

CABINET – 17th DECEMBER 2009

CORPORATE SERVICES – CABINET MEMBERS' REPORT

LEGAL & ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DEPARTMENT

- 1. The Property and Land Services Legal Team** have been very busy and have dealt with a number of new leases and general property management issues in relation to lease renewals. The Team has also been dealing with a number of landlord and tenant disputes and was successful in a recent adverse possession case which has resulted in a substantial capital receipt for the Council. In addition, the work on the land referencing for the latest CPO in the Housing Market Renewal Area has been completed.

- 2. The Planning, Environmental and Technical Services Legal Team**

On 25th November 2009 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government issued his decision on the Planning Application by Tesco Stores for a **new football stadium and retail development in Kirkby**. The Application had been called-in by the Secretary of State and a public local inquiry was held between November 2008 and February 2009. Sefton formed a consortium [known as the Combined Authority Objectors] with West Lancs District Council, Lancashire County Council and St. Helens Borough Council to oppose the Application at the public inquiry on the basis that the proposed development was contrary to national, regional and local planning policies and that it would have an unacceptable impact on the vitality and viability of Bootle, Skelmersdale and St. Helens Town Centres. Sefton acted as Lead Authority and the legal work for the consortium was undertaken by Sefton's Planning Solicitor, who instructed Counsel and Junior Counsel to appear at the Inquiry. Planning Officers from each of the consortium authorities gave evidence at the inquiry, together with a retail consultant, valuation expert and property developer. The Inspector who conducted the inquiry recommended that planning permission be refused. The Secretary of State agreed with the Inspector's recommendation and refused the application. One of the principal reasons given for refusing the application was that it was in conflict with planning policies and that it would be likely to have a harmful effect upon the vitality and viability of Bootle, Skelmersdale and St. Helens, which was precisely the case put forward by the Combined Authority Objectors. It is pleasing that the Inspector and Secretary of State fully accepted the legal arguments submitted by the Consortium.

- 3. The Child Care and Social Services Team**

The number of Child Care cases continues to rise substantially over previous years, which is having an affect on the Child Care Team generally. There has been a vast increase in the amount of photocopying, bundling etc required for the Courts.

4. Electoral Services

The Electoral Services team have completed the annual canvass for the 2010 Register of Electors. The overall response from households was 92.1%, this is 0.1% down on 2009. However it should be noted that as part of the canvass the team were also involved in an exercise to populate the register with data from the Local Land and Property Gazetteer, which identified a number of new properties to be included in the register.

As a result, more registrations were received than in 2008, then number of empty properties has decreased by more than 2000 and the number of properties were the team have not been able to gain any electoral information now stands at 6. It should also be noted that there was a significant rise in the number of household details being changed, which may indicate more movement in the housing market.

The published electorate as of the 1 December 2009 is 208,897 at 125,333 properties. The current number of electors registered to vote by post stands at 26,412, although over 13,000 fresh applications have been sent out during the canvass.

Overall the annual canvass was successful, with all targets being met.

5. Committee & Member Services

In addition to the administrative support provided for various Cabinet / Committee meetings, the Section has supported the following:

School Admission Appeals

During the period 16 October to 4 December 2009, 11 School Admission appeal hearings (9 High School and 2 Primary School) were organised. The hearings were clerked by the Section.

Members' ICT Issues

During the period from 16 October to 4 December 2009, The Members' ICT Support Officer has provided training on IT issues to 19 Councillors and dealt with 56 requests for IT support from Councillors.

6. Overview & Scrutiny

O&S Management Board

The next meeting of the O&S Management Board will take place on 8th December. A draft Scrutiny Newsletter is currently being prepared for approval by the Board. The Chairs have invited all other Members for a pre-Christmas drink at the conclusion of their meeting.

O&S Committee (Health & Social Care)

The work of the Dementia Working Group remains ongoing. A site visit to Liverpool Women's Hospital by Members of the Committee is planned for January 2010.

O&S Committee (Children's Services)

The Corporate Parenting Working Group has interviewed witnesses and is working with the Corporate Parenting Board to avoid any duplication of work. The Committee agreed recently to establish a Youth Centre Focus Group to visit the Borough's Youth Centres, in order to talk to users and providers. The visits should take place early in the New Year.

O&S Committee (Performance and Corporate Services)

Further meetings of both the Equalities Working Group and the Perception of Crime Working Group have recently been held. A Special Meeting of the Committee has been arranged for Wednesday, 9th December, to consider the "called-in" item on the temporary relocation of Southport Library. The Chair, Councillor D. Hardy, has also requested the inclusion on the agenda of items related to the transformation agenda.

O&S Committee (Regeneration and Environmental Services)

Work on the review on the kerbside recycling tender is about to re-commence.

The Libraries Working Group has recently carried out visits to neighbouring Authorities for Members to see for themselves examples of partnership working and the co-location of various services within a single building or centre, including libraries.

Joint Health & Scrutiny Bid

Funding is available from the NWE0 for a joint venture with IdeA and CfPS to support a venture on the role of scrutiny in tackling health inequalities, within the north west area. Janet Atherton, Director of Public Health, is keen for Sefton to submit a bid for consideration regarding the LAA priorities on health inequalities within Sefton. The O&S Management Board will be kept informed of developments.

7. Registration Service

A very successful training session has been held for volunteer registrars in the event of a flu pandemic. There are ongoing accommodation issues with the accommodation in Waterloo Town Hall, particularly with the strong room.

