

# EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 March 2006 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 4.30 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Crowther (Chair), Boad, Mrs Bunker, Gill, Hammon, Hatfield and Kundi.

(Councillor Gill substituted for Councillor Tamlin).

## 922. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 923. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2005 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## 924. **HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY**

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Environmental Health which presented to the Committee the draft Corporate Health and Safety policy incorporating amendments requested from the Employment Committee on 19 December 2005.

**RESOLVED** that the Corporate Health and Safety Policy as submitted be agreed for adoption by this Authority.

## 925. **BENEFITS SERVICE STAFFING**

The Committee considered a report from the Customer Information and Advice Directorate which sought approval for the re-designating of post T03110 from Take Up Officer to Visiting Officer.

Since July 2003 the Benefits Service had undertaken a benefit take-up campaign and in January 2005 it appointed a Take-up officer with specific responsibilities for increasing benefit awareness in the local community.

This campaign had been very successful with the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit caseload (number of live claims on the computer system) increased by 5% during that time.

The increase had come about through a combination of general awareness work (posters, leaflets, forms and such like) allied to specific surgery and community meeting initiatives. However, over the last twelve months the local picture had changed in that other agencies were becoming much more proactive in promoting take-up.

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The Benefits Service had been able to take advantage of these initiatives by forming partnerships with The Pension Service and Warwickshire Welfare Rights Advice Service so that most of its home visiting work was now done by these partner agencies.

Consequently it was felt that the current resource the Benefits Service devoted to take-up work would be better deployed on alternative visiting tasks such as “in-year” claim checks, welfare assistance and property inspections. This would be achieved by re-designating the post as a Visiting Officer.

The officer currently employed in the Take-up officer post was on a fixed-term contract until the end of March 2006. As a consequence of the proposals contained within the report the officer had joined the Council’s Redeployment Register and it was hoped that he would secure suitable alternative employment, possibly in the new Visiting Officer role.

There would be no increase in revenue costs.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Services reported to the Committee that funding for the Countrywide Take Up Project had been approved. The funds would be available to support staff in the North and South of the County and would be for approximately 2 ½ to 3 years. There would be no cost implications for Warwick District Council. Employee authority was still to be determined.

**RESOLVED** that the post T03110 be redesignated from Take Up Officer to Visiting Officer.

### **926. AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISHMENT – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Planning and Engineering which sought the Committee’s approval for the redesignation of a post as part of the permanent establishment for Planning and Engineering.

Following the Best Value Review of the Planning Service during 2002, funding was provided to increase the establishment of the Unit in order to deal with increased workloads. These workloads had continued to increase since that time.

In addition to permanent Planning Officer posts, permanent funding was also made available for the employment of a temporary member of staff in the form of provision for a year out student. This was a means of securing an important contribution to the work of the Department and assisting in the development of planners who were part way through their planning courses and who would then come into the profession with greater experience and ability.

The funding commitment was set at the Band F level, with students to be paid up to that amount depending on experience and qualification. Because of the

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temporary nature of the post, there was no need to incorporate it into the Establishment.

However, in a market where Planning graduates were hard to come by and where it was necessary to offer a greater degree of certainty in order to attract staff to work for the District, it would be appropriate to be able to offer the post on a permanent basis. This would enable the department to be more flexible in securing resources to undertake the heavy work loads in Development Control. For this to take place, it would be necessary to gain the formal agreement of the Committee for the post to be placed on the Establishment

**RESOLVED** that the redesignation of a post as part of the permanent establishment be approved.

### **927. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT TEAM POSTS**

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Management Team which sought approval for the permanent establishment of two posts in the new Community Support Team.

At its meeting in February, the Executive had agreed changes to existing funding and with funding from Warwickshire County Council, in order to create a community Support Team of two posts. These posts would be located organisationally within the Community Resources Directorate but line managed by the County Council's Area Partnership Manager.

The postholders were currently employed by the Council but were funded by Single Regeneration budget funding that was scheduled to end in April and June this year respectively. One post (V01/030) already existed within the Community Resources Directorate and the other one (V01/040) would be transferred from Regeneration. The team would provide support to disadvantaged communities across the District.

**RESOLVED** that posts V01/030 and V01/040 be confirmed as a permanent addition to the Council's establishment.

### **928. PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**RESOLVED** that under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraph 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **929. PRINT ROOM STAFFING**

The Committee considered a report from Members' Services which sought approval to amend the staffing establishment of the Print Room by the

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addition of a part time Advertising Officer and Graphic Designer in connection with the establishment of an advertising agency, and, undertake additional work being obtained externally.

A Best Vale Review of the Council's Communications Strategy produced an Action Plan in 2005 which recommended that all of the Council's advertising should be undertaken through an in-house agency. This would enable an annual contract to be obtained with local newspapers for advertising space.

The Design, Print and Advertising Manager had been requested to develop a business plan for the appointment of an advertising officer to assist with the operation of the advertising agency. This would be on the basis that the proposed appointment would be self-financing with the potential to operate at a profit by attracting external clients.

It should be noted that there had been considerable interest from external clients, particularly other councils in Warwickshire.

The business plan had indicated that, to enable the advertising agency to operate effectively and professionally, it would be necessary to appoint an Advertising Officer, initially on a part time basis. In addition, the appointment of a Graphic Designer would be required to work partly on advertising which, again, would be funded through the advertising agency.

The remaining time for the Graphic Designer would be required as a result of additional work being generated through an expanded client base.

Both appointments would be reviewed within twelve months to assess progress and effectiveness.

The financial projects contained in the business plan had been verified by Finance.

**RESOLVED** that the staffing establishment of Members' Services be formally amended by the addition of an Advertising Officer (half post) and a Graphic Designer subject to review within one year.

### **930. RETIREMENT OF HEAD OF FINANCE**

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive which sought recommendation to the Executive the early retirement of the Head of Finance on 7 December 2006 under Section 31 of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

On 7th December 2006 the Head of Finance would have completed 40 years contributions to the Local Government Superannuation Scheme and over 33 years service with Warwick District Council. He has requested early retirement under Section 31 of the scheme.

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Agreement to this request would allow the Council to consider its overall needs for financial management in the light of the government's requirements for use of resources; Gershon efficiencies; electronic procurement strategies and long term strategic budget planning.

Agreement at this stage would allow a lead into any proposed changes which could then be accommodated without any gaps in service provision.

### **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) the Employment Committee approve the request for early retirement from the Head of Finance with effect 7 December 2006;
- (2) the Executive be recommended that the cost be met from the Early Retirement Reserve and that the Executive receive a report on the overall effect on the retirement reserve; and
- (3) the Employment Committee note that if the request be approved consideration be given to the overall requirements for delivering financial management in the Council.

(The meeting ended at 5.05 pm)