HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

MEETING, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

Present – Councillors White (Chairman), Clare, (Vice-Chairman), Allen, Darvesh, Hayes, Shaw, and Zaman.

Also in attendance

Mr. S. Arnfield	-	Director of Corporate Resources
Mr. D. Winstanley	-	Assistant Chief Executive
Mr. T. Shepherd	-	Pensions Manager
Mr. K. Roberts	-	Head of Division, Environmental Services
Ms. J. Maddock	-	Deputy Human Resources Manager, Environmental Services
Ms. C. Ashton	-	Head of Occupational Safety and Health
Ms. M. Woodcock	-	Training and Development Manager
Mrs. S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

An apologies for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor J. Silvester

Councillor White in the Chair.

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Policy Development Group held on 12th July, 2006 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

7. PENSION SCHEME UPDATE

The Director of Corporate Resources circulated a report which summarised the four main options for change to the Local Government Pension Scheme and put forward a proposed response to the consultation document.

The Director advised the Group that the Government had issued a consultation document seeking views on the proposals for a revised Local Government Pension Scheme in England and Wales. Four options had been put forward for consideration, and the report provided a summary of the main components of each. In brief, the options were as follows:-

a) OPTION A - an updated current scheme, with additional benefit improvements - a final salary scheme with an accrual rate of 1/80th of final salary per year of membership, an automatic tax-free lump sum on retirement of 3/80th of final

salary per year membership;

b) OPTION B - a new, final salary scheme with an improved accrual rate - retains a final-salary structure, but moves from a "1/80th: 3/80th" structure to a 1/60 th accrual rate, with no automatic tax free lump-sum on retirement;

c) OPTION C - a new, career-average scheme - changes from a final-salary structure to a career-average structure. Option C1 would have accrual rate of 1.85% and revaluation on the basis of the Retail Price Index (RPI) and Option C2 would have an accrual rate of 1.65% and revaluation on the basis of the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 1.5%, this being an estimation of wage indexation (subject to the overarching legal position); and

d) OPTION D - a new, hybrid scheme as for Options C1 or C2. Scheme members would also have a one-off choice of making extra contributions, on top of the contribution rate required for the career-average core structure, to obtain final salary linked benefits in retirement.

The report went on to detail the proposed response for each option and concluded that Option A should be supported for the following reasons:-

- there was a lower cost overall;
- required lower contribution rate for employers and/or employees;
- valuable recruitment and retention tool; and
- attractive to employees.

The reasons for not supporting the other options were provided in the report.

It was agreed that the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance be recommended to support the draft response to the consultation on the new Local Government Pension Scheme, as now submitted, be supported.

8. EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES - WORKSTEP PROGRAMME

The Director of Environmental Services submitted a report which sought the views of members on proposals to introduce the use of the Bolton Council Working Scheme as a direct recruitment tool.

The report reminded the Group that the aim and objective of the Bolton Council Workstep provisions was to provide the best possible employment and training

opportunities for the disabled people of Bolton. It went on to inform members of:-

- the activities of the Workstep Teams;
- the appointment of a designated Workstep Supported Employment Officer; and
- the proposed way forward to work with individual managers across the Council to match disabled candidates to suitable vacancies and make reasonable adjustments for disabled people within the Borough of Bolton to access work within the Council.

The introduction of the government funded Workstep Programme had involved a greater focus on the development of an individuals skills and the progression of disabled people into unsupported employment after successfully completing the Programme within a 2 year period. This involved providing support to disabled people who were ready for work and looking for full time permanent employment (16 hours per week or more, on at least a 6 month fixed term contract). The support may include identifying and obtaining employment, providing advice and guidance to managers and supervisors to ensure the right support was in place for new employees and working with the Human Resources to retain disabled members of staff, or members of staff who had acquired a long term health condition or disability whilst in work.

The report reminded the Group that Workstep was monitored and evaluated by Job Centre Plus and the Adult Learning was Inspectorate (working in partnership with OFSTED). In the last Inspection of the service, it was recommended that the Council recruit a Supported Employment Officer to take day to day operational responsibility for the Programme (to be responsible to the Supported Employment and Social Inclusion Manager).

The report advised that a full time Supported Employment Officer had been appointed whose remit was to raise the profile of Workstep as a tool for supporting the Council to increase its number of disabled staff throughout all departments.

The position as at 31st March, 2006 showed that 3.06% of the Council's workforce was disabled and that the target was 7.5%. These figures may change following the results of the Staff Audit.

The report concluded that there were vacancies within the Council at all levels which may be suitable for disabled people and in order to ensure the Council met its targets for employing disabled people, there was a need to take positive action to encourage disabled people to apply for these positions.

Managers, colleagues and Human Resources were committed to supporting disabled staff already in post within the Council and the Workstep Team wanted to extend this good practice and make the Council a leading employer in the recruitment of disabled individuals.

Workstep ensured that potential candidates' skills and experience were matched to those required by individual roles and vacancies (internal and external). It could also fund training and basic skills opportunities and provide one to one job coaching (working in partnership with other Council schemes such as BEST) if needed.

