

EMPLOYEES CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

10.00 am, Monday, 16 September 2013

Present:-	Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – Chair
Councillors	Loades, Plant, Sweeney, Taylor.J and Turner
Employee representatives:-	Phil Bartels (GMB/Apex), Kim Graham (Unison) Gary Morgan (GMB/Apex) and Anne-Marie Ruscoe (GMB/Apex)
In attendance:-	Councillors Sandra Hambleton (Chair of the Staffing Committee)
Officers:-	Richard Durrant (Head of Human Resources), Sarah Taylor (HR Manager) Paul Washington (Principal Solicitor) and Jayne Briscoe (Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Paul Pickerill (GMB/Apex), Jackie Cicatello (Unison),

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of items 4 to 9 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.

4. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. REVIEW OF EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION SCHEME

A report was submitted to obtain the Committee's views/comments on proposed revisions to the council's employee awards scheme.

Members of the committee discussed various revisions, including those which had been proposed by the previous Chair of the Committee and by the trade unions. The trade unions commented that, whilst not seeking to actively oppose the scheme they had recently put forward its removal as a potential budget saving.

A timetable for the 2013 programme for voting and judging was outlined. It was suggested that the scheme be reviewed again at the January meeting of the Committee and to help in this process the comments sections be included on the voting form to help assess the view of employees on the scheme be obtained together with figures on the numbers of staff participating in the voting process.

Resolved: That a report reviewing the Employee Recognition Scheme be submitted to the 20th January 2014 meeting of this Committee, the

report is to include employees' comments on the current scheme together with the numbers of staff participating in the voting process.

6. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (LGPS) AUTO ENROLEMENT – OPTION ON TRANSITIONAL DELAY**

A report was submitted for the view of the Committee on a proposal to implement 'Transitional Delay' in relation to automatic enrolment of existing employees into the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Auto Enrolment is a new law that has been introduced to help people save for their retirement and requires employers to enrol workers who meet certain criteria into a qualifying workplace pension scheme (including the LGPS).

The Pension Regulator had scheduled 1 November as the date for Newcastle Borough Council to commence Auto Enrolment of new employees who meet the criteria, however the council is able to delay automatically enrolling existing jobholders into the LGPS until October 2017 by applying a 'Transitional Delay' option.

All employees would be informed about how Auto Enrolment would affect them within one month of 1 November 2013 as required by legislation with eligible employees able to elect to join the LGPS if Transitional Delay were to be implemented if they so wish.

The potential maximum cost to the council of not applying a Transitional Delay was estimated to be approximately £0.75m, although this amount could be higher as there may be a number of eligible 'casual' employees who may then decide to stay in the scheme. The actual cost was, however, likely to be much lower than this and would depend on how many existing employees who were automatically enrolled subsequently decided to opt out again.

Resolved: That 'Transitional Delay' be implemented.

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

A report was submitted on progress regarding attendance management, together with a graph which set out short and long term absence as requested at the last meeting of the Committee.

Absence rates continued to be reported to the monthly Departmental Management Team meetings to help ensure that Heads of Service and Business Managers were consistent and proactive in their approach and that early Occupational Health referrals were made in all cases of potential long-term sickness. Other measures already in place regarding preventative/educational health workplace initiatives included

- Cancer awareness
- Smoking cessation
- Bone density screening
- Cholesterol testing

Resolved: That the Attendance Management report be noted and reviewed in 6 month's time.

7. **REVIEW OF CHARGING ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPLACEMENT EQUIPMENT ISSUED TO STAFF**

A report was submitted to obtain the view of the Committee on a proposed revised policy designed to ensure a more consistent and robust 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 already 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.

An initial policy had been previously endorsed and referred to the Staffing Committee on 9 July 2013 when it had been resolved that the policy be redrafted to ensure that it was clear and robust in relation to negligence and referred back to this Committee for further consideration.

The Trade unions had indicated that they accepted the revised policy and that they would be monitoring its implementation.

Resolved: That the proposed revised policy be endorsed and a report be submitted to this Committee in 12 months.

8. **ENHANCEMENTS FOR NIGHT WORKING – REVISED PROPOSAL**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda pending ongoing negotiations. It was agreed that, should these negotiations be concluded in time, the item be referred to the Chair of this Committee, forwarded to the Staffing Committee; and a report back submitted to this Committee.

9. **TIME OFF FOR DEPENDENTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

A report was submitted to obtain the view of the Committee on a proposed Policy and Procedure advising employees of their statutory right to unpaid time off to deal with emergencies relating to dependents of their statutory right to unpaid time off to deal with emergencies relating to dependents, the process to be followed when requesting time off and the conditions that apply.

Under the Employment Rights Acts 1996 and 1999, employees have a statutory right to take a reasonable amount of time of work to deal with unexpected and/or sudden emergencies and to make any necessary longer-term care arrangements for dependents. The right does not include entitlement to pay.

The trade unions were in agreement that it should be implemented but wished the council to consider paying the employees for the first day of any period of 'dependents' leave and the occasions/reasons/cost to the authority be monitored to inform a review of the policy after a year.

It was agreed that section 6 of the proposed Policy and Procedure relating to Rights during time off for dependents

be amended to read that

During a period of time off to care for dependents, the employee will remain employed, ***and pay and contractual benefits will remain in place at the manager's discretion.***

- Resolved:**
- (1) That the agreed amended wording to Section 6 of the proposed policy be considered by the October Staffing Committee
 - (2) That the policy be implemented and monitored and a further report be submitted to this committee in 6 months.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair

The meeting concluded at 11.40 am.