

Some information is excluded under FOI

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting, held in committee, in the Council Chamber, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Wednesday 13 January 2010 at 8.05 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor J Beattie
(in the chair)

ALDERMEN: J White

COUNCILLORS: Mrs A Beattie
Ms J Bunting
Mrs M Chambers
Mrs J Cochrane
D Drysdale
Mrs S Duncan
B Hanvey (until 8.12 p.m.)
T Jeffers (from 8.10 p.m.)

IN ATTENDANCE: Human Resource Manager, Senior Accountant,
Client Manager, Assistant Members' Services
Officer and Alderman J Norris MBE

APOLOGIES: Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors
Copeland, Hall, McCoy, Robinson and Walker

**REPORT FROM THE CLIENT MANAGER
(copy previously circulated)**

F&GP/2010/01 : CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

The Client Manager outlined that, as requested at the December Committee meeting, he was tabling a further report on Capital Projects works, with the following supporting information:

- (i) The cost of each of the projects, where applicable
- (ii) How much funding had been obtained
- (iii) Finance that had been included in the 2010/2011 estimates for capital projects

He circulated the capital projects list which had been amended to include a cost estimate for each project. He added that it should be borne in mind that estimated costs had been provided in advance of any design work being carried out, and in most cases the estimates had been provided before a brief had been agreed. He outlined that the estimated costs should therefore be seen as very approximate.

The Client Manager asked Members to note that alternative funding which may be available had been indicated, and as further information came to light he would bring it to Members' attention. He advised that it had not as yet been agreed how much capital provision should be included in the 2010/2011 estimates.

Councillor Jeffers arrived at the meeting at 8.10 p.m.

He circulated a flow chart in respect of a recommended Committee/Council approvals process, and advised that this was just a suggestion as a starting point but that the matter had not as yet been discussed at any Committee meetings. He outlined that the capital projects list was currently an in-house Technical Services document and had not as yet been formally agreed by Council.

Councillor Hanvey left the meeting at 8.12 p.m.

Councillor Bunting outlined that the approval process as indicated within the flowchart was not correct. She explained that any major projects relating to the Leisure Park Board and the Golf Club Board would go directly to Council for approval.

The Senior Accountant indicated that there was an item on his report being considered later in the meeting (DOE Guidance on Financing of Council Expenditure) placing a requirement on councils in a deficit position to have a nil balance at March 2011.

Councillor J Beattie sought clarification as to how the projects would be funded.

The Senior Accountant advised that the Estimates Working Group would have to agree the capital provision and arrangements put in place to ensure the agreed projects were fully financed.

Councillor Chambers outlined that there was a requirement on councils to ensure all buildings were fit for purpose by May 2011 and Castlereagh Council may therefore have to spend money originally not anticipated.

Councillor J Beattie asked if Officers had determined the costs that may be incurred by the Council in this respect.

The Client Manager advised that a review of the Council's major buildings had been carried out a number of years ago with regard to DDA.

Alderman White stated that, given that the proposal for significant parts of the Borough to be transferred to Belfast City Council, the lack of clarity from the Department on the boundaries issue was making it difficult for Members to consider this issue.

Councillor Bunting concurred with Alderman White and outlined that Officers had previously been asked to write to the Department, and to date, a response had been reported to Members. She proposed that the Acting Chief Executive ascertain if a response had been received, and if not, he/she should write to the Department and continue to write until a response was received.

Alderman White seconded the proposal and asked that the Acting Chief Executive write to the Department the following morning.

The Client Manager suggested that he and the Senior Accountant would look at the capital projects list to determine what they felt could realistically be progressed and report their findings to the Estimates Working Group.

Following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that

- (a) the Acting Chief Executive ascertain if the Council had received a response from the Department in respect of the boundaries issue, and if not, he/she should continue to forward letters seeking clarity on the matter
- (b) the Client Manager liaise with the Senior Accountant in order to determine which capital projects could realistically be progressed and report their findings to the Estimates Working Group

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR ACCOUNTANT
(copy previously circulated)

F&GP/2010/02 : SUMMARY OF THE MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2009 – 30 NOVEMBER 2009

The Senior Accountant reported that all directorates within Council were underspent.

Councillor Chambers proposed that a moratorium be placed on non-essential spends such as purchase of vehicles, etc from 1 February to 31 March 2010, and Councillor Mrs Beattie seconded the proposal.

