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**COMMERCIAL & HUMAN RESOURCES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

29 October 2002  
(4.30 – 7.20 pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors White (Chair), Bagnall, Bradnack, Dryden, Ellis-Miller, Liddle, Smart, Smith, and Stebbings.

**Executive Councillor: Amanda Taylor**

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Todd-Jones for item 02/CHR/22

<b>FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL</b>
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**02/CHR/18 MINUTES**

Regarding the minutes of the meeting held on 15 August, Councillor Smith stated that his presence had not been recorded.

Councillors Bagnall and Bradnack requested that the minutes should record votes taken. The Head of Committee Services undertook to review his notes from the meeting of 2 July and amend the minutes if required. *Subsequent to the meeting, it was found that no vote had been taken on any of the matters before the Scrutiny Committee on 2 July.*

The minutes of 15 August having been amended, and the minutes of 2 July, were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

**02/CHR/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Griffiths and the Alternate Member, Councillor Ward.

**02/CHR/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor White declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/26 (Property Services Service Plan) as his company rented council commercial property.

Councillor Bagnall declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/26 (Markets Service Plan) as a member of 'Britain in Europe' which had hired a market stall to promote the Euro.

Councillor Smith declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as his wife is a member of Unison.

Councillor Taylor declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as a member of Amicus.

Councillor Dryden declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as a member of Amicus and his wife as a member of Unison.

Councillor Bradnack declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as a member of NUT and his wife as a member of NATFE.

Councillor Smart declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as a member of ALT.

Councillor Bagnall declared a personal interest in minute number 02/CHR/27 as a member of Amicus/MSF.

**02/CHR/21 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No members of the public wished to address the Scrutiny Committee.

**02/CHR/22 RESURFACING OF ARBURY COURT PUBLIC CAR PARK & ANCILLARY WORKS – PROJECT APPRAISAL** *(see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/14)*

Councillor Todd-Jones attended as a ward councillor and spoke in support of the scheme.

In response to questions, the Head of Property and Building Services stated that the work would not commence until the new year to avoid the busy Christmas trading period.

In response to a query from Councillor Smart, the Head of Property & Building Services undertook to consider other locations for the recycling centre within the car park to reduce possible damage to the new surface from heavy vehicles.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

**02/CHR/23 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PUBLICATION SCHEME** *(see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/15)*

Councillor Bagnall requested that the list of information in the introduction should be consistent with the classes stated in the body of the report. In addition, Councillor Bagnall suggested that all email addresses should list the post and/or section and/or department, not the person by name as officers moved jobs and the list would require regular updating.

The Committee agreed with the suggested amendments and with the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendations.

**02/CHR/24 KEY DECISION CREDIT CARD PAYMENT – LOCAL TAXES AND REPAYMENT OF OVERPAID HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT** *(see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/16)*

In response to questions, the Head of Revenue Services undertook to provide a copy of the survey undertaken which informed the report to Councillors Bagnall, Bradnack, Dryden and Smith.

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 3) with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

**02/CHR/25 KEY DECISION INTRODUCTION OF SURVEILLANCE AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED BENEFIT FRAUD PREVENTION AND DETECTION POLICY** (see also *Record of Decision 02/CHR/17*)

Councillor Liddle proposed that the decision be deferred pending Strategy Scrutiny Committee's consideration (on 11 November) of the procedure guide on the use of covert surveillance - the guide being a requirement of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. She also requested that Members should be provided with the information in Department of Work and Pensions Guidance on surveillance as referred to in the officer report (para 3.3). The Head of Revenue Services stated that he would seek advice from the DWP on whether its guidance could be made available to Members of the Scrutiny Committee, as it was marked confidential and only for designated officers of the authority.

Councillor Liddle's proposal to defer the matter to the next meeting was carried by 8 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed to defer the matter to January's Committee.

The Executive Councillor requested that the Head of Revenue Services include in the January report some examples of other authorities' work and costs in this area.

**02/CHR/26 SERVICE PLANS** (see also *Record of Decision 02/CHR/18*)

Councillor Bradnack stated that overall there was inconsistency in the way the Plans had been written to align services to the Council's Medium Term Objectives. In addition most Service Plans indicated a problem with recruitment and retention, which in turn was affecting the performance of services.

Councillor Bagnall was of the view that the Service Plans were too long and should be set out in a more user friendly format.

On all the Service Plans, the Labour Group asked the Executive Councillor which element(s) of the service was/were most crucial in terms of service delivery and meeting the Executive's objectives. The Executive Councillor stated that service priorities for 2003/04 would be identified in the budgets and service plans to be scrutinised at January's committee.

### **Accountancy and Support Services**

In response to questions, the Committee noted that the service had experienced difficulties in retaining temporary staff through a period of maternity leave, which had affected some levels of performance as detailed in the report.

Having been asked to highlight a priority target for this service, the Executive Councillor stated that paying invoices on time was something that the Council should continue to improve upon.

### **Legal Services and Land Charges**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services highlighted that the target set for BV179 (standard searches carried out in 10 working days) in 2002/03 will not be met. The NLIS electronic search project, which would assist turnaround for the Land Charges Service, was progressing and should ensure the Service meets the target when implemented, which should be by the end of 2003/4.

### **Democratic Services**

In response to a question from Councillor Bradnack, the Head of Committee Services stated that the report had not been as clear as it should have been in identifying Democratic Services' link to the Medium Term Objective 'Better Services' (page 3).

### **Internal Audit**

In response to questions, the Committee noted that the increase of special investigations had affected the timetable of planned audits in 2002/03.

