

Joint Consultative Forum

Minutes

22 September, 2003 at 10.00am
The Council Offices
Bourne Hill, Salisbury

**THIS REPORT SHOULD BE KEPT FOR USE AT THE CABINET MEETING TO BE HELD
ON 29 OCTOBER 2003.**

SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of the **Joint Consultative Forum** held in Committee Room 1, The Council House, Bourne Hill, Salisbury on Monday, 22nd September 2003 commencing at 10:00 am

P R E S E N T

Councillors – D Culver (Deputy Resources Portfolio Holder)

Councillors also in attendance – F D Bissington

Staff side – Trevor Kay (UNISON), Joan Smith (UNISON), Mark Wareham (UNISON), Rick Wells (UNISON) and Roy Williams (TGWU).

Officers in Attendance – John Crawford (Property & Legal Services), David Crook (Policy Director), Carole Davidson (Personnel & Training), Karen Gard (Personnel & Training), Anne McConkey (Personnel & Training), David Neudegg (Policy Director), Andrew Rose (Democratic Services) and Lesley Waller (Community Initiatives).

MINUTES NOT REQUIRING COUNCIL APPROVAL

15. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Brown-Hovelt, Fear, Mrs Warrander and West, and also from Simon Newell (UNISON).

Rick Wells, Vice-Chairman, in the Chair.

16. Minutes

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the last meeting held on 21st July 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the acting Chairman.

17. Declarations Of Interest

There were none

18. Dealing with Difficult Customers and the Customer Care Charter

Due to the fact that there were many comments made about the content of the "Dealing with Difficult Customers" policy, it was decided that:

Resolved - Helen Frances will discuss the "Dealing with Difficult Customers" policy with John Crawford, Mark Wareham and the Management Team and then bring to the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Panel a revised version of the document which will be the subject of a discussion, along with the revised Customer Care Charter (previously circulated).

19. Office Centralisation Update

David Neudegg gave an update to the Forum of events that have taken place so far in relation to the Office Centralisation Project, and also future events. The points made were:

- Cabinet was advised at the end of July that the Bourne Hill site is now the preferred location for both the Customer Contact Centre (Front Office) and the Back Office.
- The project team is currently drawing up a development brief that will go to Cabinet in October/November. This will set out the requirements of SDC and those of other interested groups, e.g. residents organisations.
- Currently, a spatial audit is being undertaken which looks at the space that SDC will require including space required for rest areas, meeting rooms and storage.
- The staff Focus Group is scheduled to look at these findings and to comment on what facilities are desirable.
- Following this, Cabinet will be requested to give permission for an architect to be appointed, with help from the Royal Institute of British Architects in drawing up an advertisement for interested persons.

David was asked to clarify the position with regards to possible planning permission problems. David advised that, due to the type of building that Bourne Hill is i.e. listed and its position, there will always be problems in respect of planning permission. However, many of these can be overcome, but there may be a cost associated. It is important to remember that using the Bourne Hill site is always going to be a riskier project than using a brownfield site.

20. Staffing Establishment List

Karen Gard advised of one amendment to the Establishment List as circulated. In relation to Revenue & Benefits Unit there has been an addition of 1.54 temporary administration staff.

The only point that was raised by those present was to request that information be given as to which of those staff that had been given a temporary contract have been hired in relation to the Office Centralisation Project. Karen advised that this should not be a problem and this information should be able to be reported on the Establishment List, or elsewhere.

21. Equalities Monitoring

Carole Davidson advised that there were some offers for employment currently going through which would increase the number of employees from ethnic minority groups.

22. Child Protection Policy

Lesley Waller presented the policy to the Forum, and also gave an overall summary of it. The main points of that summary were:

- This Policy came about as a result of the public consultation of the Cultural Strategy.
- Initially, small organisations wanted help in drawing up, or having access to, a policy for child protection and turned to SDC for help. This resulted in SDC examining what policy it had in place.
- This policy has been designed not only for use by SDC but also by outside organisations.
- Child Protection has a very high profile at the moment.
- This policy will also help to protect staff as well as children.
- There will be a public launch of the policy on 10th November 2003, which will raise awareness and also encourage volunteers to come forward for training on this policy. SDC is going to be funding 100 places and it is hoped that volunteer organisations will send 2 representatives each who can then cascade the training back to their own organisation. The training will take the form of a 3-hour session.

There then followed a general discussion where those present were able to ask questions. The main points raised were:

- Should the policy not clearly identify on page 3 & 4 under the heading "Creating a Safe Environment" that there should be at least 2 adults supervising a group, so that in the event of an accident or emergency, cover is available should one of the adults need to treat the injured child.

It was advised that this is more of a health and safety issue rather than a child protection matter, however, it was a procedure that is followed in practice anyway.

- The policy discusses the issue of sole officers driving children to their houses. Is this something that should be undertaken?

Lesley Waller replied that whilst this situation is something that should be avoided where possible, there are instances where it is impractical or not possible to follow this principle. If this is the case, there are measures that can be followed to alleviate any problems, for example, telephoning the child's parents to advise them of the situation.

There was a general agreement that the policy should not be too rigid as to be inflexible and is best used as a set of guidelines. Also, the protection of staff is just as important as the protection of children, and that those staff who are vulnerable, or risk coming into contact with children, are vetted (where it is deemed appropriate) and also given training on this subject.

RESOLVED - the Joint Consultative Forum approves the above policy and recommends its adoption by Salisbury District Council.

23. Recruitment and Retention Update

Carole Davidson advised the Forum that this report was an overview of the work undertaken in this area over the last year. During that year, every aspect of recruitment and retention of staff has been looked at. These include:

- The monitoring system has been improved
- Advertisements for posts have been redesigned
- The SDC website is now utilised to encourage applicants.
- The use of new recruitment tools e.g. psychometric tests
- Exit interviews – these have indicated that the main reason for staff leaving SDC is a lack of perceived career opportunities and training. There has been a concerted effort to improve this, and recently there were 4 internal promotions.
- Reduction in costs - these have included reducing the rates charged by advertising agencies (reduced by 3%) and in the future to look at reducing the number of temporary staff suppliers to just a few preferred suppliers to try and leverage greater discounts.
- Currently, Carole is analysing the results of the recent staff survey.
- There is a programme in place to continue the work that has already been undertaken.
- There is still a lot of work to do which will require a qualified personnel professional to complete.
- The report makes a recommendation to restructure the Recruitment and Retention section of the Personnel and Training Unit.

It was advised to the Forum that a separate paper will be going to Cabinet in October.

24. Adoption Leave

Karen Gard gave a brief explanation of the legal requirements for such a policy.

RESOLVED - the Joint Consultative Forum approves the above policy and recommends its adoption by Salisbury District Council.

25. Draft Early Retirements Requests Policy

Karen Gard advised the Forum that the reason for this policy was that any staff who are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme are eligible for early retirement if they meet a certain criteria. Such requests had recently been made, but upon being reviewed by the Management Team, it was discovered that there were no formal criteria in place to assess all requests on an equal basis. Therefore, this policy is an attempt to rectify this situation so that all requests for early retirement can be assessed using the same criteria.

RESOLVED - the Joint Consultative Forum approves the above policy and recommends its adoption by Salisbury District Council.

26. Matters, if any, that the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

Mark Wareham advised that the local pay-round discussions will soon be taking place, and therefore, this should be an item for discussion at the next JCF.

David Crook suggested that in view of the limited elected Member representation at this meeting, a discussion should be held as to whether daytime meetings are suitable for both Members and staff.

The meeting concluded at 11.20am