

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY 1 AUGUST 2008

Present: Councillor A Burnip (Chair)
Councillors Mrs M Baird, A Collinson,
J Haggan and D Maddison

Apology: Councillor M Nicholls

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 15 July 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 22 July 2008 together with those of the **SPECIAL MEETINGS** held on 25 June and 8 July 2008, copies of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

3 **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4 **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Chair advised that there were no issues considered at the Scrutiny Management Board meeting held on 28 July 2008 which fell within the remit of this Committee.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – PERSONNEL SERVICES UNIT**

Consideration was given to a briefing note prepared by the Head of Personnel which gave details of performance and achievements in the Personnel Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

With regard to the 2008/09 Service Plan R Gott highlighted the following achievements.

Members were advised that during 2007 the Council had initiated shared services with Town/Parish Councils. The unit offered personnel and health and safety services for a fixed annual fee. The initial year had proved a success and take up for the second year had been good.

Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report which gave details of the corporate sickness absence rates from 2000/01 to 2007/08. In 2000/01 the sickness absence rate was 12.5 days per employee. Performance during 2005/06 was 8.7 and in 2006/07 it was 8.5 which had almost achieved top quartile. In 2007/08 it increased to 9.3 days which was disappointing but still good.

It was explained that regular monitoring of sickness was undertaken. In addition the Chief Executive wrote annually to employees who had achieved a full year with no sickness.

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 1 August 2008

This year out of 650 employees 195 achieved this. Individual league tables were also produced to allow units to see where they stood in relation to sickness absence.

The Council had been set a Government target to reduce the number of reportable accidents at work by 30% by 2010. To date this target had been surpassed and the initial figure of 27.5 accidents per 1,000 employees had been reduced to 18.7 in 2007/08. The Council's initial target for 2009/10 had been 19.3

In order to reduce costs e-recruitment was introduced. All vacancies were now advertised on the Council's website and an application for employment could be downloaded direct from the website. Savings related to postage were difficult to quantify as staff turnover was low.

With regard to apprentice recruitment the authority had recruited business administration apprentices for the first time in 2006 and then again in 2007. There would be a further intake of 3 business administration apprentices in September of this year. All of the existing apprentices had gained full time employment either with the Council or elsewhere. The apprentice scheme had been a success and it was hoped that it would continue with the new Council.

Members were advised that employee turnover was very low. Turnover was only 5% which was low compared to the national average of 10 to 11%.

With regard to health and safety Members were advised of a fatal accident at York City Council, involving an employee mowing on steep slopes, which had resulted in the City Council being prosecuted. A lot of pro active work had been completed by the District of Easington in this area. This included carrying out the appropriate risk assessments and purchasing specialist machinery for this type of work.

R Gott reported that the corporate sickness rate had increased slightly on the previous two years although performance was still good. With LGR there was always the potential for increased sickness as employees were worried and concerned about the future and transition to the new unitary authority.

Difficulties being experienced in recruitment could be attributed to LGR and the uncertainty it created which was unlikely to improve before 1 April 2009.

Members were advised that due to other priorities there had been slippage on a number of areas of work. The production of a Workforce Plan was no longer relevant due to LGR and had been shelved.

The Personnel unit would be issuing new Statements of Particulars to all employees, this was basically a contract of employment, which set out employee's terms and conditions of service. This would need to be done before the transfer to the new unitary council. Most staff would be transferred under TUPE arrangements which did provide some reassurance.

R Gott outlined areas of work the unit was involved in regarding LGR. Each of the Councils had their own policies and procedures and it was a huge exercise to try and harmonise the terms and conditions across the board. At this stage it was a case of gathering and sharing information.

With regard to recruitment all of the Councils had agreed to keep positions open for staff that might be displaced to avoid possible compulsory redundancies, this was being

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 1 August 2008

achieved through acting up arrangements, secondments and the placing of job adverts in a common “job spot” which was open to employees of the eight councils.

The Trade Union Forum was heavily involved in the shaping of the new authority. It was pointed out that the Tripartite working arrangements currently in place at Easington were an example of best practice and would hopefully be adopted by the new unitary.

Members were advised that a new Chief Executive had been appointed and would take up his post in September however he had already produced a draft structure which was currently out to consultation.

With regard to job evaluation the unit were in the process of gathering baseline information to harmonise the scheme across the board.

Draft guidance had been prepared for managers regarding ‘Business as usual’ staffing matters that were to be followed between now and 1 April 2009.

The Council would be adopting a harmonised Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy Policy early in September. The same scheme would also be adopted by the other councils.

The authority had a Management of Change Policy which set out the process for managing change and the protection arrangements that were in place for employees. A draft harmonised policy had been produced and consultation was underway with the Trade Unions.

A Payroll Sub Stream had been established as a new payroll system would need to be up and running for the new council on 1 April 2009. A Health & Safety Sub Stream had also been established to look at how health and safety would be delivered across the county.

The Chair queried the shared services offered to Town/Parish Councils and asked if this would continue and transfer to the new authority. R Gott hoped that it would be viewed as best practice and transferred. This was an important service to the Town/Parish Councils so the issue would be flagged up with the Joint Implementation Team at the appropriate time.

Councillor J Haggan pointed out the difficulties of harmonising everything and queried the progress that had been made. R Gott explained that it was going as well as could be expected. Each work stream had a number of “must do’s” that had to be in place by 1 April 2009. There was also a range of other issues that it would be nice to have in place by vesting day but which may not be achievable.

The Chair thanked R Gott for his attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.