

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

**SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**05 FEBRUARY 2008**

Minutes of special meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7.15 pm on the above date.

**PRESENT:**

Aldermen G Mullan, G Robinson and J Rankin. Councillors A Brolly, P Butcher, M Carten, B Chivers, L Cubitt, M Coyle (chair), J F McElhinney, C Ó hOisín, A Robinson and E Stevenson.

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Committee Clerk, Director of Support Services and the Chief Executive.

**APOLOGIES:**

Councillors M Donaghy and B Douglas.

**MINUTES:**

The minutes of meeting dated 16 January 2008 were approved and signed on the proposal of Councillor Chivers, seconded by Alderman Robinson subject to the following paragraph being added to bottom of page 1 following the recorded vote:

*A Councillor attempted to question the Chief Executive in relation to the debate which the Chair ruled as inadmissible as the vote had been taken on the issue. The Councillor persisted in his questioning and was engaged on the issue by another Councillor to such an extent that the Chairman adjourned the meeting for 10 minutes and reiterated his refusal to allow the issue to be debated further.*

**MATTERS ARISING:** None

**MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING:**

The minutes of Audit Committee meeting held 11 October 2007 was adopted on the proposal of Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Cubitt.

It was agreed that a letter would be forwarded to John Galbraith, Internal Auditor Helm Corporation on his retirement. Staff were praised for doing an excellent job as a substantial level of assurance (the highest possible) had been given by the Internal Auditor.

**PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS:**

The payment of accounts for the month of November 2007 were approved on the proposal of Councillor Cubitt, seconded by Councillor Carten. It was suggested that the CCTV system at Ballyquin Road be repaired to prevent another break in at the yard.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES:**

**IN COMMITTEE** on the proposal of Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Ó hOisín.

The Human Resources Report dated 5 February 2008 was adopted on the proposal of Alderman Robinson, seconded by Councillor Cubitt subject to the following:

**Absenteeism:** The Director of Support Services reported that the Council's year to date absence per full time equivalent employee was 9.13 days or (12.17 days annualised) against a target of 8.25 days (11 days annualised).

Reference was made to recent media publicity on absenteeism and it was stressed that there were genuine reasons for staff being off work. It was suggested that statistics should be put into the report on why staff were off, for example through a car accident. It was noted that although Council had policies in place to help minimise absenteeism, officers had indicated to the Auditor that it was unfair to put absenteeism figures together for three years as this distorted the yearly figures.

**Flexible Working Hours Scheme:** Members welcomed that the flexible working hours scheme has commenced on 1 February 2008 and that in house training had been carried out for nominated employees within departments who would update and amend the necessary clocking details and that further awareness training had been provided for all other employees.

**Health & Wellbeing:** As part of Councils work to promote health and wellbeing, Council in partnership with Foyle Health @ Work had brought two nurses into Council offices and to the Depot at Ballyquin Road to conduct health checks on blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. It was noted that a total of 83 health checks were carried out on 46% of the workforce.

Members were also informed that Council also launched a Step Challenge to encourage employees to incorporate more exercise into their daily lives and that a total of 71 employees had enrolled for the challenge which would last 6 weeks.

**General:** Councillor Cubitt referred to an matter between an officer and himself and how a potential case in relation to both parties had been resolved, without monetary compensation payable to either party.

He stated that at the Development Committee meeting on 14 December 2005, he had made reference to the officer concerned. He acknowledged that certain remarks made were based on unsubstantiated information and that he had now become aware of information which was not in his possession at that time. He retracted the particular remarks made.

He read a statement from the officers' legal advisors, which indicated that the remarks and actions of Councillor Cubitt were not motivated by sectarianism. He indicated that he would provide the Human Resources Manager with a copy of the statement. **OUT OF COMMITTEE** on the proposal of Councillor Cubitt, seconded by Alderman Robinson.

**ABSENTEEISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND COUNCILS 2006/07 –  
REPORT FROM THE CHIEF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUDITOR:**

The Director of Support Services presented a report on Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils 2006/07 from the Local Government Audit Office. He provided an overview of the main finding and recommendations as follows:

- the average absenteeism rate for Northern Ireland councils was 13.82 days, an increase from the previous year but lower than rates recorded for the years 2002 – 2005.
- absenteeism in NI Councils was marginally higher than the NI Civil Service but lower than NI Health Service rate.
- stress, depression, mental health and fatigue remains the largest cause of absenteeism and the Auditor recommended that councils be proactive in trying to reducing this.
- most councils have policies in place to reduce absenteeism, with Magherafelt being the exception with few policies in place but nonetheless, a low level of absenteeism.
- 19 out of the 26 councils had established corporate or departmental level targets for managing absenteeism rates.

In the discussion that followed, it was stressed that both elected representatives and officers should made staff feel appreciated and that there were lessons to be learned from Magherafelt as policies alone did not always ensure targets were met.

**ACCOUNTS FOR 9 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2007:**

The Director of Support Services presented the accounts for the 9 months ended 31 December 2007, which showed a surplus of £86k against a budgeted surplus of £136k. He highlighted the main variances from budgeted were as follows:

- Single Status job evaluation had resulted in an adverse variance to date of £33k
- Waste Disposal Gate Fees were £60k favourable
- Contribution to voluntary body was £74k adverse, this being a contribution to Feeny Community Association and was the final payment of an overall package of £500k to community/voluntary groups agreed in 2003/04
- Central Overheads were £46k over budget and this was due to increased computer related expenditure, the recruitment of an HR Manager and provision of staff uniforms
- Loan Charges were £63k favourable as no new loans had been taken out in the year to date and
- Building Control Income was £53k adverse due to a large number of applications being received in previous year as a result of a planning embargo in the countryside and a downturn in the property market.

The Director of Support Services explained in more detail the adverse/favourable variances for salaries and wages; other expenditure; loan charge; other income & grants and dealt with queries from Councillors on any information contained in the accounts, which was produced in the same format as the budget. He pointed out that account had been taken off any variances in producing the budget for the year 2008/09.

The Director of Support Services then indicated that a projection for the year ended 31 March 2008 had been carried out and that the best and worst case scenarios for the year were a surplus of £86k and a deficit of £102k depending on Single Status negotiations and the implementation date for same.

**TENDER REPORT ON COMPUTER HARDWARE/SOFTWARE PURCHASED:**

Retrospective approval was agreed for the following tenders for computer hardware/software:

- NCS Ltd in the sum of £4,950 + VAT for upgrade of network connection ports
- Bloxx in the sum of £3350 + Vat for device to monitor internet use and
- Campuatcenter in the sum of £1565 + Vat for network antivirus software.

**NORTHERN IRELAND FAIR RATES CAMPAIGN:**

The Director of Support Services tabled letter received from Raymond Farley, Chair of Northern Ireland Fair Rates Campaign regarding the announcement by the Finance Minister, Peter Robinson MLA, PM to freeze the regional rate for the next three years. It was noted that the letter requested Limavady Borough Council to maintain a similar domestic rate level to last year as it would be inappropriate to use the zero rise in regional rate to disguise any large district rate increases. Noted.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS: - None.**

- It was agreed that a Civic Reception would be held for St Canice's under 16 football club who had win the Derry Championship.
- Councillor Ó hOisín referred to the statement made by Councillor Cubitt earlier in the meeting and said if he had made his initial comments regarding the officer OUT OF COMMITTEE then his retraction should also have been made OUT OF COMMITTEE. He requested information on how much the incident had cost in terms of the Joynes report and officers time. Councillor Cubitt indicated that there had been no cost to Council.
- Reference was made to a newspaper article regarding home heating for the over 70's. It was pointed out that the article did not mention that this was only available to those on income supplement. Noted.

**NEXT MEETING: - 4 March 2008.**

**THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
(The meeting ended at 8.30 pm)**

**Chair: \_\_\_\_\_**