

KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 8th April 2008

UPDATE ON STAFF ISSUES REF ONE COUNCIL FOR WILTSHIRE

Report by Head of Human Resources

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on staff issues as a result of the move to a single Council for Wiltshire and highlight some of the concerns and issues in relation to service delivery.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Wiltshire is going through a major transformation exercise to create a single unitary authority – this will impact on staff at various levels and in various ways over the coming months. Wiltshire County Council is fully aware of this and HR is one of the cross cutting workstreams that has been set up to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. This paper touches on the challenges this brings, the present position in Kennet, the implications for staff and the actions that we are undertaking to support the transition.

3. STRATEGIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- 3.1 The HR transition workstream started working together last July and over that time have established a Joint Consultative Committee (including all the recognised trade unions in Wiltshire) specifically for issues around transition; recruitment and secondment protocols; and outlined a strategy for the rest of the project, including issues such as severance arrangements, terms and conditions for the new Council, equal pay and TUPE. In addition we will also look at collectively sourcing out-placement services later in the process should we need them to support any staff who are potentially redundant.
- 3.2 The work of this team has been hampered by the delays in receiving the guidance from the DCLG on staffing matters, which has not yet been received (due May). We have been part of the consultation on these papers and what is currently proposed is that all staff will transfer to the new authority on the 1st April under TUPE like arrangements. What this means for staff is that they will take their substantive terms and conditions of employment with them.
- 3.3 The merging of the authorities creates huge challenges for us around equal pay and related issues and these will need to be addressed as a matter of urgency by the new authority. Kennet has as yet been unable to implement single status

and its job evaluation programme. A similar situation pertains in West Wiltshire and North Wiltshire. The County Council has just implemented its pay review successfully and Salisbury did this several years ago.

- 3.4 There are other issues around the appointment to senior positions for the new Council and these cannot be taken further forward until we have the guidance from the DCLG. This is one of the reasons being given for the delay in receiving the guidance.

4. **THE PRESENT POSITION IN KENNET**

- 4.1 Workstreams have been established covering all services and the work in these areas is progressing. As far as we have been able to achieve it, Kennet staff are involved in all areas and in some cases are taking the lead in these workstreams. Whilst we do need to be part of this process, it does take up officer time which impacts on maintaining general service delivery.

- 4.2 Internally we have done a fair amount of work with senior officers to help them understand about change and how it impacts on the individual. We have run several workshops and asked managers to share their learning with their own teams. Alongside this we are running workshops on influencing skills to support officers who are involved in the various workstreams. We have also offered support and guidance to senior officers, who are most vulnerable in this process, in the form of preparing applications forms and/or CV's and interview skills. More of this will be planned as we assess the need; as we obviously wish to give our staff every chance in securing the best positions in the new authority, where there are opportunities for promotion.

- 4.3 A recent paper went to HR Committee regarding what actions we should take to release staff if they wish to go. We agreed that we would not seek to recover the cost of the following in the event that staff left the Council between now and vesting day (these are policies that we have in place to retain staff and tie them to the Council):

- Relocation expenses (refund of these – in full or in part – is required if an employee leaves within 3 years)
- Training fees (refund of these is required if the employee leaves local government within 2 years of completing their studies)
- Lease cars (the employee has to pay the costs of returning the vehicle early if they leave during the life of the agreement, which is 3 years)
- Notice periods (at the discretion of the appropriate Chief Officer, staff required to give 2 or 3 months notice may negotiate this down to 1 month).

- 4.4 With regard to staff retention, it is our belief that the large majority of staff will have jobs within the new Council, but we are not in the position to promise that currently. We do not want to be in a position of having no staff to maintain and deliver services. It was therefore agreed by the Council in September that provision would be made for staff retention initiatives; following on from that we

have now drawn up some guidelines on handling retention, approved by HR Committee. To date 3 staff, in key areas relating to the achievement of this Council's objectives, have been offered a financial retention incentive payment and all three have decided to remain with the authority currently, two others have been offered training to retain their services. The experience of drawing up these agreements informed the guidelines.

