

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

3 August 2011

The meeting commenced at 3.00 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Jonathan Brash (Performance Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Joanne Machers, Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer
Sylvia Pinkney, Public Protection Manager
Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

9. Extended Career Grade Scheme for Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers (EHOs and TSOs) *(Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning) and Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer)*

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

To review the extended Career Grade Scheme for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) and consider whether it should continue.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In September 2005 the Performance Management Portfolio Holder approved a revised Career Grade scheme for all posts occupied by qualified EHOs and TSOs. This was in response to ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified postholders over a number of years, compounded by a national shortage. The scheme was reviewed on a yearly basis, the last review taking place in September 2009. Since the introduction of the scheme a robust corporate retention scheme had been agreed and included in the Single Status Agreement and provision made for Development Schemes to replace Career Grade Schemes meaning that the current scheme could represent an equal pay risk to the Council.

The report gave details of the current position in relation to EHOs and TSOs. Of the 11 officers employed by the Council 7 had successfully gained entry to the scheme. Appointees had cited the extended career

grade as an incentive in applying for employment and the majority of existing staff had been retained despite around a quarter of all local authorities reporting recruitment problems and a fifth offering market supplements to EHOs as an incentive. However despite the positive results which the scheme appeared to have provided it was felt that given the inconsistency of the scheme with the Single Status Agreement coupled with current staffing level and budget restrictions the scheme should be withdrawn. Should this decision be taken officers would continue to receive payments until the anniversary of their being awarded the additional payment.

The Portfolio Holder queried how this scheme had survived the single status process. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer advised that there had been some confusion caused by the decision which had been made to prioritise job evaluation and some key terms and conditions meaning that some issues were set aside, including retention payment. The main aim of single status had been to evaluate jobs and assimilate all employees onto a new pay structure. It had been agreed with the Trade Unions to set certain issues aside for consideration at a later date and retention payments had been one of those. Because of this and the fact that the September 2010 review of the scheme had been missed the Extended Career Grade Scheme this report was being presented at this time. While there was nothing specifically within the single status agreement preventing schemes of this type it did not fit with the principles established by Single Status and could leave the Council open to equal pay risk. The Portfolio Holder asked whether there were any other schemes operating within the authority that could expose the council to a similar risk. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer was not aware of any which needed addressing however mechanisms to identify any anomalies are in place through the current terms and conditions review and payroll monitoring.

The Portfolio Holder referred to a letter sent by the Trade Unions which welcomed the Council's commitment to institute development schemes for staff in this area. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer indicated that the Trade Unions had been concerned that employees might be reluctant to accept the proposed changes unless a commitment was given to build current requirements into a more modern development scheme. This commitment had been given. The Portfolio Holder is responsible for development schemes as part of job evaluation but the EHO and TSO roles are the responsibility of another portfolio holder. Development schemes are not usually reported to portfolio holders however the Portfolio Holder asked that his counterpart be advised that this commitment had been made.

The Portfolio Holder asked whether similar schemes were used either regionally or nationally. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer confirmed that market forces supplements have been used prior to the implementation of Single Status with some local authorities also offering top up payments for social care or educational roles for example. The

Public Protection Manager added that Middlesbrough Borough Council were still offering a market forces supplement to any EHOs or TSOs who had been employed there for more than 6 months. She was aware of similar incentives in other areas.

The Portfolio Holder questioned why the September 2010 review had not been carried out. The Public Protection Manager reported that due to ongoing work on departmental Service Delivery Options and other work pressures it had been missed. The Portfolio Holder appreciated officers were under pressure but felt these reasons were not good enough to explain why a portfolio holders request for a review had not been properly carried out. He asked how he could be assured that all timetabled reviews were carried out on time. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer and Public Protection Manager both confirmed that a reminder system is used in both departments.

In terms of staff consultation the Public Protection Manager confirmed that the 7 employees affected had been advised that scheme was due for review with the possibility of its discontinuation. Discussions had been held with Trade Union representatives also.

