

Durham County Council

Human Resources Committee

At a Meeting of the **Human Resources Committee** held at County Hall, Durham on **Friday 16th November 2007** at **10 am**.

Present:

Councillor D Coates in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Armstrong, Bell, C Carr, Davies, Martin, Robinson, Shuttleworth, Simmons, Stradling, Walker and Williams.

Apologies were received from Councillors Cordon, Lethbridge, Magee and Tennant.

A1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 10th August 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 August 2007 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Early Retirement Scheme

The Committee considered the joint report of the County Treasurer, Acting Director of Corporate Services and Head of Human Resources to consider ways in which the Early Retirement Sub-Committee can exercise its discretion with regard to early retirement applications and establish guidelines with regard to discretions available to the Sub-Committee in accordance with statutory powers (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed of the principles involved in administering the Early Retirement Scheme in that each case is dealt with by the Early Retirement Sub-Committee on its individual merits with due regard being given to achieving the most efficient outcome for the County Council. Discretionary powers available were outlined and guidance was given as to how Members should exercise their discretionary powers and the criteria which should be taken into account. Relevant factors include decisions should not be

discriminatory in any way. The operational needs of the service, costs of the proposal and financial savings arising from the proposal should be taken into account also.

In response to a request from Councillor Walker that Appendix 2 of the report should include the three options detailed in paragraph 10, it was confirmed that the appendix will be amended to include the three options available to Members when considering compassionate grounds cases.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted, subject to the proposed amendments to Appendix 2 and that the Guidelines on the exercise of the discretion available to the Early Retirement Sub-Committee be accepted in principle.
2. That future reports to the Early Retirement Sub-Committee include the considerations for Members to take into account as specified in paragraph 13.

A3 Sickness Absence

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Human Resources detailing the performance of the Council and individual services on sickness absence during the quarter 1 July 2007 to 30 September 2007 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that during the quarter, sickness absence levels had increased very slightly and for the twelve months to 30 September 2007, based on the requirements of BVP1 12, there was a slight increase to 9.65 days lost per Council FTE employee, however this figure was below the target figure of 9.75 days. During the quarter, four out of the seven services had recorded an increase in their sickness absence figures and individual service figures showed a variation on previous trends which could be due, in part, to movement of staff which took place during the quarter. Durham's performance was shown as positive when considered from a geographic perspective.

The Chairman expressed concern that reduction of sickness absence levels seems to have reached a plateau.

In the ensuing discussion it was suggested by Councillor Robinson that it would be useful to have more specific figures on long-term absences; for example the number of sickness absences for three months, six months etc. in order to evaluate how these absences impact on services.

Members commented on the variations in the service figures and suggested that it would be useful to have a representative from Adult and Community Services to give further information on the increase in the days lost per

employee from 3.51 to 4.37 days. The reason for the increase related to increased mental health sickness absence.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A4 Pilot Employee Volunteering Scheme

The Committee considered the joint report of the Head of Human Resources and the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services seeking approval for the introduction of a pilot employee volunteering scheme for a 12 month period from January 2008 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that Cabinet had approved the scheme in principle in January 2007. The scheme will enable staff to seek up to 20 hours of paid leave per annum to support voluntary projects in County Durham. Employees seeking to get involved in the scheme may be granted special leave of up to 20 paid hours per annum. Employees are encouraged to at least match the commitment of 20 hours with a similar period of voluntary work directly from their own time. A launch is planned for 18 January 2008.

In the ensuing discussion, Councillor Bell suggested that page 7 of the 'Draft Policy, Procedure and Toolkit' be amended to reflect that the exact amount of time will be agreed in consultation with line managers, rather than the full 20 hours having to be taken as the norm.

Resolved:

That the Pilot Employee Volunteering Scheme be approved.

B5 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of the Schedule 12A to the said Act.

B6 Single Status

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Human Resources providing an update on the Single Status project, making recommendations which will help Durham County Council meet its objectives under the Single Status Agreement (for copy see file of Minutes).

The report recommended a proposal is made to the Trade Unions to implement a phased approach for former manual employees only. In view of the complexity of the issues and the need to engage in negotiation, the report recommended that the work should be facilitated by the establishment of a Human Resources Single Status Sub-Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and the Recommendations contained therein be approved.