Councillor Drysdale outlined that a number of areas within the Robinson Centre were particularly run down and required redecorating. He added that Officers were currently obtaining costings, but it was his view that this would not be deemed as major work. He indicated that he hoped that the moratorium would not jeopardise this work.

The Senior Accountant reported that last year the definition of non-essential was unclear/abused and the Council may need to consider placing stricter controls on the purchase order system.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that a moratorium be placed on non-essential spends during the period 1 February 2010 to the end of the financial year.

F&GP/2010/03 : TREASURY MANAGEMENT/BANK INTEREST/GOVERNMENT BORROWING AND LOAN SCHEDULING

The Senior Accountant advised Members of the amount of interest earned on investments for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 December 2009. He added that there had been no government borrowing or loan rescheduling in the year to date.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/04 : MOBILE PHONE CONTRACT RENEWAL

The Senior Accountant reported that the Council's mobile phone contract was due for renewal. He circulated an analysis of the relevant costs, free minutes, etc., based on three months' usage provided by Vodafone, Orange, O2 and T-Mobile. He added that the contract was for a total of 152 handsets for Officers, Senior Management and Councillors and he advised that out of this, 90% were classed as low users.

He outlined that it was being recommended that staff be provided with a Nokia 2330/2323, depending on requirements. He advised that Vodafone could provide the handsets at a cost of £40.00 each, with a £50.00 credit.

In response to a query from Councillor Cochrane as to whether it was necessary for staff mobile phones to be replaced, the Senior Accountant advised that a number staff phones were broken, coupled with the fact that the phones were no longer retaining any significant level of battery life and were constantly needing to be charged.

The Senior Accountant reported that although T-Mobile provided the cheapest rates, they failed to prove that they could meet the service requirements of the Council. He recommended that, taking all factors into account, Vodafone be awarded a two-year contract commencing on 1 February 2010. He asked Members to note that Vodafone would provide a one-off full-day training session.

The Senior Accountant referred Members to the three options of BlackBerries available to Councillors and Senior Management, together with the relevant costs involved. He advised that he would arrange demonstrations to help Members decide which option best suited their needs.

Discussion then ensued as to whether it would be more cost effective for Councillors to arrange their own contract.

The Senior Accountant advised that he would arrange for Councillors' mobile phone usage to be assessed to assist in determining whether a private contract would be more cost effective.

Following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that

- (a) a two-year contract for mobile phone provision be awarded to Vodafone, commencing 1 February 2010
- (b) the Senior Accountant arrange for Councillors' usage to be assessed to assist them in determining whether a private contract would be more cost effective
- (c) following the assessment, those Councillors wishing to be provided with a BlackBerry should contact Members' Services
- (d) Officers arrange demonstrations on the three types of BlackBerries to assist Councillors in deciding which option to choose

F&GP/2010/05 : CAPITAL INVESTMENT – BIOMETRIC SCANNERS (TIME AND ATTENDANCE EQUIPMENT)

The Senior Accountant reported that, as a result of the recent Household Recycling Centre investigation, weaknesses had been identified within the current clocking in/out procedures. He asked Members to consider supporting the procurement of Biometric Scanners to reduce the risk of potential fraud in the future.

He circulated for Members' information details in relation to the operation of the scanners as well as three quotations. He added that it was being recommended that the scanners be located at the following Council premises:

- 2 at Council HQ (Eastern Group to fund one)
- 1 at the Ice Bowl
- 1 at the Robinson Centre
- 1 at Carryduff Household Recycling Centre
- 1 at the Lough Moss Centre

The Senior Accountant recommended that the quotation from Northtime & Data be accepted.

In response to a query from Councillor Drysdale in relation to support costs, the Senior Accountant advised that he was not aware of the exact costs in this respect, but that the scanners would pay for themselves within a very short payback period of months.

The Senior Accountant reported that the software had already been purchased and that an initial pilot would be carried out by Eastern Group within the Civic Offices.

In response to a query from Councillor Duncan, the Senior Accountant confirmed that all Officers would be required to use the scanners, including Directors.

Alderman White proposed that the quotation from Northtime & Data be accepted, and this was seconded by Councillor Mrs Beattie.

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that

- (a) Biometric Time & Attendance equipment be purchased and located at Council Headquarters, Ice Bowl, Robinson Centre, Carryduff Household Recycling Centre and the Lough Moss Centre
- (b) the quotation from Northtime & Data be accepted.

