 5)

An updated work plan was tabled for Members' attention. It was noted that a discussion on the budget had been added to November 2011.

Action 1: To include an update on Empty Homes Target for the Housing item in the workplan for September 2011.

Members discussed the amount of work in the Committee's work programme. It was noted that there was a current review of committee structures, which may lead to changes in the way select committees work. An example of the proposed changes could be for select committees to consider fewer items but in greater depth.

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42. HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE (Item No. 6)

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Finance and Human Resources and the Human Resources Manager to the meeting.

Members were updated on current developments in Human Resources (HR). The Committee noted that the average length of service for employees was increasing and there was a challenge to balance financial constraints with retaining a highly motivated workforce. Members welcomed the significant external recognition of Sevenoaks as a good employer from the Times Best Councils to Work For Survey, Investors in People Champion accreditation and the Audit Commission's highest score for workforce development.

A Member requested background and feedback on the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) secondment at Sevenoaks. HMRC had approached Sevenoaks because of the Times Best Councils to Work For Survey and they wanted to develop how HMRC engages with its employees. The feedback from the secondment confirmed that productivity at Sevenoaks was high, there was a strong customer focus for all staff and also that the HR team performed at a very high level.

Members asked how many redundancies there were and to explain the term "slotted"? The Committee was informed that there had been 18 redundancies (16 voluntary) out of a workforce of 434. The term "slotted" referred to staff who successfully applied for their own posts or were allocated a post substantially the same as their previous post.

The Director of Corporate Resources commented that the figures were for the first year of a four year savings plan and in the remaining three years the Council would lose more management posts and other posts across a number of departments.

It was explained that during the budget process vacancies were held across the council to allow as many officers to be re-deployed as possible, saving the council redundancy costs and enabling the retention of skilled and knowledgeable staff.

The Committee asked how the Council planned to address absence from sickness. It was reported that in 2009/10 the average days sickness per employee was 11.37 days per full time equivalent. This compared to 8.5 days nationally, 9.5 days in local government and 11.5 days in the NHS. Members were informed that this has been a priority for HR. Since April 2010 a new IT system had enabled a more strategic and targeted approach to managing sickness absence.

Members noted that for long term sickness absence, employees were in contact with the on-site occupational health nurse to plan a phased return to work and receive ongoing support.

The Committee asked about the challenges to HR in the coming year. Members were informed that in addition to retaining staff and ongoing staff reductions the main issue was to be the review of pay and conditions for all staff.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Finance and Human Resources and the Human Resources Manager for attending.

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Action 2: To receive a further update on Human Resources issues in a year's time.

43. UPDATE FROM MEMBER WORKING GROUPS

Members Task Group for Recycling

Members considered the minutes from meeting of the Group held on 11 April 2011. Members agreed that there should be more consideration of the potential efficiencies for the Council of using the Ideal Waste company MRF in Swanley rather than the facility at Allington. It was noted that transportation costs to Swanley would be lower and Swanley had a lower rate of rejected waste for recycling (3% at Swanley and 18% at Allington).

Resolved that :

- 1 the report be noted; and
- 2 Cabinet be asked to raise the issues and potential benefits of using the MRF site in Swanley with the Kent Waste Partnership.

Action 3: Officers to investigate the possibility a future visit of the Committee to the MRF site at Swanley.

IT Working Group

Members received a verbal update from the Chairman of the Group. Members were informed that joint work with Dartford was progressing to ensure compatibility between IT systems. For example, Sevenoaks were procuring the Modern.Government system, used by Dartford, to replace CMIS. Members also noted that savings had been made through the joint procurement of anti-virus software.

In relation to supporting Members post May 2011, it was reported that 10 new laptops had been allocated for Members: 4 were to be available for use in the building and 6 allocated to Members who had little or no access to a computer.

The access of Members to the Council IT system was discussed. The Committee welcomed the new councillor portal for access to Sevenoaks system via the internet and proposed training for Members after the elections.

The Chairman commented that, as part of the budget savings exercise, staffing within the IT Service had been reduced and despite this the IT Team continues to have a positive outlook. The Director of Corporate Resources made Members aware that further savings in IT were planned as part of the 4 year savings programme.

44. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman thanked Members and staff for their work on the Committee during the last four years.

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THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.50 P.M.

Chairman