

EMPLOYEES CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

10.00 am, Monday, 17 June, 2013

- Present:-** Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair
- Councillors Stubbs, Sweeney, Taylor.J and Turner
- Employee representatives:-** Paul Pickerill (GMB/Apex) (Employees’ Side Chair), Phil Bartels (GMB/Apex), Jackie Cicatello (Unison), Andy Cowden (GMB/Apex), Kim Graham (Unison) and Gary Morgan (GMB/Apex)
- In attendance:-** Councillors Sandra Hambleton (Chair of the Staffing Committee) and Mike Stubbs (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)
- Officers:-** Richard Durrant (Head of Human Resources), Paul Clisby (Head of Central Services), Nick Lamper (Senior Member Services Officer) and Jayne Briscoe (Democratic Services Officer)

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

2. **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of items 5 to 10 inclusive as there would be likely to be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

5. **ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT**

A report was submitted to update the Committee on progress regarding attendance management. The report included a summary of the total average number of days sick per employee during 2012/13.

Richard Durrant, Head of Human Resources, reported that during 2012/13 there had been a significant number of employees who had been absent from work due to long-term health issues. Consequently, the authority had introduced a number of initiatives designed to help prevent long term illness including bone density measurement, cancer awareness and cessation of smoking support. He added that

it may be necessary in the future to consult with trade unions with regard to the issue of electronic cigarettes which were being smoked during the working day.

The report also set out benchmarking information for 2012/13 obtained from a survey of 25 West Midlands authorities. The survey ranked Newcastle Borough Council at 8th within the group for the average number of days absence. It was hoped that preventative measures would impact to reduce this figure during the next financial year.

Paul Pickerill (GMB/Apex) noted that it was difficult to manage long term sickness and felt that the challenge to managers was to be proactive to help reduce short term absence.

It was agreed that it would be helpful to have information relating to long term absence and short term absence displayed as a graph to identify trends.

Resolved:

- (1) That the policy be endorsed; and
- (2) That information relating to the short term and long term absence of employees be included as a graph within the report to the next meeting of the Committee.

6. POLICY ON FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT FOR MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

A report was submitted for the view of the Committee on proposed revisions to the flexible retirement for members of the Local Government Pension scheme.

The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007 provided authorities with discretionary powers to allow eligible employees (LGPS Scheme members age 55 and over) the option to reduce their working hours/grade whilst also accessing their pension benefits as a way of avoiding the 'cliff edge' of full retirement.

Changes to the proposed policy, which was attached to the report, had been agreed at a previous meeting with trade unions on 10 May 2013.

Paul Pickerill (GMB/APEX) pointed out that, with regard to the words **will not agree** in the clause set out below, the council did not in fact have the power to agree and that it would make more sense to change this to **cannot agree**.

*Be sympathetic to requests involving a phased reduction in working hours, subject to any such arrangements being operationally practicable. However, the Council **will not agree** to requests that would overall, lead to the employee being better off than before flexible retirement and will only consent to the release of the accrued benefits if this is the case.*

Resolved: Subject to the **will not agree** in the above clause being changed to **cannot agree**, the proposals in the report be endorsed.

7. SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURE

A report was submitted to obtain the view of the Committee on the proposed revised sickness absence reporting arrangements. The current reporting procedure was

attached to the report together with the revised reporting procedure. A comprehensive review has been completed of the sickness absence reporting procedure and agreed with the trade unions on 10 May 2013 with the exception of the text at end of paragraph (e) ...*does not co-operate with reasonable requests from management/Human Resources*. In this respect officers recommended that it be retained. The trade unions did not agree this was essential to the text but they agreed the revised sickness absence reporting arrangements.

Resolved:

- (1) That the text at the end of paragraph (e) ...does not co-operate with reasonable requests from management/Human Resources be retained; and
- (2) That the report be endorsed.

8. PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

A report was submitted to seek the Committee's view on a proposed Policy and Procedure regarding employees who were parents and who requested unpaid time off work to look after a child together with the process to be followed for such requests. Parental leave had been introduced by the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations 1999 to give parents of young and/or disabled children the right to take a period of time off work to look after their child.

The trade unions had been consulted on 10 May 2013 and were in agreement that it should be implemented.

Resolved: That the proposed policy be endorsed.

9. REVIEW OF CHARGING ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPLACEMENT EQUIPMENT ISSUED TO STAFF

A report was submitted to obtain the view of the Committee on a proposed policy to ensure a consistent approach to dealing with instances when equipment issued to staff required replacement as a result of their negligence.

The types of equipment issued to staff varied considerably across the authority as did replacement cost. There was an obligation on employees to take reasonable measures to use and maintain equipment appropriately and to take reasonable precautions regarding its security. This had been taken into account in developing the proposed policy, together with what action was considered to be reasonable and appropriate in circumstances where an employee may have been negligent in this respect and in particular where they had been persistently negligent.

The trade unions had been consulted on 10 May 2013 and supported the proposed approach.

Resolved: That the proposed policy be endorsed.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

11. PAUL CLISBY, HEAD OF CENTRAL SERVICES

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The Chair referred to the imminent departure of Paul Clisby who would be leaving the authority to take up another position. On behalf of the Committee she thanked him for his service and wished him future success.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair

The meeting concluded at 10.45 am.