

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Monday, 16 March 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Garlick (Deputy Chair); Councillors Collins, Clarke and Davies
Councillor Collins arrived late and Councillor Garlick chaired the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Duncan and Matthews.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 October 2008 were signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

The Chair was of the opinion that the following item be discussed as a Matter of Urgency due to the undue delay if it were deferred;

Committee Business

Councillor Clarke commented that it appeared that only personnel issues were being brought to the Committee and expressed concern that the other issues within its remit were not being brought forward.

Resolved: That the Chief Executive investigate that the relevant business was being brought to the Committee and a report brought to the next meeting.

5. PROPERTY MAINTENANCE PAY & PRODUCTIVITY UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Housing submitted a report that set out an update on the implementation of the Property Maintenance Pay and Productivity Agreement and elaborated thereon. It was confirmed that for most of 2008 the department had been without a manager, team leaders and supervisors. The new structure had now been implemented and the staff were now receiving the support they needed. There were 60 full time staff and agency staff had been reduced from 45 to 24 which had provided further savings.

The Director of Housing confirmed that they had been working with the Trades Unions to put in place a multiskill band. A tradesperson qualified to NVQ 2 level would be classed as a 'multiskill level one' and this would enable the tradesperson to undertake other trades which would provide a cheaper, more productive service with less call backs. 'Multiskill level two' would be qualified to an NVQ 3 level and would be able to fully refit kitchens and bathrooms.

She anticipated that if all employees wished to progress through to the higher levels of training then this could be done as part of the Government's Train to Gain Scheme. Good progress had been made and training needs were being identified. Any discrepancies with rates of pay would be rectified in the Pay and Grading Review.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the IBS contractor module would not be running by 1 April and elaborated on the history of this system and the problems that had been encountered with this. It was confirmed that the contingency plan would be in place by 1 April which would collect the data manually but could then be transferred onto the IBS system at a later date. Once the information was transferred then it would be linked to the Agresso financial system where the cost of jobs could be accurately recorded.

The Director of Housing advised that they would initially employ 72 of the 96 posts on the establishment to avoid over recruitment during quiet periods. A consultation with residents and tenants to improve the procedure and service charges was currently taking place. Councillor Clarke noted that the Council had previously received criticism of the standard of the housing stock and in particular the condition of communal areas; it should be possible to increase the number of permanent employees and raise the standard of housing stock whilst saving money.

The Director of Finance and Support confirmed that not all agency staff were budgeted in addition to established posts. With the right level of permanent staff the standard of properties could be raised whilst reducing costs.

Resolved: The report be noted.

6. UPDATE ON THE EQUAL PAY REVIEW/PAY AND GRADING PROCESS

The Head of Human Resources reported that the Equal Pay Review and Pay and Grading project had started in October and the first stage was due to be signed off. Agreement from the Unions had been received in respect of the Conventions and Benchmarking phase of the project. The support of the West Midlands Local Government Association's had been gained as they had already implemented this in a number of authorities in the country. She confirmed that past mistakes had been learned from and a Steering Group had been set up to oversee the project and to meet the deadline of April 2010.

The Director of Finance and Support advised that the Council had to fund the pay modelling costs and implement Single Status. The estimated cost of 3% has been quoted but the true figure would not be known until after pay modelling had been undertaken in October.

The Head of Human Resources advised that when the agreement was implemented there would be legislation and case law to follow. Other terms and conditions would be reviewed as part of the pay and grading project and their financial impact would be considered. Pay protection would be a key issue. The next stage of the process was due to be completed in September.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 19.00.