

STAFF COMMITTEE



30 APRIL 2012 - 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor K G Mayor, Chairman; Councillors J R Chambers, J F Clark, P Murphy, K G Peachey, C J Seaton and F H Yeulett.

APOLOGIES: Councillor M I Archer.

S20/11 TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 19 MARCH 2012

The minutes of the meeting of 19 March 2012 were confirmed and signed.

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

S21/11 REVISED HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

Members considered revision of three Health and Safety Policies, as follows:

- Electrical Safety Policy - this combines two previously separate policies (Fixed Wiring Policy and Portable Appliance Testing Policy) into one and the policy ensures that the risks associated with electricity are adequately controlled and comply with the requirements of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989;
- Noise at Work Policy - this policy details the procedure for noise assessments and the controls that will be implemented where required, with the aim to ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise at their place of work in accordance with the Noise at Work Regulations 2005;
- Legionella Management Policy - this policy is completely revised and details compliance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the L8 Legionnaires Disease: The Control of Legionella Bacteria in Water Systems. It details the identification and assessment of the risk of legionella infection to staff, contractors and visitors arising from the manner in which the water systems, over which the Council has control, are operated, managed or designed.

A comprehensive consultation exercise has been undertaken on these revised policies, with the Corporate Management Team, Health and Safety Panel and Staff Side Group endorsing the changes.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

- the amalgamation of two policies into one is welcomed;
- have electrical inspections flagged up any major problems? Officers advised that there have been no major issues with any electrical equipment and there is a rolling programme for Portable Appliance Testing which helps prevent problems occurring;
- who issues an electrical permit to work? Officers advised that these permits are issued through the Assets and Property Team when contractors come in to undertake the work. Is it the Council's responsibility to make sure contractors are working safely? Officers advised that it is a joint responsibility, with the overarching responsibility falling to the Assets and

Property Team, but it is also the responsibility of the contractor to work safely;

- has the Council ever had a problem with Legionnaire's Disease in any of its buildings? Officers advised not. If there was an outbreak would it involve draining the system? Officers advised that the system would be shut down and flushed out. Under the policy it says that Legionnaires is not notifiable, why is this if it is as bad as the policy states? Officers advised that the policy puts in place preventative measures. Legionella naturally exists, but necessary action is taken to ensure that the risk is very low and there are no instances resulting in an outbreak in public, and as Legionella is spread from source, not a person to person spread, this is why it is not notifiable. If there is an outbreak, could members of the public take legal action? Officers advised that the policy mitigates the risk. Why does the policy only cover one of the Fenland@YourService Shops, the one in Wisbech? Officers advised that the Wisbech shop currently has a shower and the other shops do not;
- how many of the Health and Safety Policies are common and could be taken 'off the shelf' and used for Fenland's purposes? Officers advised that the policies are reviewed and condensed where possible, but there cannot be a 'one size fits all' as different authorities/organisations have different systems. Policies are shared with other authorities to look at similar standards across neighbouring authorities, working together to achieve a consistent stance. Officers will always look at streamlining policies where it can, learn from others and use HSE guidance.

Decided that the revised Health and Safety Policies be endorsed.

S22/11 REVISED EYE TEST POLICY

Members considered a revised Eye Test Policy and were informed that:

- the Council is required under the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) regulations to provide all employees who are designated as habitual DSE users with an eye test and also to meet the expense of a basic pair of glasses for DSE users only;
- the Council has an existing Eye Test Policy which meets obligations under these regulations, but it has been in place since 2006 and has been reviewed and streamlined as part of the Council's on-going programme of reviews;
- a comprehensive consultation process has been undertaken on the revised policy with the Corporate Management Team, Health and Safety Panel and the Staff Side Group, who have endorsed the changes.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- how much does eye testing cost the Council per year? Officers advised for the last financial year, 69 employees used the scheme costing £2,500. By issuing vouchers, as part of a discounted corporate scheme, it will cost £1,100. Employees are entitled to use the eye test scheme, but it is their choice as to whether they use it, with approximately 80% of the workforce being habitual users for DSE purposes;
- if it is the responsibility of the employee to ask for an eye test is there any comeback on the Council if they get impaired sight? Officers advised not, the policy is promoted at inductions and is available for employees on the Council's website;

- what is the cost of an eye test? Officers advised that an eye test costs approximately £25 and NHS prescription costs are £79.50. By issuing a voucher, it prevents variations in costs from different opticians.