### **Human Resources**

The Acting Head of Personnel confirmed that the turnover figure for the year was currently estimated at 13%, which had come down from the figure for 2001/02. The issue had also been discussed at Joint Staff Employer Forum and was something which would continue to be monitored, particularly with regard to the employees who left within the first year (which was at 21%). The Committee was informed that the County Council currently experienced a 20% turnover. In response to further questions, the Committee noted that the Head of Human Resources would be tasked with ensuring that the HR Strategy dealt with these and other issues. The Committee was also advised of some slippage on the timescales for the reviews of the Capability Procedure and the Maternity Policy.

Councillor Bradnack stated that the lack of Unison involvement, because of part funding, in job evaluation and suspension cases had caused delays which had been a real cost to the Council. He also had concerns regarding the on-going costs and time taken for Job Evaluation. Councillor Smart stated that evidence from the Regional Employers had identified that Job Evaluation had taken longer for those authorities which had opted

for a robust and fair process. The Executive Councillor stated that additional funding had been made available for union involvement in Job Evaluation in 2002/03.

### **Revenue Services**

The Head of Revenue Services asked Members to note that the Authority was currently engaged in a joint working venture with the County Council with regard to the production of a joint County/Police/Local Authority information leaflet to be sent out with all Council Tax & Business Rates bills next year. Normally the cost [£7,500] of the City Council's information leaflet is met through advertising revenue. However, because of the joint arrangements being discussed, the cost of the production of a joint leaflet may well have to be found from within budget.

### **IT Contract Management Service**

### **Property and Building Services**

The Executive Councillor highlighted the policy of supporting small businesses by the way in which the service operates its commercial portfolio.

### **Reception and Office Services**

### **City Services External Trading**

### **Markets**

The Committee agreed (by 4 votes to 0) with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

02/CHR/27 **TRADE UNIONS FACILITY AGREEMENT** (*see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/19*)

The Committee noted that this item had been discussed at the Joint Staff Employer Forum held on 24 October 2002 and the notes of the meeting had been circulated to the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Smart, the Acting Head of Personnel confirmed that Unison's time analysis had not been received and would be provided to members as soon as it had been.

Councillor Bradnack expressed concern regarding the limited flexibility of the part time arrangement of the Unison representative which restricted his ability to undertake his duties effectively. The Executive Councillor advised the Committee that she had raised this point at the Joint Staff Employer Forum and had requested that officers investigate the matter further.

Councillor Smart proposed that the recommendation made at Joint Staff Employer Forum be agreed for 2003/04 ie 50% Unison; 100% GMB.

Councillor Bradnack proposed 100% funding for Unison and GMB. This was lost by 3 votes to 4.

The Committee agreed (by 4 votes to 3) to fund in 2003/04 at the level of 50% Unison; 100% GMB.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation.

02/CHR/28 KEY DECISION **OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY** (*see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/20*)

Councillor Bradnack stated that although the report had been amended to reflect the comments of the Office Accommodation Working Party on 16 October, still inadequately addressed the justification for such expenditure based on the Council's Medium Term Objectives.

The Chair proposed that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

**Resolved –**

To exclude members of the public from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by Categories 3, 7-9 as defined in the Council's Constitution part 4B (pages 153/4).

Councillor Smart proposed amendments to the recommendation listed in the officer report as follows:

- 1) To agree in principle leasing alternative city centre office accommodation identified in the confidential part of the report sufficient to meet the relocation needs of the departments currently occupying Norwich Union House. Authorise the Head of Property and Building Services to agree provisional terms and report to January Scrutiny Committee.
- 2) At the appropriate time negotiate terms for the surrender of the Council's leasehold interests in existing office accommodation in Norwich Union House with a view to achieving the most financially advantageous outcome taking into account compensation and any overlap period with alternative accommodation.
- 3) To approve in principle the expansion of the negotiations referred to in 1) to lease in additional available office accommodation to provide decant/relocation space to facilitate developments at Hobson House and Mandela House.
- 4) To submit all necessary planning and listed building applications in connection with 1) and 3) above.

5) To instruct officers to commission more work to determine possible alternative solutions to Package 2-4 which would release some ground floor space in Mandela House for commercial development and meet the basic requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and other relevant legislation for the administrative buildings, to facilitate a decision at the January Committee.

6) That the Council should continue to explore whether accommodation/facilities can be made available to South Cambs DC, as referred to in the officer report.

Councillor Bradnack requested an addition to 5) : 'and that officers investigate other potential funding routes on the options available.'

The Committee agreed to the proposed amendments from Councillors Smart and Bradnack by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor confirmed the importance of good working conditions to staff, but she stressed that the consultants' proposals, albeit most desirable, went way beyond the Council's available resources. The potential income streams arising from renting retail units out as part of the Hobson/Mandela development could not be guaranteed.

She said that the consultants had presented 'optimum' proposals, but that members needed to be aware of the costs of a less elaborate scheme which would still comply with DDA and other recent legislation, so that they had some comparisons to draw.

The Director of Finance highlighted that the Council was not in a position to commit to any proposed expenditure (other than that which was contained in current budgets) ahead of the draft Government settlement due in mid-December. The Executive Councillor stated that further work within current budgets would be undertaken to explore alternative options to the four packages proposed.

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 0) with the recommendations, as amended above, for the Executive Councillor.

The Executive Councillor agreed to the amended recommendations.

**02/CHR/29 GENERAL DEBTS – BAD DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF** (*see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/21*)

The Committee agreed with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

**02/CHR/30 BUSINESS RATES – DEBTS TO BE WRITTEN-OFF** (*see also Record of Decision 02/CHR/22*)

After discussion, the Committee agreed that 3128 463 0 should be pursued further by the Director of Finance, with the remainder written off as recommended.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor in the report as amended above.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

**CHAIR**