

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**At a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Friday 10 August 2007 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor D Coates** in the Chair

**Members of the Committee:**

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

**Other Members:**

Councillors Barker and Knox.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong, Bell, R Carr, Nicholls, Tennant, Vasey and Walker.

**A1 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2007**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2007 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**A2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Ebbatson declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item A3 Employee Volunteering Scheme in his role as Chairman of a Volunteer Centre.

**A3 Employee Volunteering Scheme**

The Committee considered a joint report of the Head of Human Resources and the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services providing an overview of the Employee Volunteering Scheme currently being prepared for Durham County Council (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that Employee Volunteering Schemes are based around the employer allowing staff paid time to volunteer and although originally instigated by the private sector there are now a number of schemes in the public sector with West Sussex, Surrey and Buckinghamshire operating schemes.

A Working Group of Durham County Council Officers and staff representing the Volunteer Centres in County Durham has been carrying out initial work with a report taken to Cabinet on the 25 January 2007. The report recommended the release of staff as volunteers for up to 20 hours per annum to support voluntary projects in County Durham, with the scheme having a 12 month pilot period.

A member of the Committee expressed concern about the possible financial cost to the authority of such a scheme should large numbers of staff wish to participate.

It was stressed that each application to participate in the scheme would involve a decision on the part of management as to whether it was in the 'interest of the Authority' that the application be approved, if not appropriate then the application would not be allowed.

In relation to the insurance aspect members expressed concern that employees whilst undertaking voluntary activities would not be covered by the Durham County Council insurance policy.

It was confirmed that the Durham County Council Insurers would not provide cover as there was no control over the workplace area or what activities the volunteers would undertake however the Head of Human Resources commented that she would continue to pursue this issue.

It was suggested by a member of the Committee that there may be a need when looking at placements to ensure that the organisation has public liability insurance and/or that the body complies with the Standards on Volunteering.

With reference to the proposed scheme it was remarked by another member of the Committee that such a scheme would provide an opportunity for staff to develop their skills by getting involved in local communities and look at service delivery from a different perspective. It was emphasised by the member that the benefits of such a scheme will far outweigh the costs.

Clarification was requested as to whether the scheme would be extended to include staff working in schools.

It was confirmed that schools would be informed of the existence of the scheme however it would be up to the individual school as to whether they adopted the policy.

With reference to feedback from other Authorities who have adopted the scheme it was confirmed that the comments had been positive, in addition it was confirmed that a review of the policy will be undertaken after six months of operation.

It was emphasised that the report is an interim report with the final report being considered by members in the near future which will include a system of monitoring.

In relation to the voluntary projects it was confirmed that a criteria will be used to ensure that employees volunteer for schemes from which they will benefit; that they are projects with a registered charity or ensure they have a charitable purpose.

It was suggested that it may be appropriate for the organisations who require volunteers to make applications to the scheme.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

**A4    Sickness Absence: Quarterly Performance Monitoring**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Human Resources detailing the performance of the Council and of individual services in relation to sickness absence during the quarter 1 April to 30 June 2007 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that during the quarter sickness absence levels had decreased and for the twelve months to 30 June 2007, based on the requirements of BVPI 12, there was a welcome decrease to 9.58 days lost per Council FTE employee which continues the downward trend of the past 6 months.

In addition it was highlighted that the Resource Link Payroll/HR Monitoring System should generate more consistent data across the Council, but the initial effect on the overall statistics is still a little uncertain at this stage.

With reference to the previous meeting of the Human Resources Committee when members agreed that it would be useful to have representatives from Services in attendance to give details of the increases and decreases in sickness absence figures, members expressed disappointment that no officers were present at this meeting to provide further information and requested that officers attend future meetings.

Clarification was requested as to whether the County Council has a standard Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure which was applied across all services and schools.

It was confirmed that the physical collation of sickness absence data is done differently by various services within the Authority, however the new payroll system will remove any anomalies in data collection. With reference to the schools they have the option of adopting the new County Council Sickness Absence Policy however it was emphasised that many will opt to use the old policy or in some instances their own policy.

With reference to Industrial Injuries data, clarification was requested by members as to where this data appears in the information provided to members, how many days are lost and what action is taken on the part of the Authority to prevent this category of injury from occurring.

The Chairman of Human Resources informed members that this data is discussed at length at meetings of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee. In addition each service has a Health and Safety Committee which consider the appropriate data for that particular service and an invitation was given by the Chairman of Human Resources Committee to members to attend and participate in these meetings.

It was confirmed that data in relation to industrial injuries will be provided to members at future meetings of the Human Resources Committee.

**Resolved:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That representatives from services which show a marked increase or decrease in sickness absence rates be invited to future meetings to explain why this has occurred.
3. That industrial injuries data be provided at future meetings of the Human Resources Committee.