Decided that the revised Eye Test Policy be endorsed.

S23/11 SUMMARY OF SERVICE REVIEWS

Further to minute S16/11, members received details of the financial savings generated by the staffing reviews approved by the committee over the past two years, together with a summary of costs associated with those reviews. Members were informed that:

- due to the requirement to make significant on-going savings over the last two years, since February 2010, cumulative savings of £8.93 million will have been achieved from the approved reviews up to the end of 2013/14;
- termination costs associated with these reviews have totalled £1.68 million resulting in net cumulative savings for the Council for the four year period 2010/11-2013/14 of £7.25 million;
- the reviews have been conducted to ensure minimum impact on key front line services and priorities, which has been a considerable achievement and demonstrates the focus from Cabinet, Staff Committee and officers in delivering the required savings;
- further on-going savings are forecast to be required over the medium-term and further reviews will be submitted to this committee as necessary in the future.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- thanks was given to CMT and senior staff for managing this process;
- whilst it is commendable achievement, what are the implications? Councillor Clark stated that staff have lost their jobs, difficult decisions have had to be made and CMT and senior staff have managed the process well;
- what is the status of morale across the Council? Officers advised that morale has gone through a change over the last few years as staff are concerned and worried, seeing themselves at risk or their colleagues. Work is being undertaken to improve morale and return it to its previous position. Cabinet and Council were clear in the staffing reviews not impacting on frontline staff and not having an impact on the community, with some reviews offering improvements to the community with minimum job losses;
- what service areas have most of the savings been made and do these savings run from senior management team downwards? Officers advised that the savings are made from a number of staff, starting from the top with CMT reducing from 11 to 6 and a complete organisation wide restructure resulting in a number of jobs being lost, which impacted upon every team within the Council. Councillor Clark made the point that this is still an on-going process;
- it has been a difficult situation over the last couple of years, with Corporate Management Team and the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development handling it in exemplary fashion. These comments were endorsed by all members;

S22

- it is important to note that the worse case scenarios for redundancy and departure costs were included in reports to Staff Committee, but these only amounted to £1.6 million in the end;
- termination costs in the graph are going to flat line in 2014? Officers advised that the Council is paying more now and pension costs can be paid over 1, 3 or 5 years, with savings to the Council accumulated every year and the redundancy costs being a one-off;
- the cumulative savings are great value and this has been achieved without making too many staff redundant;
- what is the criteria for pension payments in 1, 3 or 5 years? Officers advised that the Corporate Director and Chief Accountant assess this when redundancies are submitted, looking at the value and what is appropriate. Sometimes it is an advantage to pay early as there is less cost to the Council, but being mindful of the Council finances.

Members noted the information reported.

S24/11 PRINT AND POST SERVICES REVIEW

Members considered proposals regarding the future delivery of the Council's Print, Post and Stores Services. Members were:

- informed of the circumstances and details of the proposed changes;
- of the annual efficiency savings that the revised structure would deliver;
- of all the comments and feedback put forward during the consultation process.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses from officers.

Decided that:

- 1. the report and annual efficiency savings achieved as a result of the proposals be noted;**
- 2. the proposals, including the deletion and creation of posts, be approved.**

(Members resolved to exclude the public from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

S25/11 REQUEST FOR VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY

Members considered a request for voluntary redundancy. Members were informed:

- of the background and circumstances of the request;
- of the financial implications associated with the voluntary redundancy.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses from officers.

Decided that:

- 1. the report and associated costs be noted;**
- 2. the request for voluntary redundancy as set out in the report be approved.**

(Members resolved to exclude the public from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

11.00am

Chairman