

Staff & Pensions Committee

Monday, 9 December 2019

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Neil Dirveiks
Councillor Bill Gifford
Councillor John Horner
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Bob Stevens

Officers

Others Present

1. General

(1) Apologies

None

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September and 15 October 2019 were considered and agreed as a true and accurate record for signing by the Chair.

Councillor Neil Dirveiks, replacing Councillor Richard Chattaway, was welcomed to the Committee.

2. Proposal for Additional Paid Employee Leave Provision

Having introduced Caroline Fraser (Strategy and Commissioning Manager (HROD)) to the committee Sarah McCluskey (HR Business Partner) introduced the published report summarising its key points. The committee considered the proposals for military personnel. With reference to paragraph 1.6 in the report it was noted that the council has achieved bronze status on the MOD's

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. There is, however, an aspiration to achieve gold status. There are currently 14 staff members who would benefit from the proposals as set out in the report.

Members expressed their support for the proposal. Councillor Bob Stevens emphasised the need to provide as much support as possible to serving and ex-military personnel adding that people who have served in the military often bring a wide range of skills and experiences to their work at the council. This view was echoed by Councillor Bill Gifford who observed that his father had experienced difficulties in securing employment when he left the armed forces.

In response to a question from Councillor Gifford, Phil Deakin (Armed Forces Covenant Community Projects Worker) confirmed that all three armed forces are treated equally. Members agreed that it will be important to ensure that the additional leave does not undermine the capacity of the council to deliver services. To this end a policy guidance document is to be produced. The situation will also be assisted by the MOD arranging training well in advance. The committee agreed its support for the proposals as they relate to existing and prospective foster carers.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee:

1) Approves the proposal for up to 10 days paid leave per annum (pro rata for part time staff) for employees serving in the Reserve Armed Forces or those volunteering their time as Adult Cadet Instructors for undertaking their annual training camp or other training specific to their Reserve or Adult Cadet Instructor role.

2) Approves the proposal for up to 10 days additional unpaid leave in total (pro rata for part time staff) within a 3 year period, and each successive 3 year period thereafter, for those serving in the Reserve Armed Forces or volunteering their time as Adult Cadet Instructors, for undertaking additional specialist training to enhance their role or for progression within the Reserve or Cadet Forces.

3) Approves the proposal to introduce a Guaranteed Interview Scheme where the essential criteria for a post are met by external candidates:

- who are serving Armed Forces personnel during the 12 weeks prior to their discharge date from the Armed Forces;
- who are ex-Armed Forces personnel within 3 years of their discharge date or;
- where the Armed Forces were their last long-term substantive employer

4) Approves Warwickshire County Council becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer, through subscribing to the Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly Employer Scheme.

5) Approves the proposal for up to 5 days paid leave (pro rata for part time staff) for employees who intend to become foster carers, in the first year of fostering for the purposes of undertaking training and/or activity in relation to their assessment as foster carers.

6) Approves the proposal for up to 3 days additional paid leave per annum (pro rata for part time staff) for employees who are approved foster carers in the years following approval for the purposes of undertaking learning, development or preparation for the placement of a child or young person.

7) Approval of leave in recommendations 1,2, 5 and 6 will be at the discretion of the line manager subject to business need, with ultimate discretion by the Assistant Director if the employee is not satisfied with their decision.

3. Pension Administration Update

Chris Norton (Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Treasury, Pension, Audit & Risk)) in introducing the remaining agenda items explained that with changes in governance and the growth in the number of employers in the Warwickshire Pension Fund it is probable that more pensions-related business will be presented to the committee in the future. Liz Firmstone (Service Manager – Transformation) explained that agenda item 3 served to set the scene for future business and reports.

Councillor Bob Stevens suggested that with a number of pensions-related developments it will be necessary to review the way in which the pensions service is run. There is, he suggested, a need to return to basics and reflect on the relationship between the Local Pension Board, the Pension Fund Investment SubCommittee and the Staff and Pensions Committee. Councillor Bill Gifford emphasised that it is important to ensure that the Pension Fund Investment SubCommittee does not make decisions that must then be overturned by the Staff and Pensions Committee. Councillor John Horner reminded members that the Staff and Pensions Committee should focus solely on Council element of the Pension Fund.

In addition, he reminded members that the job of the Local Pension Board is to ensure that the Pensions Service is being run properly. In response to these points it was agreed that officers prepare a briefing note setting out the relative responsibilities of the committees.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee approves the proposals for future reports to the Committee in relation to the Pensions Administration Service.

4. Pension Fund Admissions - Academies

Neil Buxton (Pension Services Manager) introduced the report. In response to a question from Councillor John Horner the committee was informed that pension administration costs are paid by constituent employers.

There is always a set up fee with actuaries developing an opening statement for new employers.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee delegates authority to the Strategic Director for Resources to approve applications from the listed schools converting to academy status, subject to the applications meeting the criteria:

- Meon Vale (Tudor Grange Academy Trust; 1 September 2019)
- Henley High School (Arden Multiple Academy Trust; 1 September 2019).
- Lower Farm Academy (REAch2 Academy Trust; 1 September 2019)

5. LGPS Development Update

Neil Buxton summarised the published report.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the report.

6. Pensions Fund Breaches Policy

Neil Buxton explained that the review of the Breaches Policy is one of a number of such exercises being proposed or undertaken. The committee was informed that it is important that staff are aware of their responsibilities when a breach occurs.

Of equal importance is an awareness of the consequences of any breach for employers. The Pensions Team is working with employers to ensure that they have the knowledge and understanding they require. Regarding a breach that was reviewed by the Local Pension Board it was confirmed that as it was graded amber it was not reported to the Pensions Regulator. Rather, it was reported internally.

Members of the committee agreed that they would welcome training on breaches so that they would know what to look for and how to address them. The key would be an understanding of the relevant protocols. In response to this Chris Norton agreed to ensure that whenever pensions-related training is planned an invitation be extended to members of the Staff and Pensions Committee.

Sarah Duxbury (Assistant Director, Governance and Policy) added that a further safeguard is provided by the Council's Audit function which works to ensure that all relevant checks are being made.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee approves the Breaches Policy.

7. Cubbington Parish Council

The committee considered and agreed its support for this proposal. **Resolved**
That the Staff and Pensions Committee approve the application from Cubbington Parish Council for admission to the Warwickshire Pension Fund.

8. Urgent Business

Councillor John Horner questioned whether employees are aware of the value of their pensions to them adding that an indication of the employer's contribution could be added to pay slips. This may have the effect of dissuading staff from leaving the County Council in search of higher salaries.

In response it was observed that additional information on payslips may prove confusing. It should also be borne in mind that people with young families and sizable mortgages may not be persuaded to stay in the employ of the County Council by the knowledge of their pension benefits. Neil Buxton suggested that there may be scope to offer more publicity regarding the value of pensions to staff.

He added that it is important to stop people from opting out from the scheme.

9. Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 9 March 2020 The meeting rose at 2.58p.m.

Actions Resulting from this Meeting Action

Responsible Officer(s)

1. Briefing note on roles and responsibilities of pensions committees Chris Norton
2. Members to be invited to training on pensions related matters Chris Norton