

STAFF COMMITTEE



16 JULY 2015 - 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor M Davis(Chairman), Councillor D Mason(Vice-Chairman), Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor F H Yeulett.

S1/15 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR.

Councillor Maureen Davis was appointed as Chairman of the Staff Committee for the municipal year.

S2/15 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR.

Councillor David Mason was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Staff Committee for the municipal year.

S3/15 TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 16 MARCH 2015

The Minutes of the meeting of 16 March 2015 were confirmed and signed.

S4/15 CORPORATE HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

David Vincent, Health & Safety and Emergency Planning Manager, presented the Corporate Health & Safety Annual Report 2014/15 and informed Members that through proactive and procedures, the Council has seen continued performance in health and safety, with key areas such as:

- The total number of accidents remains low with 30 recorded, and with just two 'reportable accidents to the HSE.
- The total numbers of lost days through work-related injuries was 55, significantly less than the previous year.
- The ongoing delivery of the Council's comprehensive health and safety training programme, with a total of 89 staff having received corporate health and safety training.
- Fire services/teams were audited in this period, with recommendations made where improvements are required. Six monthly follow up meetings are then conducted to assess progress with implementation of the required recommendations.
- A programme continues to review and convert all existing Health and Safety Policies into Codes of Practice, which will improve the process to implement any required changes.
- The vast majority of the listed objectives within the Health and Safety Action Plan 2014/15 are "Green" and have been completed within the required timescales, with the exception of reviewing/converting policies into codes of practice and the implementation of an "Introduction to Health and Safety" E-learning package. Both of these actions are underway and in progress, and will be carried forward into 2015/16.

Councillor Butcher asked what the outcomes were to the two RIDDOR accidents that were reported to HSE. David Vincent explained that the two accidents were:

- A member of the refuse team who was struck by a car driven by a member of the public down a narrow cul de sac; which caused a fractured rib. The HSE found no problems with this accident.
- A member of the public fractured her foot running after a loose dog and ran into the back of one of the refuse lorries; again the HSE found no problems.

David Vincent explained that these types of accidents were firstly investigated by the relevant manager and then these reports were looked at and if deemed necessary a follow up would take place.

Councillor Yeulett stated that the refuse collection area was most at risk; was the E-Learning package rolled out to them and how did the reduced amount of accidents in this area compare to other councils. David Vincent explained that the reduced amount of accidents was excellent; only 2 out of the 23 accidents were not from the refuse area. E-Learning packages were being rolled out to those with PCs in this team but a more effective delivery was used of face-to-face on an annual basis; this means that the refuse area receive training specifically tailored to them, they also receive a Health & Safety Handbook that again is specifically targeted to the refuse area.

Councillor Yeulett asked how had the reduction in accidents helped the Council financially. Rob Bridge, Corporate Director, stated that the reduction in working days lost would give a good indication; especially within the refuse area where the Council incur a cost by employing agency workers to cover this front line service; if lost days are from less front facing services then the Council do not tend to back fill them.

Councillor Mason asked if it was possible to extend the Health and Safety training to Parish and Town Councils to which David Vincent replied stating that this would need looking into due to cost, resource and capacity implications.

Councillor Seaton stated this was a good report and asked that with the days lost having reduced significantly, how did this equate to the workforce as it had reduced in numbers; what would this be in percentage terms on the present number of staff. Sam Anthony explained that the reduction in head count from last year was not significant, minus 20 at most and therefore 55 days lost is a significant reduction. Councillor Seaton asked if the 174 working days last year included the two very serious injuries to which David Vincent replied that they did.

Councillor Booth stated that as First Aiders were a statutory requirement then the total number of people with First Aid at Work training should be stated within the report; how was the Council sure that it had the correct amount of cover. Rob Bridge assured the committee that the Council did have the correct amount of first aiders in the various Council locations but it was a fair point that this should be stated within the report.

Councillor Booth asked that regarding the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessor; at what intervals are staff required to complete these, yearly or three yearly intervals. David Vincent explained that a refresher of this training took place every three years. Rob Bridge explained that if a member of staff moves desks within that timescale then another DSE is carried out. Councillor Booth explained that within other organisations this risk management is carried out yearly as this stops any later claims against the authority; would this be part of the E-Learning package. David Vincent explained that all risk assessments are carried out on a yearly basis and if a member of staff moves then a further DSE is carried out.

Councillor Booth stated it would be useful to include the outcome of the HSE investigations within the report.

Councillor Booth stated that 55 lost working days was low, the Council has gone from one extreme to another and there is the probability that this would return to normal next year.

It was AGREED that:

- The Council's performance with the report , which has also been cascaded to the Corporate Management Team and the Council's Health and Safety Panel be NOTED;
- Requested changes to format made within the meeting be agreed.

S5/15 ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP) - SINGLE FRAUD INVESTIGATION SERVICE (SFIS) AND COUNTER FRAUD

Councillor Maureen Davis stated this item was not a confidential item as previously stated.

Geoff Kent, Head of Customer Services, presented the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) - Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) and Counter Fraud report and informed Members that:

- The Benefit Fraud teams at five ARP partner authorities (Breckland, East Cambs, Fenland, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury) were combined and have worked as a single team since April 2014. Suffolk Coastal and Waveney (the two other ARP partners) have corporate fraud teams that are outside of the scope of ARP;
- The Welfare Reform Act 2012 led to the creation of the Single Fraud Investigation Service to combine present arrangements for the investigation of benefit fraud which will be brought together under one organisation (the Single Fraud Investigation Service of "SFIS") managed by the Government's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This means that all benefit fraud work in respect of Fenland will transfer to DWP from 1 September 2015;
- There will be a residual fraud team at ARP. This was agreed by ARP Joint Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2015;
- Benefit Fraud staff not placed within the residual ARP team will transfer under existing terms and conditions to the DWP SFIS team on 1 September 2015.

