

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE

28th February 2008

Present: Councillor Hastrick (Chair)
Councillor L Scudder (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Counter (for minute number CF19-07/08), Grimston,
Martins, D Scudder and Wylie

CF15-
07/08 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Wylie replaced Councillor McGovern.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor I Brown.

CF16-
07/08 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

CF17-
07/08 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th January 2008 were submitted and signed.

CF18-
07/08 **COUNCIL TAX 2008/09**

Reason for Urgency: The Police Authority and the County Council had not set their precepts until 22 and 26 February respectively. The overall level of Council Tax needed to be approved to comply with legal and good practice requirements on billing.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Finance setting out the statutory Council Tax Resolution for 2008/09, including the Council Tax requirements for Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police Authority.

RESOLVED –

that the Committee formally sets the total Council Tax for Watford Borough Council, including the precepts for Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Police Authority, as set out in the table below.

Band	(Ratios)	Watford's Share	HCC's Share	Herts Police Share	TOTAL
		£	£	£	£
A	(6/9)	167.33	720.75	91.11	979.19
B	(7/9)	195.22	840.87	106.30	1,142.39
C	(8/9)	223.11	961.00	121.48	1,305.59
D	(1)	251.00	1,081.12	136.67	1,468.79
E	(11/9)	306.78	1,321.37	167.04	1,795.19
F	(13/9)	362.56	1,561.62	197.41	2,121.59
G	(15/9)	418.33	1,801.87	227.78	2,447.98
H	(2)	502.00	2,162.24	273.34	2,937.58

CF19-
07/08

SICKNESS POLICY

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources including possible new options to reduce current levels of sickness absence and a proposed new Sickness Management Policy.

The Head of Human Resources explained to the Committee about the progress that had been made to date in reducing the overall level of sickness absence. She also informed Members about suggested initiatives to help reduce levels further.

Members discussed the suggestion that staff could be rewarded if they had little or no sickness absence. They had a number of concerns about this suggestion. Some Members felt that the suggestion of an extra day of annual leave might be a good idea. However, there were concerns that this might be difficult to manage and staff might be encouraged to come to work when they should be on sick leave. A Member commented that a reward system could be divisive and a group reward was not the correct way to reduce sickness levels. However, the Committee supported the suggestion of some personal form of acknowledgement, either a letter or through the appraisal system would be appropriate.

A Member said that she was concerned about the suggested physiotherapy service referred to in the report. She felt that if the problem was severe enough, the person's doctor would be referring them for treatment through the NHS. Members appreciated that the cost of physiotherapy treatment would be less than the cost of long term sick leave.

The Head of Human Resources explained that the service would only be used where delays in receiving physiotherapy were elongating the duration of absence and on the advice of the Occupational Health service. Members felt that it was important that this service should not be seen as a perk and needed to be managed carefully. It was suggested that a trial of one year could be carried out to evaluate any benefits.

The Head of Human Resources advised that in cases of long term sickness the Occupational Health Adviser wrote to the GP about the case. She said that it might be possible to include a question about physiotherapy.

The Committee supported the use of a Nurse Contact Centre for sickness reporting, but the adviser should not be intrusive when speaking to the member of staff about the reason for taking sick leave. The Head of Human Resources explained that the adviser would be able to give constructive advice to the member of staff. A Member said that the adviser should be supportive rather than interrogate the person. Members supported the use of this service on a trial basis of one year.

The Head of Human Resources informed the Committee about the new sickness management policy and procedure. She advised that it included separate procedures for short term and long term absences.

Members enquired about the potential to dismiss staff for very poor attendance within the policy. The Head of Human Resources explained that this was within the parameters of employment law, but in Local Government it was unusual to dismiss a member of staff on health grounds and this was rarely necessary. It was not legally fair to dismiss people whilst they were still entitled to sick pay, which could be up to 12 months in Local Government. Generally people returned to work in this time. In response to a question on sickness statistics, she explained that the sickness levels appeared to be high, due to the way the statistics had to be calculated for the performance indicator. This was because it was based on average days per full time equivalent member of staff. However, many staff rarely took sick leave. Other statistics were produced which were more representative of the position. She confirmed that long term absences affected the performance indicator calculation and could make a section's sickness figures look high when few people were off.

Members discussed the use of home visits and who would make them. There was concern that in some cases the line manager might not be appropriate and cause the member of staff more stress. The Head of Human Resources advised that it was important that all managers received appropriate training. Currently the line manager might visit with a representative from Human Resources or a Human Resources officer would go on their own.

It was acknowledged that the line manager needed to be kept informed. Members suggested that visits could be made by the Occupational Health Adviser or a union representative.

The Head of Human Resources stated that a judgement needed to be made in each case.

RESOLVED –

- a) that the proposed sickness management policy be approved.
- b) that the use of a Nurse Contact Centre for sickness reporting and physiotherapy service options be approved for a trial period of one year.

Chair
Council Functions Committee

The meeting started at 7.35pm
and ended at 8.45 pm

F – 7/3 (SH)