Citizenship Ceremonies continue to be successful and the possibility of offering new services in conjunction with ceremonies is being explored.

The online RON system for marriages was successfully implemented and has been operational since 16th November 2009.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

A. Pay & Grading Review/Equal Pay

1. At its meeting on 10th November 2009, the Pay and Grading Committee received a verbal update from local Trade Union representatives who confirmed that the Council's proposed pay structure had been referred to their national officers for comment. Committee also considered and approved a mitigation policy that was designed to ease the detriment that some staff may suffer as a result of implementing the Pay and Grading Review.

2. Consultation with the Trade Unions is continuing on a regular basis and progress is being made on reviewing allowances that are attached to pay.
3. As a measure to reduce the Council's equal pay liabilities it has been agreed that revised settlement offers will be made in December to see if it is possible to 'buy out' certain claims.

B. Establishment Control, Pensions, Payroll & HR Transactional Services

4. The weekly Client meetings continue and we are progressing in several areas including the introduction of new process and improving data quality. Protocols continue to be developed as and when required.
6. The Establishment Control Team is now involved in updating ResourceLink with frozen/deleted/vacant posts following vacancy panel meetings and reporting on the associated savings to the Finance Department.
7. The Establishment Control Team is in the process of preparing Workforce Data that will be published to all Service Directors on a regular basis.
8. The Pensions Officer is currently working closely with the policy team to develop pension policies.

C. Corporate Learning & Development Unit

10. Apprenticeships, Work-Based Learning and Skills for Life:

- Sefton currently has 26 apprentices and 86 adult apprentices undertaking qualifications in a range of occupational areas.
- 55 staff are being funded through Train to Gain to achieve occupational qualifications.
- 31 employees from Cleansing have recently "signed up" for an NVQ in Waste Management or Street Services
- 5 members of staff are undertaking Skills for Life training in either numeracy or literacy
- 25 staff are undertaking their ITQ (NVQ IT qualification)
- A Customer Service Programme has been delivered for Leisure Services: this includes 11 staff who will be undertaking an NVQ in Customer Service
- CLDU has employed a Business Admin. Apprentice to "lead by example"
- Amanda McNally, the Learning and Skills Co-ordinator (which is a joint union/Sefton appointment) is now fully operational. Amanda is working with departments and Union Learning Representatives (of whom there are now 10) to embed Skills for Life and lifelong learning in general as well as supporting staff undertaking work-based learning.

11. Management Development:

- MDP14 have recently begun their programme – CLDU are maintaining their target of three groups beginning each year.

- The Foundation to Management Programme continues apace with 4 groups currently in progress: 40 of them have “signed up for the NVQ Level 3 in Management.
- 21 graduates from MDP 7/8/9 are nearing completion of the conversion of their award to the ILM Level 5 Certificate in Leadership, with a further intake of up to 15 graduates from MDP 10/11 planned for January 2010
- Management Network for MDP graduates and current participants hosted by Margaret Carney. The event was very successful and will be repeated in November for those unable to attend originally.
- The Merseyside sub-regional training programme “Coaching Skills for Managers” has been launched successfully. The first of six 3-day Programmes is complete with programmes two to four underway. Delegate feedback is excellent.

FINANCE & INFORMATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Budget Issues/Spending Freeze

The department continues to be heavily involved in the Strategic Budget Review. Work is ongoing to assess real budget pressures faced by the Council, in particular we are working closely to review the demand-led pressures on Adult and Children Social Care.

The current year budget is still under pressure, and a spending freeze remains in place. A review of all provisions and reserves has identified significant resources which can be released to support the 2009/10 budget. These resources are available on a one-off basis and therefore will not be available to support future years budgets. The budget will continue to require close monitoring over the remainder of the financial year.

The Medium Term Financial plan continues to be updated with the availability of new information; a report on this item can be found elsewhere on today’s agenda. Discussions with all political parties have been held and will continue over the coming months in order to arrive at an agreed balanced budget for 2010/11.

Introduction of International Financial reporting Standards

All local authorities are required to comply with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) from the 2010/2011 financial year. However, the 2009/2010 Accounts also need to be restated (including the opening balances as at 1 April 2009).

A significant amount of work needs to be undertaken before 31 March 2010, involving staff in all departments. Initial preparation work has been undertaken in conjunction with PricewaterhouseCoopers to identify the changes that will be needed. It is likely that additional financial resources will be required (in addition to extra staff time) to ensure the Council’s compliance with the statutory change.

Specialist Transport Unit

A number of cost saving initiatives are planned and tenders are currently being evaluated for a new route management software system, which it is anticipated will bring about significant cost savings.

Client Unit

ICT - USB Data sticks containing Wraptor software have now been distributed to all Members and senior officers that require secure access to the Portal.

Two projects to upgrade the voice and data networks of the Council have successfully completed with little or no disruption to services. These were major engineering exercises and were undertaken by arvato with Telewest and Damovo. These networks had been in place since 2003/4 and their upgrade and modernisation achieve a major milestone in the contract with arvato.

The tender process for the replacement of the Pericles Revenues and Benefits has commenced. A report recommending a preferred supplier is to be considered by Corporate Services on 9th December 2009.

Revenues & Benefits – A tender exercise is being finalised for a software system to replace the current Pericles system, and the Cabinet Member Corporate Services meeting on 9 December is considering a report on this matter.