

Durham County Council

Human Resources Committee

At a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on **Friday 15 June 2007** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor D Coates in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors Armstrong, Davies, Douthwaite, Ebbatson, N C Foster, Henderson, Iveson, Meir, O'Donnell, Priestley, Simmons, Stradling and Williams.

Other Members:

Councillors Barker, Knox and Walker.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell and Bowman.

A1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 March 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2007 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Stress Management Policy and Action Plan

The Committee considered and commented on a report from the Head of Human Resources seeking support to role out and implement the new Stress Management Policy and Action Plan across the County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chairman informed the Committee that a joint exercise with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look at the Policy implementation and monitoring of its progress was to be conducted, and two Members were invited to participate in a small working group, in addition to the Chairman of this Committee.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the Securing Health Together national strategy, particularly a reduction in the target by 30% of the number of working days lost due to work-related ill health and for employees off work due to ill health or disability to be made aware of opportunities for rehabilitation back into work as early as possible, and were asked to put into

context that if the stigma of stress related illness was removed, this percentage might increase but it did not mean that the new Policy was not working.

In response to a query about the effect the measures have on staff, the Head of Human Resources confirmed that the results from staff surveys were usually a good indicator of the views of staff about sickness absence and the effect this had on them if a colleague is absent and their workload transferred.

Resolved:

That the recommendation contained within the report be approved.

A3 Sickness Absence: Quarterly Performance Monitoring

The Committee considered and commented on a report from the Head of Human Resources on Sickness Absence: Quarterly Performance Monitoring (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chairman referred to paragraph 8 of the report stating targets and commented that these seemed to be challenging but were they achievable. The Head of Human Resources responded that the County Council should not be complacent and that stretched targets helped to ensure progress therefore they were considered achievable.

The Committee expressed concern about the significant increase in the figures from Environment Services and in particular why no indication had been given to the reasons why this had occurred. The Committee agreed that it would have been useful to have a representative from the Service in attendance to give further details.

The Members of the Committee then went on to debate the issue of developing a new policy whereby employees should not be remunerated for short-term absences unless adequate evidence is produced to substantiate the absence. The Chairman advised the Committee that this would have to be done in consultation with the Trade Unions and that it would be difficult to implement. The Committee requested however that this suggestion should be given careful consideration.

A Member of the Committee also remarked that in relation to schools it was the responsibility of the governing body to implement the sickness absence procedures and as the County Council had little input or control with this what action could be taken to positively impact on their figures.

The Committee considered a suggestion that the best and least performing schools could be compared and incidences of best practice introduced in the least performing ones.

The Committee expressed the view that sickness absence should be highlighted at school governor meetings and asked that the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services' representative ensure that this subject was being discussed and monitored within schools.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That representatives from services, which show a marked increase or decrease in sickness absence, are invited to future meetings to explain why this has occurred and how the County Council can learn from it.

A4 Early Retirement Scheme – Review of Restriction on Added Years

The Committee considered a joint report from the County Treasurer and Head of Human Resources about a review of one of the provisions of the Early Retirement Scheme, namely a proposal that in the circumstances of early retirement on the grounds of redundancy or efficiency, compensatory added years should be restricted so that, when accrued service is taken together with added years, the total service is capped at 40 years as a maximum (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee discussed at length the positive and negative aspects of capping total service at 40 years and the flexibility that the Early Retirement Scheme currently affords so that each early retirement application is considered on its own merits

Resolved:

- (i) That the Early Retirement Scheme remains unchanged; and
- (ii) That applicants are made aware of the Early Retirement Sub-Committee's discretionary powers to award or not award up to the maximum of four added years, and that each case will be decided on its own merits.

Signed by Councillor.....
Chairman of the meeting held on 10 August 2007