F&GP/2010/06 : ESTIMATES 2010/2011 UPDATE

The Senior Accountant reported that savings had been found within the Administration & Community Services Department draft estimates and was now on target. He outlined that work was progressing, in terms of Repairs & Renewals and the Capital Expenditure Plan.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/07 : INVOICE FROM PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES RE: REPAYMENT CLAIM

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to grant approval for payment of an invoice from PriceWaterhouseCoopers for professional services provided in respect of the VAT repayment claim.

F&GP/2010/08 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT RE: CONSULTATION ON THE DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSAL TO MAKE THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (GENERAL GRANT) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2010

The Senior Accountant briefed Members on the impact of the above correspondence.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/09 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT - LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY DIVISION RE GUIDANCE ON FINANCING OF COUNCIL EXPENDITURE

The Senior Accountant reported that a need had been identified for financial

guidance during the run up to RPA in May 2011. He highlighted a number of key areas within the Guidance, as outlined below:

- (a) It is vital that a council does not leave an overdrawn balance on the District Fund at 31 March 2011 and that councils should plan, as a minimum, to have a District Fund balance equating to 5% to 7.5% of the net operating expenditure
- (b) Careful planning in terms of the estimated rate position for 2010/2011 is important, in particular careful consideration should be given to:
 - all known or estimated liabilities are factored in
 - adequate provision is made to fund current and planned capital expenditure in addition to any unfunded capital expenditure at 31 March 2009
 - potential impact of International Financial Reporting Standards on district fund restated balances
- (a) No capital expenditure should take place without appropriate financing in place, i.e.
 - council approval to borrow and receipt of a loan sanction from the DOE
 - council approval to sell other assets matched by demonstrating that the assets are on the market for sale, or,
 - council approval of identified finance from the District Fund credit balance or other funds such as a Capital Fund (with DOE approval)

Noted.

F&GP/2010/10 : MINUTES ON THE WEBSITE

The Senior Accountant advised that the IT Manager and the Administration Manager had asked him to raise the issue of Minutes on the Council's website. He outlined that he had been advised that a software package could be purchased at approximately £4,000.00, alternatively, the IT Officer could transfer the Minutes as pdf documents, with the only cost being manhours.

He indicated that the process of authorisation was the key to this particular issue to manage/control what was put on the website.

Councillor Cochrane suggested that training could be provided in order for the Members Services Section to transfer the Minutes and keep the site updated.

Following discussion, Councillor Bunting stated that it was clear that Members had no objection to putting the Minutes on the website.

Councillor Mrs Beattie outlined that clarification needed to be sought on transferring any issues discussed "Staff in Committee".

Councillor Cochrane advised that the detail in respect of the Publication Scheme currently on the Council's website was not correct and she asked that Officers rectify this matter.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that

- (b) the Director of Administration & Community Services liaise with the IT Manager and the Human Resource Manager, with a view to implementing a process for transferring the Minutes onto the Council's website
- (b) Officers correct the Publication Scheme information currently placed on the Council's website

**REPORT FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER
(copy previously circulated)**

F&GP/2010/11 : UPDATE ON APPOINTMENT OF DISABILITY CHAMPIONS

The Human Resource Manager outlined that Members had previously agreed that an Elected Representative and an Officer would act as the Council's Disability Champions. He advised that Councillor J Beattie had been appointed as the Members' Disability Chamber at the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11 November 2009. He reported that nominations had been sought for the Officers' Disability Champion and three Officers had put forward their names. He advised that a selection process may have to be introduced, based on expertise/interest in the subject area.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that the Human Resource Manager carry out a selection process for the Officers' Disability Champion, and report back to the next Committee meeting.

F&GP/2010/12 : GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION 5TH GUIDING PRINCIPLE – VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Human Resource Manager referred Members to the above document and highlighted a number of key aspects.

The Senior Accountant outlined that the Public Service Commission had consulted with the Executive, the sectoral Staff Commission and representatives of NIC/ICTU with regard to the most appropriate way to make preparations for the staffing structures required within the new councils. He highlighted a number of key aspects of the document in relation to potential

redundancies, career breaks, short-term contracts, etc. He added that the application of the Guiding Principle and the associated recommendations would help towards clarifying the position for staff and re-assuring them that every possible effort would be made to safeguard their interest.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/13 : THE EQUALITY COMMISSION LAUNCH EVENT: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DISABILITY DUTIES REVIEW REPORT

The Human Resource Manager referred Members to the above document which included the details of the Equality Commission's Launch Event being held on 10 February 2010. He asked if Members wish to attend the event.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/14 : BIS CONSULTATION ON EUROPEAN WORKS COUNCIL

The Human Resource Manager advised that the above document had been tabled at the December Council meeting and referred to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for consideration.

He outlined that a representative from the Department of Education and Learning had confirmed that the draft directive only applied to employers 'at a European level in undertakings or groups of undertakings with at least 1000 employees across member states, and at least 150 employees in each of 2 or more of those member states'. He added that this therefore did not apply to Castlereagh Borough Council.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/15 : NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE REPORT ON ABSENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Human Resource Manager referred Members to the above document and advised that Castlereagh Borough Council had increased its three-year average absenteeism rate slightly from the 2003-2006 rate of 10.39 days to 10.74 days in 2006-2009. He outlined that despite this small increase the Council's absenteeism rate was well below the Northern Ireland 2008-2009 average, i.e. 5th in the league table. He advised that there was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2006-2009 period.

In response to a query from Councillor Cochrane in respect of the recent absenteeism discretionary policy, the Human Resource Manager confirmed that Managers had referred a number of cases to him for consideration under the discretionary policy, and he would report back to the Committee on this matter.

Councillor Chambers outlined that whilst the Committee was noting the report, the Council would not be complacent with regard to absenteeism.

Noted.

F&GP/2010/16 : CLAIM FOR PLANNED OVERTIME FOR AN OFFICER WITHIN EASTERN GROUP WHOSE SALARY IS ABOVE SPINAL COLUMN 28 (document attached)

The Human Resource Manager referred Members to a copy of a claim from an Officer within Eastern Group for overtime worked during the months of May, July, August and October 2009. He reported that as the Officer's salary was above spinal column 28, the request required Council approval

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to grant approval for planned overtime carried out by an Officer within Eastern Group whose salary was above spinal column 28, during the months of May, July, August and October 2009.

F&GP/2010/17 : STAFFING MATTERS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

(i) LPB/2009/182 : TECHNICAL STUDENT

The Director advised that the Leisure Park Board had granted approval for the employment of a Technical Student to provide invaluable support to the Technical Manager. Permission was sought to re-employ a replacement student for a further 12 months commencing in the summer, when the present student left. She advised that there was expenditure within the estimates which had been carried forward to fund his/her employment.

RESOLVED:- that, approval be granted for the employment of a technical student to provide invaluable support to the Technical Manager on the basis that there is sufficient expenditure within the estimates.

(II) LPB/2009/164 : CAREER BREAK – TECHNICAL MANAGER (Minute Ref No: LPB/2009/144 refers)

The General Manager advised that the Technical Manager had accrued 6 weeks TOIL and this matter was being referred to the next Finance & General Purposes Meeting for consideration.

Members agreed that, as this was an exceptional circumstances case, they would support the Technical Manager's request when it was tabled at F&GP.

Noted.

(iii) LPB/2009/170 : PLANT STAFF TOIL (Minute Ref No: LPB/2008/229 refers)

Members were advised that to facilitate training and to fit required training into Plant Staff shift schedules as efficiently and economically as possible therefore Plant Staff were compensated with TOIL for any additional required hours associated with training.

Due to shift patterns and the requirement to have 2 plant staff on site for the majority of the opening hours of the centre, any leave taken by Plant Staff (including TOIL) generally requires shift cover which results in overtime payments.

It was therefore proposed that the current levels of TOIL are paid to staff at their relevant flat rates, thereby avoiding overtime rates and Members referred to the details of plant staff TOIL and associated costs outlined in the Officer's report.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED:- That, authorisation be given for Plant Staff TOIL to be "cashed in" and paid to staff at "flat rate" in order to realise a saving.

(iv) GCB/2009/350 : OUT OF HOURS MAINTENANCE SUPPORT

The General Manager Leisure & Marketing reported that the Council's leisure facilities were busiest at evenings and weekends. He stated that the failure of a critical piece of equipment could result in the closure of part or all of a facility with the associated loss of income and reputation. He indicated that this was of particular concern when it affected tenants of the Council whose commercial businesses relied on the efficient maintenance of facilities.