The Portfolio Holder approved the retrospective continuation of the scheme to the current date, albeit with great reluctance given the departmental failure to produce a review report in September 2010. He felt that the scheme should not continue past the current date as it was outwith the Single Status Agreement, was not common practice and could open the Council to potential risk. He asked that affected staff be kept properly informed and supported by management together with the Trade Unions through the transition period and that the responsible Portfolio Holder be advised of today's decision and the reasons behind it. He also thanked the Trade Unions for their correspondence in this matter and asked that they be written to regarding the decision and the Portfolio Holder's ongoing commitment to the future development scheme.

Decision

- I. That the position regarding the recruitment and retention of Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers be noted
- II. That the continuation of the Extended Career Grade Scheme to the current date be approved retrospectively
- III. That the Extended Career Grade Scheme should not continue past the current date and that payments to officers will cease on the anniversary of their being awarded the additional payment
- IV. That the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the development scheme be advised in writing of the decision to replace the Extended Career Grade Scheme with a development scheme

- V. That the Trade Unions be written to be advised of the decision and the Portfolio Holder's on-going commitment to the future development scheme.

10. Customer and Financial Services Section – Annual Reports 2010-11 (*Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the various sections' performance and key achievements during the year April 2010 to March 2011.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report contained background information on each of the service areas in the Customer and Financial Services Section of the Customer and Workforce Services Division together with details of performance and key achievements during 2010/11. An annual report for each of the following service areas was included containing next year's targets and the key projects and issues for 2010/11:

- Diversity
- Hartlepool Connect
- Registration and Nationality
- Revenues and Benefits
- Shared Services

The Portfolio Holder felt there was a tremendous amount to be proud of within these reports and paid tribute to all the staff concerned for achieving excellent results in difficult circumstances. He then raised the following issues:

Revenues and Benefits

The Portfolio Holder commented that Council Tax collection rate figures were excellent but that due to the quoting of both long and short term figures were open to misinterpretation and therefore were difficult to understand. He asked that quoted figures were made clearer.

The Portfolio Holder asked what work was being done to make a proper estimate of the amount of unclaimed benefits outstanding in Hartlepool. He felt that maximisation of benefit uptake should be the top priority for Revenues and Benefits and that work should be done to identify whether there were any particular geographic issues associated with unclaimed benefits.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether future challenges such as Universal Credit and the changes to Council Tax benefit should be reflected within the annual report. Both will be major challenges for the department in terms of staffing and capacity.

Hartlepool Connect

The Portfolio Holder noted the small number of people contacting the Council electronically as opposed to by letter, by telephone or in person and asked what was being done to address this. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer confirmed that programmes were in place to encourage more people to use electronic services, particularly those using telephone services. Sometimes individual departments would retain electronic contacts for themselves and only pass telephone calls and letter to Hartlepool Connect. It was also a fact that some customers would never use electronic methods. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the traditional methods of contact should always be maintained, but that given obvious advantage of electronic interaction that more should be done to maximise this method of contact.

The Portfolio Holder referred to internal switchboard calls querying why staff with access to the internal phone directory would ring the switchboard. The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer advised that sometimes staff would be unsure which person they needed to be put through to and switchboard staff had that general knowledge. Previous instances of staff using the switchboard inappropriately had been identified and dealt with. The Portfolio Holder felt it might be worth including these issues in Councillor inductions as members could be just as guilty of ringing the switchboard unnecessarily.

Diversity

The Portfolio Holder noted the reorganisation of this department the previous year and asked that the Council's commitment to maintain equality and diversity be fully reflected within the annual report.

Decision

That the report be noted

11. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 12 - Approval for Compulsory Redundancy - This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely, information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority (paragraph 4).

- 12. Approval for Compulsory Redundancy** (*Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*) This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority (paragraph 4).

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

To seek a decision regarding four posts within the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Department.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report set out the redundancy process which had been followed and the impact on specific posts and post holders.

Decision

The decision is set out in the exempt section of the decision record.

The meeting concluded at 3:45pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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