

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Monday, 14 February 2011

PRESENT: Councillor Garlick (Chair); Councillor Woods (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Conroy, Duncan, Glynane, Mason (In place of
Choudary), Mildren and Simpson

APOLOGIES: Councillor Choudary

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2010 were confirmed and signed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

None.

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

None.

**6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
- ABSENCE MANAGEMENT**

Councillor Jane Hollis of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented a report on Absence Management to the Committee and informed them about the positive feedback received from staff on the new absence management reporting. It was confirmed that having a qualified nurse to report to, provided additional information to staff such as an estimated time scale for absence and a potential return to work date. It was also noted that a review of the absence review policy would come back to this meeting at a later stage if an increase in data changed the results so far received, positively or negatively.

Members questioned the training offered to staff and managers. It was confirmed by the Head of Human Resources (HR) that Line Managers were offered training on the new system but that this was not currently offered to all employees.

Discussion took place around equalities and it was confirmed that the organisation used for Absence Management reporting (First Care) provided services for many employment sectors and therefore had a wealth of experience in dealing with different types of people and any concerns regarding equalities had been allayed by First

Care.

Members wished to thank the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for its report, the HR Officers for implementing the new system and the staff for ensuring a smooth transition.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. UPDATE ON THE REVISED TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE OF COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

The Head of HR outlined the report to the Committee and informed them that since the last meeting of the Committee 81% of staff had now accepted the new Terms and Conditions (T&C). Due to Unison and GMB not being able to jointly agree on the T&C it was unavoidable that a collective agreement could not be made. HR was instead speaking to individuals to explain the new T&C and request their cooperation.

Discussion took place around the appeals process, the deadline of 14 January 2011 and that 155 job families had appealed their Job Evaluation (JE) totalling 380 staff members. It was confirmed that the 90 day consultation period ended on 12 February 2011. It was noted that any staff who had not accepted the new T&C's by 25 February 2011 would be dismissed from their current contract on 28 February 2011 and reengaged onto the new contract on 22 May 2011 (not affecting continuous service). Members raised concerns about how well this information was being advertised internally and if staff were aware that they could appeal alongside signing up to the new T&C, avoiding the dismissal and reengaging process. It was confirmed that the staff were aware of the process and that it had been suitably advertised internally.

Members stated that they did not feel it was automatically necessary to review this item and that the Chair should access this on behalf of the Committee and only add to the agenda if he feels necessary. The Members also wished to note the hard work by HR and the staff in making this painful process well organised.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

8. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Chief Executive outlined the report to the Committee and raised the significant changes to the Borough's ward boundaries would be brought into force at the May 2011 elections. It was confirmed to be the Polling Station with the largest number of voters was 2215, which would ensure the problems that occurred in Sheffield, and other places would not be repeated in this Borough. Policy was confirmed in that only those electors that had ballot papers at 10:00 pm would be permitted to vote.

There was discussion around the movement of Polling Places due to this review, how

many people would be affected and how this was being flagged with residents. It was noted by the Chief Executive that the Final Recommendations of The Local Government Boundary Commission for England were received much later than expected which has prevented informing residents about the changes on an individual basis. Instead, it was only possible to raise this in the local media, putting extra staff in the Contact Centre to answer calls, and relying on the information contained within the polling card and the Northampton Borough Council (NBC) website.

Discussion took place around the affect on boundaries for the Parish, County and Parliamentary Elections. It was confirmed that these boundaries would be rationalised and reviewed at a later date. It was noted that in the report, item 3.7, there were still issues in locating permanent polling places for some polling districts but that a better quality of mobile station would be looked into along with accessibility issues. It was confirmed that it was the Policy of NBC to avoid the use of schools and prevent unnecessary disruption to children and their parents.

There was discussion around the new rules on staffing and that there was a significant rise in the numbers of staff that were required to work polling stations and as inspectors. Members questioned if this would assist in detecting fraudulent activity such as identity fraud. It was noted that postal votes were more susceptible to fraud and that NBC's policy was a 100% fraud check ensuring every vote was scanned and checked individually.

Members requested that the addition of a note to all Polling Cards stating that there was a change to the boundaries and to check their wards and Polling Places. The Chief Executive noted this to be a good idea and would add this if possible.

The Committee then

RESOLVED:

1. That the changes to the polling districts and polling places within the Borough be agreed in order that preparations can be made for the election to be conducted on the new ward boundaries; and
2. That the Electoral Registration Officer be able to amend the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations as required for operational purposes; and
3. That the public consultation on the polling districts, polling places and polling stations be noted.

9. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair moved that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

The meeting concluded at 6:55 pm