



meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

date **Thursday 29th March 2006**

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PEOPLE & PERFORMANCE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report seeks to update Members on various issues relating to the People and Performance portfolio since my last report to Council.

2. PERSONNEL AND EMPLOYMENT RELATED MATTERS

2.1 Flexible Retirement

Attention has recently been given to introducing a flexible retirement policy to allow employees to take part of their pension whilst still continuing to work. This will help address issues around the ageing workforce and encourage those that want to stay on to do so. This should ease the position of the Authority faced with otherwise losing skills and knowledge and help to plan overall skills transition and development. Officers are currently working with the trade unions on the final details, getting legal advice with a view to finalising matters in the next few weeks.

2.2 Pensions

A review of the early retirement scheme has recently been undertaken to accord with the requirements of the Age Discrimination legislation and the changes being proposed by the Government. Earlier this month the trade unions agreed a revision based upon the nationally agreed statutory redundancy framework. It is now a matter of implementing the revised proposals and reviewing previous cases considered since the introduction of the age legislation. The revised proposals broadly mirror the approach of the previously agreed scheme and did not result in any major industrial relations problems.

2.3 Health, Safety and sickness absence

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have undertaken an analysis of our approach to health, safety and sickness absence and have recognised our work in these areas. The initiatives we have adopted

around support and encouragement for employees in areas of wellbeing are seen to be innovative though we still seem to suffer high levels of sickness absence.

A project manager has been tasked with supporting this initiative and has been working with the HR team to address issues. Following a successful departmental pilot, steps include some additional temporary Absence Management Officers as well as resources for the employee services centre management information team so that accurate data can be obtained around sickness absence. An ICT system is being built that will allow remote data entry from sites across the County which should reduce the time taken to process paper staffing records and should improve accuracy of data.

A newly agreed approach to dealing with stress at work has been launched and the first learning and development events for managers have now taken place. Stress is one the main reasons for our sickness absences and the manager's stress management tool will allow groups of employees to identify problem areas. The tool is a web based questionnaire which is anonymous and is supported by the Health and Safety Executive

2.4 Childcare Voucher Scheme

We have been considering a childcare voucher scheme as part of our overall employment policy and remunerations package. Following consideration of a number of possible providers, we have agreed to work with an organisation called 'Busy Bees' which provides childcare voucher schemes to many authorities.

The scheme is what is commonly known as a salary sacrifice scheme where employees sacrifice some of their salary for a proportion of childcare vouchers. This is tax efficient for the employee and is good for the employer as there are tax savings for us too. The scheme does not cost us anything as Busy Bees get their income from these savings and there is minimal administration.

The introduction of this scheme will encourage employees with caring responsibilities to stay at work and encourage potential employees to apply for our vacancies. It accords with our vision of being an employer of choice.

2.5 National Job Evaluation

Job scores were published at the beginning of March which fulfils our commitment to transparency of the process. The launch was supported by manager briefings which were undertaken at various locations throughout the County ahead of the release of figures. The trade unions directly supported these events and I am grateful to the trade unions for the support they have given throughout this process. Information has been available through the intranet and hard copies of all the relevant managers' guides and score booklets have been

distributed. There have been a few queries but not at the level anticipated. It is against the published job scores that appeals are to be based.

The Job Evaluation team will now focus upon evaluating changed jobs since 2002 and will be involved in appeals over the coming months.

3. BEST VALUE AND PERFORMANCE

3.1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Members should be aware that the Council has received its CPA score for 2006 and has again achieved the top ranking of four stars. In the separate judgment of “direction of travel” the Council has been judged to be “Improving Well”. This is the second highest classification and demonstrates consistent improvement. The overall judgment is made by the Audit Commission and included the assessments of OfSTED and CSCI.

The judgment also demonstrates strong consistency across the County Council’s services with scores of 3 out of 4 for Children and Young People’s services, Adult Social Care and Environment whilst Cultural services scored 4 out of 4.