It was agreed that this Group recommends the Executive Member for Human Resources and Diversity to:-

a) support the use of the Bolton Council Workstep Scheme as a direct recruitment tool for suitable Council vacancies and the Workstep Team to liaise with managers/Human Resources to assess what support/positive action can be taken to fill a vacant post with a suitable disabled applicant who has the skills to carry out the job; and

b) support the scheme to allow short term work experience (job tasters) for disabled individuals interested in relevant lines of work as an assessment tool to replace the formal interview in line with the workstep practice example in the above report.

9. DRAFT REDUNDANCY POLICY

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report which put forward a draft Redundancy Procedure for the consideration and comment of members.

The policy set out how potential redundancy situations, and, if necessary, compulsory redundancy, should be dealt with.

Its main objectives were to:-

- ensure that the Council complied with the legislative requirements in relation to redundancy situations;

- provide clear advice to Managers as to their role in handling potential redundancy situations;

- outline the workforce planning and management measures available to seek to minimise or avoid compulsory redundancies;

- set out a clear framework for the management of compulsory redundancy situations including the application of redundancy

selection criteria; and

- seek to ensure that where compulsory redundancy was necessary employees left the service of the Council feeling that they had been treated in a fair and equitable manner.

Members discussed the draft procedure. It was felt that employees who had been dismissed under the disciplinary procedure should be added to the list of exclusions to the procedure.

It was agreed that the Executive Member for Human Resources and Diversity be recommended to support the draft Redundancy Procedure, as now amended.

10. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Further to Minute 11 of the meeting of this Group held on 5th October, 2005, Ms. M. Woodcock, Pay and Workforce Implementation Coordinator, submitted a report which informed the Group of the outcome of the pilot schemes relating to Workforce Development Planning Methodology and Skills Audits.

The report reminded the Group that the Authority's first Workforce Development Plan had been endorsed by the Human Resources and Diversity Executive Member in August, 2005. In October, 2005 this Group had recommended that:-

- pilots of both the Workforce Development Planning methodology and Skills Audits would be carried out, the results of which would inform the future roll out of Workforce Planning;

- the Workforce Development Planning Working Group would work alongside Human Resources Management Team to roll out workforce planning in line with the Shaping Future Services - Our Change Programme;

- work with regional and national partners would continue; and

- Trade Unions would be closely involved with the development of workforce development planning solutions.

The report went on to provide details of the Workforce Planning Pilots which had taken place in the following three areas:-

- the Customer Service Division (including the Area Officers);

- the Planning Division; and

- Environmental Health and Trading Standards.

These areas had been chosen as they had experienced difficulties in recruitment and/or retention as well as changing requirements on employees in these areas.

With regard to the pilots the following methodology was applied across each of the Pilot areas following guidance from North West Employers and by taking on board good practice from other authorities:-

- interview Service Managers to better understand their workforce issues;

- profile the workforce demographics to analyse trends, patterns and issues;

- carry out Skills Audits to establish skills gaps and areas of expertise;

- analyse and make recommendations; and

- action Plan with Senior Management Teams.

The key findings from the pilot have been considered onto the table shown on Appendix A.

The report went on to identify the key recommendations from the Pilots, which were as follows:-

- that a strategic and centrally co-ordinated approach to support recruitment was required to target under represented groups, traineeships and career grades. e.g. centrally co-ordinated and systematic attendance at Careers Fairs;

- introduction of a planned approach to talent management to ensure talent pipelines;

- the development of career pathways to encourage movement within services and across services;

- improved exit monitoring;

- promotion of the Flexible Working Policies to encourage managers to use them more often; and

- workforce planning to be integrated within the Human Resources Strand of Our Change Programme to ensure that operation

requirements were factored into future strategic plans.

The report also went on to outline a plan for future action.

It was anticipated that the Human Resources Development Management Team would discuss the recommendations and report back for discussion to this Group on how these areas would be taken forward.

Members referred to the need to ensure that employees from black ethnic minority communities progressed within the Authority to more senior management positions. Melissa reported that there were a number of approaches that could be taken, including positive action training. This could be investigated further.

The Chairman reported that Ms. Woodcock would be leaving the Authority to take up a position at Government Office North West. The Group thanked Ms. Woodcock for her work for the Authority and wished her well in her future career.

It was agreed that the Executive Member for Human Resources and Diversity be recommended to support the proposals for Workforce Planning, as detailed in the report be submitted.

11. SMOKE FREE POLICY

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report which updated the Group on the implications of the forthcoming smoking legislation and to obtain comments on the proposed smoke free policy.

It was agreed that the policy be referred for consideration by the three Political Groups and that the outcome be reported to the next meeting of this Group.

12. HAND ARM VIBRATION POLICY

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report which put forward the Authority's Hand Arm Vibration Policy for the consideration of members.

The report advised the Group that the Council was legally required to ensure effective management of the risks arising from work presenting exposure to vibration.

A copy of the Policy was appended to the report and aimed to address all aspects involved in the effective management of risks involved.

The Policy had been structured in accordance with the OHSAS 18001 Health and Safety Management System Model and aimed to protect Bolton Council as the Duty Holder and protect employees from hand arm vibration syndrome.

It was agreed that the Executive Member for Human Resources and Diversity be recommended to approve the Hand Arm Vibration Policy, as now submitted.

(The meeting started at 2.30pm and finished at 4.30pm)