

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Thursday, 18th September 2008 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor John (Chair), Councillor Blackman and Councillors Bessong, Beswick, Butt, Colwill, Hirani (alternate for Lorber), Sneddon and Wharton.

Apologies were received from Councillors Castle, Lorber and Van Kalwala.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 17th July 2008 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Deputations

There were none.

5. Appointments to Sub-Committees

There were none.

6. Flexible Working

The Committee had before them a report from the Director of Human Resources & Diversity which sought to review the Council's existing Flexible Working policies through a range of new policies to complement and improve the Council's approach to flexible working with the aim of improving service delivery together with the recruitment and retention of employees.

The Lead Member for Human Resources & Diversity; Local Democracy and Consultation, Councillor Sneddon introduced this report. In setting out the main objectives of the proposed flexible working scheme, Councillor Sneddon stated that it would lead to increased cost-effectiveness and efficiency such as savings on overheads when employees work from home, increased customer satisfaction due to services being available for longer and in a variety of methods, such as 24 hour availability and on line service access, ability to attract and retain a higher level of skilled personnel and above all increased job satisfaction, staff morale, motivation and commitment as well as reduced absenteeism. He added that the proposals and the range of policies attached as appendices to the report had been widely consulted with recognised trade unions, staff panels, forum groups, departmental management teams all of whom had given positive responses.

Strategic HR Manager, Claire Gore added that the proposed policy would accord with the Council's transformation and service improvement agenda. She continued that by allowing staff to vary their start and finish times to fit in with their outside commitments as well as fulfilling their contractual obligations, the policy would assist the Council in the delivery of its services and give greater flexibility to employees in managing their workloads at busy times. The Chair enquired whether steps had been taken to address concerns expressed by the GMB Union about the selling and buying of annual leave as it could be detrimental to service delivery and to those individuals whose leave would be reduced. In response, Claire Gore stated that the buying and selling of annual leave would be subject to the needs of the service and there being sufficient budget. In addition, employees would only be able to sell a fixed number of days leave to ensure that their leave entitlement remained above the statutory minimum requirement. Enabling managers to buy employees leave would assist the Council in avoiding relatively expensive agency cover to deliver services. She clarified that the price of buying and selling would be determined by the Council's payroll services based on spinal points. She continued that the policy would be reviewed a year after implementation and the results reported to this Committee.

RESOLVED:-

that the revised approach to flexible working and the range of policies attached to the report be agreed.

7. Local Government Pension Scheme Discretions

The Committee gave consideration to this report that proposed a policy for a new discretion for the Council to award additional pension benefits to members of the pension scheme. The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources, Duncan McLeod informed members that under regulation 13 of the Local Government (Benefit, Membership and Contribution) Regulations 2007 (the benefit regulations) the Council may resolve to award a member additional pension of not more than £5000 per annum. This would allow the Council to increase an employee's Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension only without corresponding increase to the member's dependant benefits. He clarified that the regulations required the Council to repay the cost of additional pension via the Council's General Fund either as a specific payment or by an increase in the employer's contribution rate, the former being consistent with other similar policies relating to pension costs charged to the General Fund and in officers' view the preferred option. The Pensions Manager, Andy Gray drew Members' attention to housekeeping issues about the administration of existing discretionary policies. He continued that the additional pension benefits would be awarded only in wholly exceptional circumstances including the retention of staff transferring to the Council under TUPE.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the proposed policy statement for additional scheme membership and pension benefits as detailed in paragraph 3.7 of the report from the Director of Finance & Corporate Resources be agreed;
- (ii) that the discretionary powers that transferred from the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 to the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007 (Benefit Regulations) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (Administration) Regulations 2008, detailed in Appendix 2 be noted;
- (iii) that a procedure concerning the discretion to allow early payment of pension benefits detailed in paragraph 3.8 of the report be agreed.

8. 2007/08 Statement of Accounts

The Committee gave consideration to Brent's Statement of Accounts for 2007/08. The Director of Finance & Corporate Resources stated that the statement of accounts were approved by this Committee at its meeting on 26th June 2008 and as in previous years, they did not include the accounts of the Pension Fund for which the Council was the administering body. He continued that although the inclusion of the Pension Fund accounts was unclear, it was the view of the Council's new auditors that they should have been included. It was on this basis that the Committee was being asked to re-approve the unaudited accounts, including the Pension Fund accounts. He added that the accounts would be reported to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 24th September 2008.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the 2007/08 Statement of Accounts including Pension Fund accounts (attached as appendix A to the report) be approved;
- (ii) that the Chair of the Committee be asked to sign the accounts including the Pension Fund accounts.

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of next meeting of the General Purposes Committee was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 28th January 2009.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

There were none.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm.

A JOHN
Chair