

REPORT OF CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

(Meeting Held 15 June 1999)

1. CASHIERING AND INFORMATION SERVICES AT RINGWOOD PUBLIC OFFICES (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 10).

Following the resignation of a part-time Cashier based at Ringwood, the provision of Cashiering and Information Services at that location has been reviewed. Having regard to the relatively low number of transactions conducted at the Public Offices, the Committee has supported the amalgamation of the Cashiering and Information Services functions. It is anticipated that this will provide a better customer service through multi-functional working. A similar arrangement at Appletree Court has already been successfully introduced.

The amalgamation of the service would achieve ongoing revenue savings of £8,500 per annum, through the deletion of half a post, in a full financial year.

To achieve the amalgamation of the services, the current cash office would have to be moved alongside the Information Office and that area made secure. The estimated cost of the work, based on the lowest quotation received, is £8,000. The costs reflect the specialised works that will have to be undertaken to ensure employee safety when handling cash. The payback period will be relatively short. The cost involved in the alterations could be met from amounts provided for planned preventative maintenance at Appletree Court and the Town Hall for which no specific projects have been identified.

The Committee has therefore authorised the allocation of an amount of £8,000 from the Capital Estimates for the necessary building works.

2. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FACILITIES FOR MEMBERS (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 13).

The Committee has considered the extension of Information Technology (I.T.) facilities to members. The report before the Committee followed the successful completion of the pilot project of 10 members in 1998/99 and the decision by the previous Council that the leaders of the political groups make specific recommendations to the Central Services Committee following the District Council elections as to who should be included in the extended provision of I.T. facilities.

The Committee has been informed that 31 additional Members have expressed a wish to use I.T. facilities. This demand could not be met without the authorisation of additional expenditure. In order to avoid this, it has been agreed that I.T. facilities will be provided in two phases. The first phase will include all Programme Committee Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Shadow Chairmen and the leaders of the political groups. The second phase would extend I.T. facilities to all members requiring them.

The Committee appreciates that a number of members, particularly those with their own PCs and expertise in I.T., will be disappointed not to be connected to the Council's Intranet and e-mail facilities but considers that to avoid unbudgeted expenditure it is important to provide the facilities in phases. As not all Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen will require the use of computer facilities, it has been agreed that the leaders of the political groups should identify which of their Members should qualify for any "spare" facilities in the first phase. Each member with the I.T. facilities will receive a laptop computer and printer, with the Council providing an additional telephone line and call charges for that line. Training will be provided.

The Committee also considered it reasonable to provide those Members who do not receive I.T. facilities with a fax/answer phone machine. These machines will be provided on the understanding that any additional line rental and call costs are borne by the member concerned.

The cost of providing the I.T. facilities to members in the first phase will be approximately £29,800. This will be met from the I.T. Work Programme. In addition, an amount of £14,000 will be required for telephone installation and call charges as well as training. Provision for this amount has been made in the budget.

No budget provision exists for additional fax/answer phone machines and the cost involved cannot be estimated until it is known how many Members wish to take up the facilities. It is, however, hoped that the total cost could be contained within the overall members' budget.

3. ANNUAL EMPLOYEE TRAINING REPORT (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO. 15).

The Committee has reviewed training and development of the Council's employees undertaken during 1998/99 and proposed training and development for 1999/2000.

The Committee has noted that the Training and Development Strategy entitled "Developing Together" is a key part of the Council's approach to meeting its corporate aims. The Training and Development Strategy particularly focuses on the continuous development of New Forest District Council as an organisation of excellence.

The Strategy is designed to promote achievement of a number of key objectives, including attracting and retaining a skilled, flexible and efficient workforce. Integral to the process is the Performance and Development Interview (PDI), which is used to assist in ensuring that all employees have their training and development needs identified and programmes agreed for achieving individual and business unit objectives. A full performance and development interview is held once a year with a minimum requirement for follow up interviews every three months. These quarterly interviews are targeted at progress with training and personal development.

The Committee has noted that with the continuing development in I.T., training in this area continued to be a priority for many employees.

There has also been significant activity in the areas of communications training and training of new Councillors. The levels of activity have increased significantly from 1997/98 as a result of the implementation of the Training and Development Strategy and the increasingly effective contribution made by Training Co-ordinators. Although expenditure on training in the past year in some Directorates reduced slightly when compared with the previous year (1997/98), the average spent per employee in 1997/98 was unusually high. Training now being undertaken was needs based, as identified through the PDI process. A number of priorities for Directorates have been identified and these will be addressed in the coming year.

Full copies of the report are available from the Personnel Division.

4. LYNDHURST AND MILFORD ON SEA PARISH COUNCILS – REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF MEMBERS (REPORT H) (MINUTE NO. 16).

Lyndhurst and Milford on Sea Parish Councils have requested a reduction in the numbers of their Parish Councillors. Lyndhurst at present comprises 15 members and Milford on Sea 12. At the quadrennial election on 6 May, 11 prospective Councillors were nominated for Lyndhurst and 8 for Milford on Sea. These candidates were elected without contest.

Both Parish Councils have sought to co-opt suitable persons to fill the vacancies. Lyndhurst has co-opted one additional Member and Milford on Sea two. As both Parish Councils see little likelihood of suitable persons being found for the remaining vacancies, they have asked for the numbers on the Councils to be reduced to 12 and 10 respectively.

Both Parish Councils are larger than the average for their electorate and the Committee recommends that their numbers be reduced, as requested.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That in accordance with the provisions of Section 17(2) of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, the number of Parish Councillors on the following Parish Councils be reduced as follows with immediate effect:**

Lyndhurst	-	from 15 to 12
Milford on Sea	-	from 12 to 10

- (b) That the District Council does not exercise its powers under the Local Government Act 1972 to seek to appoint Members to serve on Lyndhurst or Milford on Sea Parish Councils or to hold elections to fill the vacancies on the Parish Councils.**

Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN