
Employment Panel

Report of the meeting held on 20th September 2006

Matters for Information

6. TRAVEL PLAN

For all major employment sites, the Council as a planning authority requires the preparation of a travel plan which demonstrates a commitment to promoting sustainable travel.

In the light of the new headquarters and operations centre project, the views of the Panel have been invited on an overall Travel Plan for the District Council which proposes a range of measures to reduce, over time, the reliance of Members and employees on the need to travel by car. Specific plans will be prepared for each of the Council's sites in accordance with the overall vision and objectives.

Following a wide ranging discussion and having regard also to those representations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) (Item No. 14 refers) and the Employee Liaison Advisory Group, the Panel has suggested that the provisions of the approved Plan should apply equally to Members and Officers, that consideration should be given to the scheduling of Member meetings in the evening to allow use of the town centre car parks when they are least busy and that further research be undertaken to ascertain why the majority of employees appear to have a preference for travelling to work alone by private car. These views will be conveyed to the Cabinet for consideration at their meeting on 19th October 2006.

7. EARLY RETIREMENT POLICY

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 come into force on 1st October 2006 and by virtue of these regulations local authority employers will have discretionary powers to award employees a one off lump sum of up to 2 years pay when their employment is terminated early. This replaces a Regulation which restricted compensation to a maximum of 66 weeks pay, using a formula based on the employee's age and length of service.

In the absence of a prescribed formula for calculating the amount of compensation payable, national employers recommend that local authorities adopt a policy to meet all relevant circumstances based on the draft regulations in advance of 1st October.

To maintain maximum flexibility in the event of any case of early retirement, and in advance of the total review of the pension scheme for implementation by April 2008, the Panel has adopted a policy, under the revised Local Government Discretionary Payments Regulations, which will allow the award of lump sum compensation based on the merits of each case and taking all costs into account.

As the draft regulations do not provide for the award of a credited period (commonly referred to as "added years") the Panel has varied the policy in respect of the discretion available in Regulation 52 (Augmentation) of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 so that "the Council will consider granting additional membership, taking all costs into account".

8. EQUAL PAY REVIEW

Following a methodology produced by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Panel has noted the outcome of a review of workforce pay undertaken periodically to safeguard the Council against claims for equal pay under the Equal Pay Act 1970. The review has involved a comparison of the pay received by women and men doing equal work and investigated the causes of any gender pay gaps that cannot satisfactorily be explained.

In considering the Review's findings, the Panel has noted that the use of the Council's analytical job evaluation scheme affords protection from equal pay claims and that in the determination of the starting salary of female employees there was not less than a 5% difference between the average salary points of male and female employees.

9. DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

For clarification purposes and to improve the efficiency of the process, the Panel has approved minor amendments to the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. In the event of an appeal in which Members would be involved, the Panel has requested that, in future, a pool of Members be appointed at the commencement of the municipal year from which the composition of an Appeals Sub Group could be drawn, when necessary, to determine appeals under the Council's disciplinary and appeals procedures. Such Members will receive appropriate training prior to their involvement in Sub Group hearings.

10. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Pursuant to Item No. 9, the Panel also has approved a new Grievance Procedure which, in the light of discussion requires a few minor amendments, and will be resubmitted to a future meeting.

11. AGE DISCRIMINATION: ACTION PLAN

The Panel has approved an Action Plan in order that the District Council, as an employer, meets the requirements of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 to be introduced with effect from 1st

October 2006. The Action Plan will continue to be reviewed as understanding of the legislation and case law develops.

12. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING

The Panel has received and noted the outcomes of equal opportunities monitoring of employees over the period 1st July 2005 to 30th June 2006. Further details are available from the Head of HR and Payroll Services on request.

13. STAFFING ISSUES

(a) Housing and Council Tax Benefits: Increase in staff

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to approve the creation of three new posts of Housing Benefit Assessment Officers to meet an increase in the complexity and volume of work in the Housing and Council Tax Benefits section. Whilst the proposals are estimated to cost £35,000 in 2005/6 and £69,000 in subsequent years, the employment of additional assessors will avoid loss of Government subsidy amounting to £70,000 in 2005/6 through the imposition of penalties for delay in handling claims.

(b) Recruitment of additional Call Centre Advisers and filling of the vacant Team Leader post

To meet the increasing workload anticipated as a result of the transfer of additional services to the Call Centre early in 2007, the Panel has approved the appointment of two further FTE posts of Call Centre Advisers and the filling of an existing post of Team Leader. Further justification for the creation of an additional Adviser post will be submitted to the next meeting.

(c) Request to fill vacant post

Having considered the circumstances applicable to a vacancy within the Central Services Directorate for a Centre Manager at St Neots Leisure Centre, the Panel has authorised the Head of HR and Payroll Services to commence recruitment to the post.

(d) Realignment of services: Environmental and Community Health Division

Following the recent realignment of services across Directorates, the Panel has approved a minor re-organisation to improve the structure of the Environmental and Community Services Division. This proposal will encourage closer working across specialist teams, offer an improved service to the public and result in a modest financial saving.

(e) IMD: Web Administrator

The Panel has approved the establishment, on a permanent basis, of a post of Web Administrator within the IT Development Team. No additional funding is required to support the establishment of the post which has a key role to play in the implementation of the Customer First programme and other projects and departmental initiatives

14. RETIREMENT OF PERSONNEL – ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Panel has placed on record its recognition of, and gratitude for, the excellent contribution made by Mr C Billingham during his employment as a Housing Adviser in the Operational Services Directorate and in the local government service over 16 years and conveys its best wishes to him for a long and happy retirement.

Mrs B E Boddington
Vice Chairman