5. IMPACT OF CHANGES ON STAFFING LEVELS AND WORKLOADS

- 5.1 Inevitably staff have been unsettled by the changes and in the first couple of months from the announcement of the unitary decision we lost a number of staff at senior level. Some of these staff may well have left in any event, but local government reorganisation probably encouraged these staff look externally quicker than they might have done otherwise. In the main these posts have not been filled other than by internal promotion, which has created gaps further down the organisation.
- 5.2 In the 12 months to 1st March, turnover in the Council has been at just over 12%. This is, if anything, slightly below normal. There is a perception among staff that turnover is high, principally because a number of long serving and high profile staff have left, for example the Chief Accountant, Principal Conservation Officer and the Head of Building Control. The loss of such staff inevitably has a negative effect on morale. The majority of staff however, currently seem to be taking a view of waiting to see what happens in the coming months before taking any decision as to whether to go or stay.
- 5.3 Of the 66 voluntary leavers we have received in the last 12 months, only 9 staff have directly cited local government reorganisation as their reason for leaving, and almost all of these have left to take promotion elsewhere. Of the rest, it is likely that local government reorganisation was part of their decision to leave.
- 5.4 Because the One Council bid was predicated on staff reductions, a number of posts, in non front line services, have been left unfilled (with staff acting up) or covered by temporary appointments. These temporary contracts run until vesting day, although it is likely they will continue for a period of time afterwards. In some areas we have been entirely unable to fill posts and in certain services are operating at well below capacity as a result. Some managers are concerned that further staff losses could have a significant impact on our ability to deliver services.
- 5.5 Managers are endeavouring to keep morale high (despite being concerned about their own position) and many staff are just getting on with the day job. We are closely monitoring sickness absence levels, particularly taking note of any stress related absences. The HR team is working with managers to identify any potential problems early. Staff who are taking advantage of the on-site massages are finding these helpful in reducing stress and tension. We hope to run a family fun day in the summer open to all staff (as an alternative to the

summer ball that we ran last year).

- 5.6 Members will be aware that earlier in this process the Council adopted minimum service standard levels, to take effect in the event that staff retention should be an issue. In many areas we are probably at or about that level now. This is due to two factors – the loss of staff and the inability to fill vacancies due to the changes, and remaining officers getting involved in the transition to the new Council. There is some back-funding available from Wiltshire where staff have been seconded and we will use this to best advantage, but additional funding may be required in some areas, and it is not always possible to recruit appropriately skilled staff for a short period of time.
- 5.7 Whilst in most areas officers are coping with current workloads, there are clear indications that capacity is becoming a problem as more staff get involved in the transition and in the shared services project. Attached to this report is a list of areas where services are becoming stretched. Some senior staff are already beginning to look tired and we are asking managers to look out for their staff and also for each other.

6. **CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 This is a period of significant uncertainty for all staff across all levels of the Council. Every effort is being made to support staff through this time of transition through training and other support mechanisms. We are also monitoring staff turnover and sickness absence levels to identify any problems early on and ensure staff are supported. We have modified existing policies for the period to vesting day to encourage staff to remain with the Council but also to support those staff who feel they have no alternative but to leave.
- 6.2 In terms of service delivery, we are already identifying areas where services are operating at minimum levels. Some of these are detailed in the attached document so that Members are aware of problem areas.
- 6.3 With regard to the reorganisation process, we are working closely with Wiltshire County Council to ensure that our staff are encouraged to participate, involved in the process, and so that we can secure good positions for them in the new Council.

Anne Ewing
Head of Human Resources

Appendix A

Stretched and vulnerable services as at March 2008

What is no longer being done, or is about to stop as a result of staffing issues in Community Services.

Forward Planning & Transportation

(Currently down one senior officer and P/T admin support post)

As a result of staffing levels resources will be concentrated on LDS Core Strategy (consultation on strategic options for development locations; consultation on development sites to deliver selected option; and sustainability appraisal of options/selected option to aid members appraisal of exercise and select preferred option).

Staff will increasingly be involved in cooperating on initiatives/working groups for the transition of the service to the new authority.

*We will **not** be monitoring housing, employment or town centre development after April 2008 (resource intensive, likely to be done by new authority using different software).*

*We will **not** be undertaking any further village design guides or advising groups on such or parish plans etc (other than those we are already committed to).*

*We will **not** be providing support to developers in undertaking consultation on major developments (e.g. Quakers Walk).*

*We will **not** be responding to consultations on government reform proposals or on development plan proposals by adjacent authorities, or other organisation's strategies unless they are of major importance to current interests.*

*We will **not** be undertaking any transport work other than that required to feed into the core strategy. Therefore we will not be participating on any of the working/project groups or responding to consultations in this area of work.*

Development Control & Conservation

Conservation

(Currently down from what was four F/T to 1 F/T and 1P/T with recruitment underway for 1F/T)

The service will be concentrating remaining resources into responding to listed building applications and major planning applications in conservation areas and preliminary enquiries on major sites in conservation areas such as Devizes.

