

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Human Resources Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 21 July 2016 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor J Hillary (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors S Iveson (Vice-Chairman), J Armstrong, J Blakey, A Bonner, J Brown, J Clark, D Hicks, N Martin, S Morrison, J Robinson, J Shuttleworth and A Surtees

Also Present:

J Kemp – Human Resources Advice and Support Manager

S Urwin – Senior HR Officer (Pensions)

J Walt – HR Business Lead, Children and Adults Services

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Henig, B Moir, R Ormerod and K Shaw.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor N Martin substituted for Councillor R Ormerod.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor S Iveson declared an interest in item 12 on the Agenda as the applicant was a friend of the family. The Member left the meeting during the consideration of the application.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2016 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

Matter Arising Restructure/Redundancy Process

J Kemp, Human Resources Advice and Support Manager provided Members with information regarding the consultation process carried out by the Authority when a Service was required to carry out a restructure exercise. Members were also informed of the statutory redundancy consultation procedure.

Members considered that the information was useful and asked the Officer to explore the possibility of including the process on the Council's intranet.

Resolved:

That the information given be noted.

5 Update on the Health and Safety Service

K Lough, Occupational Health and Safety Manager was in attendance to give an update on the Health and Safety Service as at the end of year 2015/16.

The Officer informed Members that end of year statistics showed a reduction in RIDDOR reportable accidents by 13% and in the total number of accidents by 4.8%. It was pleasing to report that days lost had also reduced which could be attributed to the work undertaken by the Team with the Occupational Health Service to introduce self-referral or Manager referral to services such as physiotherapy sessions. Councillor Clark made the point that self-referral may be more difficult for those employees without access to a computer yet who may also be more likely to require access to physiotherapy because of the physical nature of their work. K Lough advised that this had been addressed through working with Managers of at-risk groups. Following a further question from Councillor Robinson, Members were informed that GP referral was not necessary.

In response to a question from Councillor Blakey, K Lough advised of work to be undertaken with Public Health in 2016/17 to implement mental health and wellbeing interventions which would include training to help Managers recognise signs of mental health problems.

The Chairman considered that the reduction in accidents was commendable and asked about the recording of 'near-misses' which could provide useful information for the prevention of accidents in future. K Lough acknowledged this and advised that figures had shown an increase in the number of 'near misses' which may be due to the improved accident reporting process. The Team would continue to encourage employees to report 'near misses'.

In the year almost 100 proactive audit and inspections had been carried out with in excess of 240 accident investigations. Over 4400 employees had received training in areas such as noise and asbestos management, and workplace transport improvements had been made at depots. 50% of mining legacy inspections had been completed and a corporate lone working system had been introduced.

A key highlight for the year was the completion of Phase 1 of work on open water safety. Phase 2 would be completed during 2016-2017 with the development of education and awareness initiatives throughout the year. He informed Members of the recently launched Open Water Safety Campaign, a multi-agency collaboration which in excess of 250,000 people had already viewed, and which other local authorities had expressed an interest in using in their areas. 3500 schoolchildren had attended special assemblies about the campaign and it had been shortlisted for the Public Sector Campaign awards.

For 2016-2017 the Team would be drafting a new Health and Safety Strategy to reflect changes to Corporate Management Team. Scheduled risk based proactive audits and inspections would continue, as would the review of fire related risks within Council and multi-occupied premises, and the mining legacy inspection programme.

Resolved:

That the information given be noted.

6 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

7 Applications for Early Retirement and/or Voluntary Redundancy for Council Employees

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Corporate Director Children and Adults Services and the Human Resources Advice and Support Manager (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved that:

- a) The cases of Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy be noted and agreed with effect from the dates specified in the report;
- b) the case of Compulsory Redundancy and Early Retirement be noted with effect from the date specified in the report.

8 Application for Early Release of Pension Benefits on Compassionate Grounds from a former Employee of Resources

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Corporate Director Resources and the Human Resources Advice and Support Manager (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members discussed the application at length, and in response to a question from Councillor Armstrong the Committee was informed that the recommendation in the report was determined by the cost to the authority. In reaching their decision Members determined the application based on the circumstances of the individual in line with the criteria set out in the report.

Following discussion it was **Resolved:**

That in view of the individual's circumstances the application for the early release of pension benefits on compassionate grounds be granted with no reductions (option 6(b) in the report).

9 Application for Early Release of Pension Benefits on Compassionate Grounds from a Former Employee of Neighbourhood Services

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and the Human Resources Advice and Support Manager (for copy see file of Minutes).

In discussing the application Members noted that total household income and outgoings had been omitted from the form. The Committee considered that the application should be deferred to give the applicant the opportunity to provide further information.

Resolved:

That the application be deferred.

10 Application for Early Release of Pension Benefits on Compassionate Grounds from a Former Employee of Neighbourhood Services

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and the Human Resources Advice and Support Manager (for copy see file of Minutes).

In discussing the application Members considered that in view of the applicant's circumstances, the request should be looked upon favourably. It was also suggested that the applicant be advised to contact Welfare rights for advice.

Resolved:

That the application for the early release of pension benefits be granted on compassionate grounds with no reductions (option 6(b) in the report).

Councillor S Iveson left the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

11 Application for Early Release of Pension Benefits on Compassionate Grounds from a Former Employee of Children and Adults Services

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Corporate Director Children and Adults Services and the Human Resources Advice and Support Manager (for copy see file of Minutes).

In discussing the application Members carefully considered the financial situation of the applicant and suggested that she be advised to contact Welfare Rights.

Members also considered the impact of granting the request with or without reductions and took into account the guidance for determining applications outlined in paragraph 7 in the report.

Following discussion it was **Resolved:**

That the application be refused (option 6(a) in the report).

12 Matter Arising from the Minutes

At the last meeting of the Committee Members had asked for additional information regarding the recruitment and retention of staff within the Social Care Service in Children and Adults Services.

J Walt, HR Business Lead, Children and Adults Services provided Members with details of the current position in Durham and of ongoing work in the Service.

Resolved:

That the information given be noted.