Councillor Murphy asked if there could be a breakdown of Fenland District Council's savings and costs to which Rob Bridge replied that there were figures within the table at 2.1 within the report and this was driven by government statistical information; the £320,000 is for all the partners but achieving less fraud will in turn mean more Council Tax monies coming into the Council.

Councillor Murphy asked what the cost was of the two fraud investigators currently in post to which Geoff Kent replied approximately £70,000. Geoff Kent explained that the ARP costs are pooled and shared across the partners. These changes will not create an additional cost to the Council; it was agreed at joint committee that the surplus from the previous year would be used first and therefore giving the service a chance to become a success. Several smaller councils are struggling with this and therefore the ARP have agreed, with further work, to set up a trading arm of ARP and offer these services to other district councils which in turn would bring in additional income to ARP and therefore to Fenland District Council.

Councillor Murphy asked for a breakdown of costs to be included in the next report that comes to Staff Committee. Rob Bridge stated that costs would be monitored as there was a need to ensure that the fraud team generates enough fraud success that the money it brings in will pay for itself. This report has already been to Cabinet and has now been presented to Staff Committee for information.

Councillor Seaton added that Fenland District Council joining the ARP has been extremely successful and something that had to be done; at the moment it is based on a cost neutral fact with the progression of a trading arm that will allow the Council to sell its services to other councils which is a big part of its future.

Councillor Mason stated that a saving of £137,000 had been made but the estimate for the coming year was now £320,000; this was a considerable hike up. Rob Bridge explained that the £137,000 was Fenland joining the ARP and a change in management structures and arrangements; the total was in fact £274,000 with Fenland keeping half. Now there were further savings shared out on an agreed percentage; these savings are estimates and are about identifying fraud, again driven by government statistics but as the system rolls out there will be a clearer focus on this.

Councillor Butcher asked if Fenland would receive savings from the bailiff services that were being set up to which Rob Bridge replied that Fenland would see these savings; the joint committee has a responsibility to manage these and the Council report these through portfolio holder briefings or committees. There is a team in place to deliver the bailiff service that was agreed by Council and these will start when the next set of summons are sent out; this will enable Fenland to have a better relationship with those concerned and give them the opportunity to discuss options with a trading arm that will allow Fenland to offer this service to other authorities. In the past bailiff services have upset the people involved and this will allow Fenland to deal with these issues in the right way so not to cause problems.

Councillor Mason asked when would an issue be considered as fraud as opposed to avoidance to which Geoff Kent explained this was driven by legislation which determines whether non-compliance was deliberate or not intentional but in this case it was usually people fraudulently claiming reductions.

Councillor Booth asked if the Council would be taking a proportionate approach to which Geoff Kent explained that this was already done with an immediate priority to stop giving a reduction when there is no entitlement to it and then arranging repayment. All avenues are looked at and each case is looked at on its own merits. Rob Bridge stated that most of the time fraud is not committed on one aspect, it usually involves council tax, housing benefit etc and therefore the Council's dialogue and communication is important; resulting in a joint prosecution and sending out a clear message.

Councillor Booth asked if the figures in the report at 2.1 were additional monies over and above what had already been recovered to which Rob Bridge stated in essence, this was the case; last year had resulted in a surplus and this will help but it was difficult as it was not a definitive. Geoff Kent stated it was a "broad brush approach" from the government which did not take into account local circumstances. There was a pot for additional income but the exact amount would be difficult to quantify; the Council constantly look at preventing fraud by tightening up procedures before any reductions are awarded.

Councillor Booth stated that unless working practices were changed then how would the amount recovered be increased; would there be a full review of the processes. Geoff Kent explained that the Council constantly reviewed its processes with all applications being looked at; the advantage of seven authorities was that a lot more experience could be pulled together.

Councillor Booth asked if those staff that were transferring to the DWP would have to relocate to which Geoff Kent explained that they would be based at the Job Centre in Wisbech.

Councillor Yeulett stated he liked the idea of prevention at the beginning of an application. He was concerned about those staff transferring being at a loss with regard to their pensions. Rob Bridge stated he did not know the details of the civil service pension but it must be of the same nature that staff already have. Sam Anthony added that it was her belief that it was non-contributory and deemed to be a good pension.

Councillor Davis asked if those affected staff had been given pension advice to which Sam Anthony stated they had been given access to the pensions teams. Geoff Kent explained that

there had been a lengthy information sharing process with all affected staff, with an opportunity to raise concerns across all authorities; DWP had also held workshops. Fraud investigators are an active community and therefore were up to speed as to what this would mean to them. Sam Anthony added that this process had been at least 18 months in the making and therefore all staff were aware of the changes.

Rob Bridge stated that Fenland's pension was a career average scheme from April 2014 but he was not sure of the details of the civil service pension. Sam Anthony explained that staff had been given directions on where to go for advice but individuals would have had to request pension illustrations to which Councillor Booth stated this was different to other organisations that automatically sent out pension illustrations.

Councillor Butcher asked how many Fenland staff this affected to which Geoff Kent explained that just two full-time staff were from Fenland with six full-time and one part-time from Thetford.

It was AGREED that the report be NOTED.

11:10am

Chairman