

Durham County Council

Human Resources Committee

At a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held at Co. Hall, Durham on **Friday 14 March 2008** at 10 am.

Present:

Councillor D Coates in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors: Armstrong, Bell, Davies, Douthwaite, Henderson, Shuttleworth, Simmons and Wright

Other Members:

Councillors Chapman, Knox, Pendlebury and Pye

Apologies were received from Councillors Ebbatson and Williams

A1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2007 and 19 December 2007

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 16 November 2007 and 19 December 2007 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Sickness Absence

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Human Resources detailing the performance of the Council and individual services on sickness absence during the quarter 1 October 2007 – 31 December 2007 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that during the quarter, sickness absence levels, based on the requirements of BVPI12 had decreased to 9.23 days lost per County Council FTE employee. The Head of Human Resources informed the Committee that this figure was the best performance since the end of 2001 when the rate stood at 9.30 days per FTE, adding that although this was a welcome improvement, the current position should be treated with caution. The Resource Link Payroll / Human Resources monitoring system had been utilised in the collation of the data and it is anticipated that this development should generate more consistent data across the Council. Information contained within the report demonstrated that the County Council's

performance from a regional perspective was favourable, having the second best sickness rate of Unitary and County Authorities in the North East.

A Member of the Committee referred to paragraph 14 which stated that a project underway in the Occupational Health Service has demonstrated that levels of deprivation have a significant impact on the sickness rate of a Local Authority. The Committee agreed that further information would be useful as to how this link is established, given that the figure for Easington, which could be described as one of the most deprived areas of County Durham, is shown to have one of the lowest numbers of days lost per FTE in the table shown at Figure 4 on page 3 of the Report.

The Committee commented that, despite the improvement, sickness absence levels were still too high and further steps must be taken to address this. In response, the Chairman of the Committee referred to paragraph 18 of the Report which states that the Audit Commission has been invited to review the arrangements for the management of sickness absence in Durham and Teesside. The study aims to establish methods that are working well and identify areas for development, examining the approaches which lead to reductions in sickness absence levels and the background to increases in sickness absence levels.

The Head of Support Services, Children and Young People's Services referred to the recent changes in Adult and Community Services and Children and Young People's Services, saying that the restructures of these services will have had a major impact emphasising the importance for managers to maintain staff morale, motivation and attendance at such times.

A Member of the Committee referred to paragraph 21 and emphasised the importance of all Chief Officers cascading the stress management policy at all management team meetings within services.

The Head of Human Resources informed Members that an external Occupational Health Specialist has been invited to look into additional employee support mechanisms that could be put in place.

Resolved:

That the Report be noted.

A3 Review of Pilot Flexible Working Hours Scheme in County Durham

The Committee considered a Report of the Head of Human Resources to determine if an extraordinary meeting of the Human Resources Committee is required to be scheduled for the end of April 2008 to further consider the Pilot Flexible Working Hours Policy in Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

With reference to Minute No. A1 of the Minutes dated 19 December 2007 which agreed the extension of the Pilot Scheme to February 2008, further assessments have taken place and whilst it is difficult to gather qualitative data; no adverse effects on service delivery have been reported.

A comparison of external factors of Durham County Council's pilot scheme with some of the schemes run by the District Councils has been undertaken. The Head of Human Resources added that it would appear that the Local Government Review process will require future consideration of flexitime principles across the eight councils.

In response to a Member of the Committee as to how time is recorded, the Head of Human Resources informed that time is recorded on an electronic, IT based system and that no entry-door method of time-recording is operated at present. The Member replied that the Council should be investigating the different methods employed by the district councils to ensure that the most efficient method of time-recording is in place for the future.

The Head of Support Services, Children and Young People's Services commented that Signing-In books which are monitored by Team Leaders provide the additional aspect of peer-monitoring.

Resolved:

That the Pilot Flexible Working Hours Scheme should continue, pending a final decision being made at a future point.

A4: Recruitment Protocol – Interim Appointment Arrangements

The Committee considered a Report of the Head of Human Resources providing an update on the immediate implications in respect to the introduction of a recruitment protocol within the eight Council's of County Durham in light of Local Government Review. This recruitment protocol will be applied to all eight affected Councils leading up to vesting day (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the Report be noted.