*We are **not** carrying out any more conservation area appraisals/statements.*

*We are **not** considering any new requests for conservation areas from parish councils etc.*

Landscape/Forestry

(Currently down from two F/T to 1F/T and one P/T)

The service will be concentrating its remaining resources on dealing with tree work applications and major applications with significant landscape impacts.

*We will **not** be proactive in making new TPO's*

Development Control

(Currently two down two F/TE's on maternity leave and it has not been possible to back fill)

The service is now concentrating its remaining resources on dealing with planning applications and appeals.

We are giving far lower priority to any preliminary enquiries on anything other than major applications

*We are **not** considering any requests to speak to Parish and Town Councils*

*We are **not** monitoring any PI's other than the national PI's on planning applications.*

*We are **not** doing the annual report to committee*

*We are **not** doing any member training*

*Where the number of applications scheduled for committee is too low, we are, by agreement with the Chairman, **cancelling** the committee.*

Enforcement

(Currently 1 F/T down – but are seeking to recruit)

The service is focusing on significant complaints.

As far as loss of staffing goes, DC and conservation have lost one Conservation Officer and one enforcement officer as a direct result of LGR with two others lined up to go before April 09 also as a result of LGR.

Building Control

Due to staff shortages internal targets will **not** be given as these are now not considered to be a priority.

Democratic Services

(Currently one F/T down (short sabbatical) with another having given notice with a departure date in mid April)

*The service has already **stopped** servicing the twinning meetings and the most obvious next step is to stop meetings such as Devizes Leisure Joint Committee and the remaining Community Area Forums.*

*In mid April the service should **cease** making road closure orders. We are not obliged to do so and event organisers will have to do their own liaison with police and county highways etc.*

*Member training will probably have to **cease** and be referred to WCC/WC as being no longer relevant for a fourth option council.*

The current situation could deteriorate if the post holder on sabbatical does not return in May as it will then become very difficult to service the committees and council meetings.

It also looks like the elections staff will be wholly concentrating on unitary matters from about August 2008 and then the committee staff will consist of one or two F/T posts. Either scenario would make the position untenable and there will be pressure to cancel meetings.

Environmental Health, Housing and Protection

*The service has already **stopped** doing the following...*

- *Core education/promotion work (apart from commitments - one remaining) already identified as 4s in the cttee report*
- *Infectious disease where there is an association with animals*
- *Research for housing needs in the district*
- *empty homes*
- *formulation of affordable housing policy (pending development of a county-wide policy)*

Corporate promotion - Kennet Times. This takes up a lot of time in the run up to KT publication and there is no staff resource to do this.

*The service **needs to stop** work with regard to community health - health strategy development, support for PCT consultations and support for member rep on H O&S. This is not core KDC business.*

The service is monitoring, and could be forced to drop

- *proactive enforcement of dog control orders and Licensing Act*
- *inspection of low risk food premises*
- *accident investigation where this doesn't include fatality*
- *support for Supporting People*

Financial Services

Accountancy has lost a third of its staff, (all with vast experience i.e. long term staff) and whilst some backfilling has been achieved, this is with relatively junior staff who will take time to train and support. This will inevitably impact on service delivery and the preparation of the final accounts.

Revenues have vacancies across the team and any sickness / leave impacts on the work levels.

The audit plan has had to be significantly cut back with 1FTE and 10hours short.

Morale is low and if any further experienced staff leave the remaining staff will struggle to maintain the day job.

Corporate Services – Policy and HR

Policy has already lost staff and has been unable to replace them. Service delivery is already at minimum standards.

The HR team is still fully staffed, but at the same time fully stretched with its involvement in the transformation and transition, participating in the shared services project and implementation of SAP. Backfilling funding will be sought from Wiltshire in relation to the shared services project which will become increasingly time hungry from now on.

Any development work that the HR team had planned has been cancelled and it is a purely reactive service now.

Environmental and Leisure Services

These are mainly front line services and are possibly the least affected in terms of staffing levels. That said, morale is low because of fears of outsourcing, although increasingly Wiltshire is stating that outsourcing services is not on its agenda.