The Manager advised that staff did not have the specialised knowledge to rectify problems and, wherever possible, procedures had been put in place to ensure that suppliers/contractors' contact numbers were available should an emergency arise. However it was noted that contractors did not always answer the call and the fee for attendance out of hours was high.

The General Manager stated that, although these problems could frequently be solved by the Council's Plant Engineer or technical staff, there were currently no arrangements in place for out of hours support by Council staff. He reported that at present technical staff were responding to out of hours emergency calls on a goodwill basis but that the number of calls was impacting on the personal time of staff and straining their loyalty. He referred to an instance when one member of staff had received 35 calls over a weekend.

The Manager pointed out that the Council's IT section and the Eastern Group already received "call out" allowances albeit at different rates and at a substantially lower rate than the private sector. He reported

that establishment of a rota system would mean that staff would be on call for a week at a time and they would only receive remuneration for their on-call period. He estimated the total annual cost of on-call cover.

The Director of Leisure Services pointed out that, as staff were responding to calls on a goodwill basis, the Council could not guarantee that there would always be a member of staff available and willing to attend. She stated that the maintenance of operations was a crucial element and that the lack of an out of hours emergency service placed the Council in a high risk position.

The General Manager advised that, if the Board were in agreement, he would arrange to put the cover in place as soon as possible and would include provision for it in the estimates for 2010/2011.

After discussion, it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Board approve in principle the introduction of an interim out of hours on-call arrangement to ensure the maintenance of operations at evenings and weekends and that this matter be referred to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.
- (c) that immediate arrangements be put in place to cover leisure facilities during the Christmas period and that these be in keeping with similar on-call arrangements operating in other Council sections.

Councillor Cochrane referred to the resolution in respect of Item (iii) above in relation to Out of Hours Maintenance Support and advised that the Board had not specified that this was an on-call payment but was an out of hours arrangement being put in place to ensure the maintenance of operations during the evenings and weekends. She added that she would arrange to have the Minute amended accordingly at the next Board meeting.

Councillor Bunting outlined that this was a Single Status issue and to ensure a consistent approach was being adopted throughout all Council departments, she proposed that matter be referred to the Single Status Working Group, and this was seconded by Councillor Chambers.

Councillor Bunting indicated that before Officers brought recommendations before the individual Boards, they should ensure that there were no policy implications.

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that, to ensure that a consistent approach was being adopted across all Council departments, that the Human Resource Manager refer the issue of payments to staff for out of hours/on-call arrangements to the Single Status Working Group.

F&GP/2010/18 : WORKING BEYOND RETIREMENT

The Human Resource Manager reported that a request had been received from two Officers within the Finance Department for a six-month extension beyond their normal dates of retirement.

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to approve a request from two Officers within the Finance Department for a six-month extension beyond their normal dates of retirement.

F&GP/2010/19 : REQUEST FOR A CAREER BREAK

The Human Resource Manager reported that the Grants Officer was due to return from maternity leave on 18 January, 2010 and had requested a three year career break for family reasons. He advised that the Economic Development Manager had confirmed that he could fill the vacancy with placement students at a reduced cost.

He outlined that in view of RPA, Officers were currently considering the implications of career breaks and he would report further on the matter at the next Committee meeting.

Following discussion, Members agreed that the Officer be granted a one-year career break.

In response to a query from Councillor Cochrane, the Human Resource Manager confirmed that the policy in relation to pay back of maternity leave would apply, should the Officer not return after the career break.

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to grant approval for a one-year career break to the Grants Officer, subject to the policy in relation to the pay back of maternity leave being applied, should the Officer not return to work after the career break.

F&GP/2010/20 : TRAINING REQUESTS

The Human Resource Manager reported that the following two training requests had been received:

- (i) Foreperson in Street Cleansing to attend the Frontline Development Programme.
- (ii) Cleaner/ Relief General Assistant in Leisure Services to attend the 4 day course in First Aid Training.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to approve the following training request:

- (i) Foreperson in Street Cleansing to attend the Frontline Development Programme.
- (ii) Cleaner/ Relief General Assistant in Leisure Services to attend the 4 day course in First Aid Training.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

F&GP/2010/21 : NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION BEING HELD IN THE SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL ON 18TH AND 19TH FEBRUARY 2010

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to grant approval for the Members represented on the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to attend the Annual Conference in Slieve Donard Hotel on 18th and 19th February 2010.

CHAIRMAN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Adopted by the Council this _____ day of
_____2010 with the exception of
Minute Nos. _____

MAYOR