The Use of Resources judgment which has been becoming increasingly difficult each year also retained a score of three, this being repeated for each of the five elements of this judgement including the Value for Money judgement.

3.2 Changing approach to performance

The Government highlighted major changes to the way it is to assess performance in last October’s Local Government White Paper, and the implications and timetable for change is now becoming clearer. There will be a significant reduction in the number of performance targets that Government expects Councils to achieve. A more limited number of targets will be set for areas to achieve in partnership and these will be negotiated through the Local Area Agreement. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment will be replaced by a Comprehensive Area Assessment. This will focus on the area rather than just the County Council and will include an annual assessment of risk against which the need for further inspections will be assessed.

3.3 Performance Conference

On 12th March the Council’s annual performance conference took place. This year the event was open to partners as well as staff in recognition of the new approach to performance regime and its focus on partnership performance within areas. The conference provided an opportunity to send a message of congratulations to staff for their excellent performance during a fairly turbulent year within the County

Council, a year that has included the potentially unsettling effects of re-organisation and job evaluation.

A presentation by Ben Page from Ipsos-MORI on last autumn's Best Value General Survey provided a useful background for a panel discussion on the day and set the context for upcoming discussions with partners as we approach the new performance regime.

4. ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

4.1 Carbon Management Plan

The Council's Carbon Management Plan 'Towards Carbon Neutrality' was published in January and local people were invited to give their views. The plan aims to reduce the authority's impact on climate change and addresses carbon dioxide emissions from council buildings, transport, waste and street lighting. The plan sets out to reduce emissions by Council services and activities by 60% by the year 2050.

Key proposals include converting old coal and oil boilers and installing new woodheat boilers, improving energy efficiency standards for new buildings, trialling LED streetlights to reduce electricity use and possible car park charging for staff who travel to work alone to encourage car sharing and public transport use.

Although the document focuses on the Council's internal actions, I very much hope that it will raise the game of our partners and other organisations that will also need to reduce their carbon emissions. Cabinet will be asked to formally approve the plan at its meeting on 18th April.

4.2 Planning and Climate Change and Building a Greener Future – consultation documents

The draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) and Building a Greener Future have both been published for consultation as part of a package of action by the Government to help deliver its ambition of achieving zero carbon development. The Cabinet Member for Environment and I have reported to Cabinet and sent a joint response on behalf of the County Council.

The draft PPS sets out key planning objectives and decision making principles for regional planning bodies and local planning authorities and emphasises that climate change should be an integrating theme in Regional Spatial Strategies. It highlights two key areas for Local Development Documents to address: identifying land for development and assessing potential for accommodating renewable and low-carbon energy supply.

The draft PPS is welcomed as it firmly establishes climate change as a central issue in the planning system, but the authority did raise a number of issues including:

- Ensuring that emerging spatial strategies and development documents are consistent with the PPS could require significant additional work, as will applying the sustainability appraisals
- The planning profession will need time to develop its skills and expertise
- Whilst the PPS is very detailed regarding the responsibilities of planning authorities, it says very little about the responsibilities of developers
- The objective referring to biodiversity should be framed more positively.

The Government is proposing that all new homes are zero carbon by 2016 and it aims to do this through planning policies, building regulations and the Code for Sustainable Homes. The Building a Greener Future document describes how the Government sees these 3 strands working together. Again, the document is firmly welcomed as it recognises the fundamental role of the planning system in tackling climate change, but there are areas of concern:

- The document focuses on improving the environmental performance of new housing but there is an urgent need for a coherent programme of measures to reduce carbon emissions from the existing housing stock
- The new Code for Sustainable Homes is voluntary and it would be more effective if all the environmental provisions in the Code were mandatory
- There is an urgent need for an equivalent mandatory code for all non-residential buildings.

Cllr John Stocks,
Cabinet Member for People & Performance.