

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 8th June, 2011.

Present:- Councillors Bains (Chair), Sharif, Coad, Dale-Gough, Dar, A S Dhaliwal, Grewal, Plenty and Stokes

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Housing Futures - Provision of Housing Services Update

Members were advised that this item had been referred to the Committee by the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel. The Panel had agreed that the Committee should consider any HR implications arising from the restructuring of the housing service to incorporate former People 1st Housing management teams.

The Assistant Director of Housing gave a brief summary of the process that had been undertaken with regard to the future of housing services and the incorporation of the former People 1st Housing management teams. Members of the Committee had a brief discussion around the process and the measures in place to ensure that the new management team was ensuring delivery of an effective service.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2011 were taken as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Appointment of Sub Committees

The Committee received a report on the establishment of the Employment Appeals and Appeals Sub-Committees. The nominations that had been received from political groups were read out at the meeting.

Resolved -

- (a) That the Sub-Committees set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report with the terms of reference as set out in Appendix 1 be appointed for the 2011/12 municipal year and that seats be allocated to the Sub-Committees as shown.
- (b) **That the following members be appointed to serve on each of the Sub-Committees in accordance with the wishes expressed by political groups in respect of the seats allocated to them:**

Employment & Appeals Committee - 08.06.11

Employment Appeals Sub-Committee - Councillors Chohan, Dodds and Coad (Deputies – Councillors Bains, Munawar, Plenty, Qureshi and Rasib).

Appeals Sub-Committee – Councillors Davis, M Mann, Rasib, Dale-Gough and 1 BILLD vacancy (Deputies – Councillors Chohan, Dodds and Sharif).

5. Briefing on Future Key Issues

At its meeting on 15th March, 2011 the Committee had been asked to identify key issues for consideration at future meetings. The Committee had requested an update on the role of the Local Authority in relation to schools – (policy and finance) and this item, along with items on changes to the local authority role in Benefit Fraud, Strategic HR and OD Support and the outcomes and numbers of expressions of interest had been included in the agenda for the Strategic Director of Resources and Regeneration to brief members of the Committee.

A member of the Committee queried why these issues had been included on the agenda as he did not see their relevance to the remit of the Employment and Appeals Committee. He argued that the Government was currently consulting on bureaucracy generally and had particularly asked councils to look at posts where officers were paid in excess of £100,000 and he felt that the Committee should be considering this. He also requested that the Committee consider the use of interims and consultants and the relationship of the spend on these categories of staff to the payroll. Another member of the committee supported the proposal that a report on the use of consultants and interim officers be prepared for a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair noted the proposal that had been put forward and explained to the Committee that the Councillor had not been present at the previous meeting of the Committee when items for future discussion had been identified. He indicated that he would therefore ask the Strategic Director of Resources and Regeneration to continue with the briefing as agreed.

Schools Funding

The role of the Local Authority was changing with regard to schools funding. The government wished to move to a national funding formula for schools as soon as possible which would mean that the funding of schools would no longer reflect local characteristics of the local authority or the local area. Local authorities would no longer need to have teams dealing with schools finance other than those providing financial services which schools bought back. The Director advised that as these proposals would have a significant effect on the workforce. Whilst there was a need to resource the team in the short term the Authority would increase its use of temporary staff within the school finance team to avoid the potential redundancy situations that might arise.

Employment & Appeals Committee - 08.06.11

Benefit Fraud

A consultation document had been published by the Department for Work and Pensions with regard to a new strategy for tackling benefit fraud. The paper was suggesting the creation of a single fraud investigation service at Regional level. The local authority's input would therefore no longer be required. The Council currently had 12 people in the benefit fraud team with 2 vacancies and there would therefore be a significant impact on staffing.

Members of the Committee discussed the two consultation papers and the ramifications for the Council's workforce.

The Director advised that the Authority had responded to the consultation on schools funding and that a copy of the response would be sent to all members of the committee.

Strategic HR and OD Support

Members were advised that the Council had put out a tender for Strategic HR and OD Advice which would provide better value for money than having an in-house HR Director. The Council would set minimum standards of availability and responsiveness under the contract and it would for bidders to outline exactly how they would provide the expertise. The Council had received 16 tenders and three organisations had been short listed for selection the following week. Councillor Stokes requested that his dissent be recorded as he disagreed with the proposal to have Strategic HR and OD Advice under a contract arrangement and raised concerns that the Assistant Director of Professional Services' post required no HR professional qualification. The Director of Resources and Regeneration, whilst noting the concern expressed, detailed the background to the establishment of the AD post which had had full member engagement and outlined the benefits to the authority in proceeding to put the proposed arrangements for strategic HR advice in place.

Outcomes and Numbers of Expressions of Interest – Planning for the Future Exercise

A summary of the expressions of interest savings as at 1st June 2011 was tabled. The summary outlined the budget salary savings from restructured areas in 2011/12 as a result of planning for the future and the redundancy and retirement costs which had been funded from the 2010/11 budget. The net impact on the establishment (reduction in posts) was 67 - there had been 6 compulsory redundancies to-date with a potential for 5 further compulsory redundancies if redeployment was unsuccessful.

In answer to a question the Director of Resources and Regeneration advised that the Council's payroll bill for 2011/12 was £56.620m (this included the employment of interim officers). The Director, when asked a question in relation to redundancy of an officer indicated that a detailed letter in response

Employment & Appeals Committee - 08.06.11

to an FOI on this subject had been prepared for the councillor in question. The Committee acknowledged that discussions on individual members of staff were not appropriate in the part 1 session of the Committee.

The Committee considered the request that Councillor Stokes had made for the Committee to consider, as a matter of urgency, posts over £100k which he believed to be an obligation imposed by the Government. Officers advised that they had no knowledge of a government requirement for consideration of this matter and it was agreed that if there was such a requirement the Chair and Vice-Chair would be consulted on any decisions on future agenda items.

The Director also agreed to forward information with regard to the cost savings that had been made in Human Resources to be forwarded to Councillor Plenty.

6. New arrangements for Health and Safety

The Committee considered a report setting out a new arrangement for the delivery of Health and Safety support by entering into shared arrangements for a Health and Safety Manager, Policy, Systems and Processes with Reading Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Under the arrangement the Council would pay Reading Borough Council £22,000 per annum for the provision of the service. This would include salary and on costs of the Health and Safety Manager, access to policy, procedures and shared training courses. In addition to the cost savings it was envisaged that by sharing management arrangements there would be cross fertilisation of ideas and Best Practice across the three Boroughs for the benefit of all parties.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

7. Employee Assistance Programme

The Committee considered a report on the new arrangements for provision of employee assistance and counselling support to staff. The report set out the benefits that the new arrangements would provide to employees that were an improvement on the previous service provided by the in-house employee counsellors. These included a more accessible service for staff, 24/7 access, increased confidentiality, immediate access to experts in the legal and financial fields. Members of the Committee noted that this provision extended to elected members.

Resolved –

- (a) That the changes in how the employee assistance service would be delivered be noted.

Employment & Appeals Committee - 08.06.11

- (b) That the Committee receive an annual report to help determine the effectiveness of the new service.

8. Update on Outplacement Support

The Committee received a report detailing the arrangements in place to support staff who had been made redundant in accessing skills and knowledge to assist them in finding alternative employment.

Resolved - The report be noted.

9. Date of Next Meeting

22nd September 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm)