

**Notes of the Community Focused Efficient Council Scrutiny Meeting held on
Wednesday, 1st December 2010 at 6.00 pm in the
Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

Present: Councillors Clive Mollett (Chairman), David Chaplin, Angela McClements, Bill Tomlinson and Co-optee Maurice Viney.

Also in attendance: Meredith Evans, Corporate Director Environment & Rural Area / Housing Regeneration & Prosperity; Debbie Germany, Organisational Improvement Manager; Emma Gower, Project Officer, Organisational Improvement; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

Apologies: Councillor Adrian Meredith, co-optee Maurice Viney.

<u>Minute/Action</u>	<u>Action to be taken by</u>
1. The minutes of the last meeting noted without change.	
2. <u>Single Status</u> Members received a verbal report from the Corporate Director for Environment & Rural Area / Housing, Regeneration & Prosperity and the Organisational Improvement Manager. Single Status dated from 2007 and stemmed from equal pay legislation aimed at addressing gender bias in pay for like-for-like jobs, especially low paid jobs where women had traditionally been paid less than men. All local authorities had to undergo a systematic re-evaluation of all jobs to bring pay into alignment; it was not about how much people should be paid, only that pay was equal for equal value work. Where higher pay awards were made, claims for back pay could be back-dated to 2007. Since 2007 a lot of work had been done in Telford & Wrekin on job evaluation and pay modelling, but the process had been extremely complicated. The implementation of Single Status in other authorities had thrown up legal challenges so that case law was constantly changing. Telford & Wrekin had therefore reviewed and re-modelled its approach at each stage to make sure it was as robust as possible against legal challenge and this amongst other things had made the process more protracted. Meredith Evans had become lead Director and Debbie Germany as Project Manager for Single Status in July 2010 because they were leading on the Council's restructure programme and it made sense to align the two processes. A new methodology and implementation timetable had been put in place, and delivery was being overseen by a new Steering Group made up of senior staff in legal, HR and finance. "Job families" had been established to categorise jobs with recognised similarities and equal value into manageable groups. This had made the process easier and more flexible to manage, although it was still very complex with many timing dependencies. It had added about 8 months to the timetable, but other authorities were now adopting the approach. Work with schools had become more complicated as schools moved towards independence which changed the employment	

status of staff. There was on-going negotiation with the unions.

Questions and Answers

Q. How do you ensure that job roles are fairly and consistently evaluated?

A. Each member of staff completes a detailed Job Evaluation (JE) questionnaire which is designed to pull out the value of the job - it requires them to give examples of how their skills are used - and is signed-off by their line manager. Questionnaires are thoroughly analysed and checked for consistency by the JE panel, and the Job Family framework enables jobs of a similar value to be more fairly evaluated. The process is sophisticated, and is as thorough and fair as possible. There are checks and balances in the system, and there will be an appeal process.

ME/DG

A sample questionnaire would be circulated.

Q. What is the timetable for implementation?

A. The implementation date is May 2012. The steps leading up to this are pay modelling, equality impact assessments, legal and financial affordability checks, then to Cabinet for approval, then to the union for agreement locally and nationally, then back to Cabinet for final approval.

Q. Have there been any challenges yet in Telford & Wrekin?

A. What we want is collective agreement with the union. The current union position is neutral and open-minded, and although there are some reservations about the Job family approach.

Q. How are the unions involved and how do you communicate with them?

A. There is a fortnightly meeting to raise issues, give updates and sound out ideas on either side. There is quite a constant dialogue, although the unions are more involved at key stages.

Q. How are staff supported in completing the JE forms? People who are more adept at filling in the forms could be advantaged.

A. The JE team offers training, and line managers can also support staff in addition to signing off the forms. The Job Family approach and the JE process include core consistency checks to ensure that people are treated equally. Forms are double-checked to reduce the risk of discrepancies.

Q. How does Single Status affect back-pay for leavers?

Current case law indicates that there have been no successful claims beyond 6 months of the employee leave date.

Q. Does Single Status include teachers?

A. It does not cover teachers but it does cover other school staff including teaching assistants, catering, cleaning etc.

Q. Does back-pay remain fixed, or is interest paid on the pay owing?

A. There is no formula for back-pay. The legislation applies from April 2007. Other authorities have dealt with this in different ways e.g. a negotiated compensation payment. In Telford & Wrekin, a reserve of 4% has been set aside each year for the last 3 years to cover Single Status costs, but until the pay modelling is done we will not know if this is enough. The final

amount will depend on a number of factors.

Q. Are we liaising with neighbouring authorities to try to ensure implementation dates are aligned and market rates are consistent?

A. Because there is no national framework for Single Status, each authority has done it differently and within different timescales. We do look at authorities who have recently gone through implementation to learn from them e.g. Derbyshire completed in January, Sandwell in April. Shropshire implemented phase 1 for the lower grades 1-2 years ago. Walsall is on track to implement soon, so we are talking to them. BT recommended contacting Shropshire to find out how the lower grade implementation had been done and gone.

