

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE LEGAL SERVICES UPDATE

AGENDA ITEM 10 – 15 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Head of Human Resources will update the Group following the report to this Committee in April when it was agreed that an interim progress report be brought to the Committee in September 2014 and that a thorough review then be undertaken in six months time regarding the effects of ongoing changes in this area.

Previous minute below, with updates in bold where available:

The Committee had before it a paper * setting out the Cabinet's response in relation to each of the Working Groups recommendations.

The Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development provided the Committee with an update on recent events in the Legal Services area:

- A new solicitor had been appointed to fill a gap resulting from an imminent retirement. She would start on 1 June 2014 and would have a hand over period of one month with the member of staff retiring. She had a particular expertise in Planning and was very experienced in managing staff;

Johanna Ayres commenced employment with the Council as stated on the 1st June, Johanna is now attending Planning meetings and has taken on the management of two members of the legal team.

- In addition to this a member of staff had been employed on a temporary three month basis to deal with the backlog of Section 106's as a result of the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy;

This individual is still with the Council and is now covering the maternity leave of a member of the legal team.

- Service Level Agreements would be drawn up with the Town Councils;

This is in the process of being done.

- It had been proposed to employ somebody for six months to scan all of the records in the deeds room thereby freeing up a lot of space and holding records electronically;

We have had initial discussions regarding the use of DMS to store some of the documentation but the process is still in its very early stages, and initially we are looking at going through the files to establish the document types so that we can begin looking at how each file (and subsequent deed) would be stored. Once we have gone through this process we can then look to take the matter further.

It was hoped that there would be a significant improvement in this service area within the next six months as a result of these changes.

Discussion took place regarding the decision to remove the photocopier which had once been in the Legal Services room. It was felt that its relocation to a position some distance

away had led to highly paid staff having to spend long periods of time at the copier since it was not possible to leave confidential documents in the machine and return to their desks whilst the copying took place. This had led to a great deal of frustration within the Legal Services team and had prevented them from using their time efficiently. A business case had been made by the Head of Human Resources to return the copier to its original location but this had not been supported.

Members expressed concern that this issue had still not been resolved and questioned who had made the decisions in relation to the copier especially given that it had originally been purchased out of the Legal Services budget. It was felt that this was having a negative impact upon the ability of the team to function efficiently.

RECOMMENDED to full Council that the Legal Services photocopier be returned to their office as a matter of urgency.

(Proposed by Cllr T W Snow and seconded by Cllr N A Way)

It was also AGREED that an interim progress report be brought to the Committee in September 2014 and that a more thorough review be undertaken in six month's time regarding the effects of on-going changes in this area.