

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 26 June 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Vice-Chair), Mark Coxshall, James Halden, Barbara Rice, Lynn Worrall and Chris Baker (substitute for Robert Ray)

Apologies: Councillors John Kent (Chair) and Robert Ray.

In attendance: Jackie Hinchliffe, Head of HR, OD and Customer Strategy
Lindsey Francklin – Business Development Manager
Steve Jones – Democratic Services Manager

Councillor Gledhill, as Vice Chair, took the Chair for this meeting.

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the General Services Committee, held on 13 January 2014, were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair informed the Committee that he had not agreed to the consideration of any items of urgent business.

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations made.

4. Local Government Pension Scheme Discretionary Decision Policy Statement

The Business Development Manager introduced the report.

Members were informed that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) 2014 came into effect on the 1 April 2014 and that under the conditions of the scheme, the Council were required to publish certain discretions, as the employer, on a range of discretions contained within the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 and the Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional provisions, Savings and Amendment) Regulations 2014.

The Committee were advised that the new and changed discretions were summarised in the table at paragraph 3.5 of the report and related to both the 2014 regulations and guidance, and, the changes to discretions that had been approved by the Council for the previous discretionary pension policy statement. In addition, Members were informed that the proposed changes which appeared in bold text were discretions that must be published.

A copy of the full Discretionary Policy Statement was included at Appendix 1 to the report for Members' information.

Councillor Halden enquired how the changes were to be communicated to staff and was advised that the policy statement would be published to the Intranet, a notification would also be included in the weekly "Insight" email to all staff, and, that Managers would be asked to cascade this information to their teams.

Councillor Barbara Rice enquired whether the Trade Unions had been involved and members of the pension scheme consulted through the Unions.

Members were informed that the three main Trade Unions had been consulted and that all staff had also received a letter to inform them of the new pension scheme. It was reported that the Council would not necessarily write to each member of the pension scheme regarding the discretionary policy statement, but would instead publicise this through its normal communications channels.

A further query was raised as to whether the changes to the pension scheme, in respect of it being based on average earnings, applied only to new entrants. It was reported that every member of the pension scheme transferred into the new scheme as of 1 April 2014 and that staff would effectively see benefits for service after 31 March 2014 being accrued on a Career Average Revalued Earnings (CARE) basis, rather than on a final salary basis as was previously the case.

Members were advised that some protections existed for staff, such as those employees subject to the 85-year rule and those who were close to the normal age for retirement to ensure that they were not worse off financially under the new scheme.

Councillor Halden sought confirmation that the changes to the way in which benefits for service were now accrued had been included in the letter sent to staff. It was reported that this information had been included in the letter that had been sent to every member of the Scheme and that, in addition to this, information was available on the LGPS website and that a pension road show had been held in Thurrock which staff could attend.

Councillor Gledhill enquired how the Council would engage with and notify the changes to those members of the scheme who were no longer employees.

It was reported that whilst the Council could deal with some, it would be for the Pension Fund to communicate the changes to anyone with “deferred benefits”. Members were informed that the Council would only have contact with people who wished to take their benefits early, because this was now available to anyone over 55.

Councillor Gledhill informed the Committee that he was happy to see that the Council would be checking people who take pension if they were unfit to work and make checks on this at 18 months and 3 year points

Members were informed that the Tier 3 pension had been in place since the 2008 scheme and that the Council were rigorous in undertaking checks at 18 months and 3 years and also had the option of making a referral back to a GP at 3 years. It was reported that the Council undertook rigorous checks because, as the employer, it was liable.

The recommendations printed in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the new discretions under the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 and the Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional Provisions, Savings and Amendment) Regulations 2014 be approved.**
- 2. That the LGPS discretionary changes under the previous regulations be approved.**

The meeting finished at 7.12 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**