

EMPLOYMENT PANEL

THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Phillip Bicknell (Vice-Chairman), Paul Brimacombe, Simon Dudley, Malcolm Beer and John Story

Also in attendance: Arron Jones, UNISON

Officers: Alison Alexander, Terry Baldwin and Karen Shepherd

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burbage, Dr Evans, Mrs Jones and Saunders.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Story stated that his wife was an employee of RBWM but that this did not result in any conflict with the items on the agenda.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Part I minutes of the meetings held on 13 and 29 October 2015 be approved.

UNISON AND GMB PAY CLAIM FOR 2016/17

Members considered the Trade Union pay claim for 2016/17.

Arron Jones, a representative of UNISON, addressed the Panel. Mr Jones stated that UNISON was requesting a 3% pay rise across all bands to match inflation and meet the cost of living increases employees were facing. He was aware that the borough had experienced recruitment and retention issues and asked whether Members had considered how much the use of locum and agency staff would reduce if a pay rise was awarded?

Councillor Dudley explained that an important element for consideration of wage growth was disposable earnings. Under both the coalition and the new Conservative government there had been an increase in the tax free allowance element, the introduction of the national living wage and an increase in free childcare. It was clear that there had therefore been attempts to address the issue of disposable earnings, particularly for those on a lower income. For a number of years the borough had focussed increases to salaries of those in lower pay bands. The council had now introduced a pay reward scheme to incentivise and reward those performing above average. The council was extremely interested in retaining the highest quality staff and having a remuneration scheme to achieve that. There were some specific areas that caused problems, such as children's social workers and planning. In these instances the terms and conditions had been reviewed. The council tried to be proactive in addressing areas of weakness.

Mr Jones commented that CPI was being used as a measure of disposable income, however he felt that this failed to adequately measure the pressures facing a working household.

Councillor Dudley responded that before the Pay Reward scheme had been brought in, the focus had been on increases for those in lower salary grades. The council would soon be in a position where every employee earned more than the national living wage. The Head of HR

confirmed that the Panel would receive a report in January 2016 to address the government's proposals.

It was confirmed that Members had received UNISON's survey comments on the Pay Reward scheme when the Panel had reviewed the scheme earlier in 2015. Councillor Dudley commented that one area of concern raised in the survey had been disqualification based on sick leave. Members had agreed with the comments and modified the scheme. The change had been communicated to all employees and fed back to the Trade Unions.

Councillor Brimacombe commented that any Pay Reward scheme needed core principles. It was right, decent and moral to move to a position whereby every employee was paid above the living wage. Any percentage increase was worth less the lower your salary; therefore increments every year were important. However it was also important to be conscious of the large volume of employees that would be involved and therefore the large bill that resulted. The more an individual earned the more career focussed they were and scarcity in the market meant they were more likely to move jobs. Therefore pay increases should be linked to performance. He believed the council's policies were well aligned through the appraisal system. He was not in favour of blanket increases. The council's Transformation programme meant that skill sets were changing and needed to be refreshed to ensure the best services for residents. Staff turnover was therefore not necessarily a negative.

The Chairman stated that staff were entitled to a fair return for their efforts, however blanket awards were old fashioned and did not cut across the thrust of an individual needing to improve their skills to move forward. He believed effort should be what drove salaries forward. He welcomed the useful research and data provided by UNISON, but he felt that the statistics should have also covered families with two earners rather than just focussing on those with one earner. He also commented that the borough was an expensive area in terms of accommodation and Members would take this into account when considering the pay claim.

Councillor Beer commented that he had worked for a London authority during his career, at a time when no salary increments had been given for a number of years; therefore he understood the reasons for a standstill policy. However local government workers were very mobile and consideration needed to be given to retention and the need to offer a competitive package. The Chairman highlighted the need to avoid a spiral situation. The main problem was agency staff not wanting a permanent role to maintain their mobility.

Mr Jones stated that the reason the union was asking for a blanket increase was to bring pay up to match prices in the borough, then incentivisation could be used on top. This might encourage agency staff to settle. He appreciated that borough specific statistics and other family type examples would be useful and he would see if this could be provided. The Managing Director confirmed that the borough had been creative in addressing the agency issue especially in high risk areas; however there was a need to ensure wages did not continue to increase. Across the south east local authorities were taking a firmer approach to set overall rates for a collective position. It had also been agreed that agency staff would not be appointed if they had left a permanent position just to take up the agency post.

The Head of HR explained that previously the only way to move beyond a grade was to be promoted. Under the new system the council had wider pay bands including gateways which allowed for a pay increase if an individual received an excellent rating in their appraisal. Any increase became a permanent part of the individual's salary.

The Chairman stated that the council was looking for forward movement in terms of salaries and would consider the request for a 3% increase. Councillor Brimacombe commented that Members needed to consider the size of the 'pot' and a more sophisticated distribution. There was no argument for featherbedding the public sector; it needed to set an example.

Mr Jones suggested a survey of agency staff to identify the reasons they did not wish to stay may be useful for Members. The Managing Director confirmed that this had been undertaken when social worker salaries had been regraded.

The Chairman thanked Mr Jones for attending. Mr Jones left the meeting at 6.35pm

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion took place on items 6-7 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.00 pm, finished at 6.56 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....