Q. Why has it taken so long to implement?

A. ME had only been involved with Single Status since July 2010, so could not account for specifics before then, but the major changes the organisation is facing and the economic climate had all had an impact on timescales, as well as the changing case law referred to earlier. But rigorous project management had now been put in place to make sure milestones are achieved in future.

Q. How can we be assured that the May 2012 implementation date will be met?

A. We are as confident as possible that they can be met where they are within Council control. There are unknowns such as negotiation with the unions and how long they take for the national negotiation and it is difficult to know how long to allow for this.

Q. Are there any external controls on timescales?

A. No, but we don't want the Single Status project lasting longer than necessary.

3. Service Reviews

Members received a verbal report from the Corporate Director for Environment & Rural Area / Housing, Regeneration & Prosperity and Organisational Improvement Manager.

As part of the One Council vision, the council got rid of the old portfolios has restructured to merge and streamline management, cutting 50% off management costs. Service Reviews are also underway across all service areas to identify priorities and look at how services can be reshaped to make efficiencies. National cuts are now a big driver. There are 3 types of Service Review:

1. The NKA efficiency reviews - transport, environmental services. The recommendations have either been implemented or are being worked through and will come out as part of the budget proposals.
2. The 3 major reviews on the reconfiguration of ASC/CYP services which are due to conclude at the end of December
3. All other service reviews. This work will initially feed into the budget proposals for 2011/12 which will identify any service impacts, and will not be reported separately. Many are at the

early idea stage and more complicated proposals will come through later next year.

Questions and Answers

Q. Has there been an evaluation of whether the savings projected from the NKA reviews have actually been made, and how is this done?

A. Some savings have been captured and are in place, others will come through the budget proposals and there will be year-on-year savings. A wind-up report went to Cabinet to show savings to date; there have been savings from the retendering of taxi services, reduced costs of the travel centre in the bus station, and savings from a review of maintenance schedules will come through the budget proposals – but a running total just related to NKA suggestions is not being kept. In the current climate, the Council would do things differently from using consultants in this way.

Q. What risk analysis and impact assessment is done on the proposed service changes?

A. The projected outcomes and implications of proposals are analysed and identified in a risk register. Steering Groups have been set up for key areas of work: New Ways of Working, Single Status and Service Reviews. These are action-focused groups which include officers doing the work.

Members LL and AMc expressed concern about risks.

Q. If the budget is the driver, how is saving money balanced with maintaining services?

A. Services will need to be prioritised carefully. The high cost/low impact areas where efficiencies can be made have been identified, but these won't deliver the level of savings that are expected to be required. We need to maximise savings in areas that are least damaging to the community and we are working with partners on this. Some services have already been cut back following the withdrawal of grant funding in the summer.

Q. Will the services that are funded be effective?

A. Yes, the starting point is identifying exactly what services need to be delivered and the funding needed to provide them at the agreed level will be identified.

Q. When will the budget proposals be available to scrutiny?

A. There was uncertainty about the exact date, but it was noted that the proposals are going to Cabinet on 11th January. BT commented that in the past, papers with figures had not been available until the day of the Cabinet meeting.

THE COMMITTEE REQUESTED

That the investment and savings figures in the budget proposals should have an explanatory narrative around them.

4. Employee Suggestion Scheme

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director for Environment & Rural Area / Housing, Regeneration & Prosperity which was also presented by the Project Officer, Organisational Improvement.

The report highlighted:

- There had been 146 suggestions from 1st April-30th Sept, about 100 in the first month then around 10 per month.
- 15 suggestions had been implemented (on target at 10%). 1 had made £2k p.a. cashable savings, the others resulted in non-cashable savings or other organisational benefit.
- 41% were declined, mostly because they were already planned or were not financially viable.
- There had been issues with the automated system so a manual system was being used.
- Employee engagement sessions done as part of the service reviews had brought in significantly more suggestions and these will be taken into account in the service reviews

Questions and Answers

Q. Will the scheme be continued with current performance?

A. Yes, the scheme is intended to continue. A full review of the scheme will take place in April.

Q. What are the rewards?

A. There are rewards for suggestions that make cashable savings - £25 for individuals, up to £100 for groups and a mug for any suggestion implemented.

Q. Should the rewards be set higher as an incentive e.g. a % of the savings made?

A. The employee engagement sessions were a more successful way of getting suggestions and staff were not rewarded at all for these. (A note was e-mailed to members on 2nd December about this and forwarded to co-optees.)

Q. Is everyone aware of the rewards?

A. There are details on the intranet.

Q. Do people making suggestions receive feedback to update them on what is happening with their suggestion?

A. All people making suggestions receive feedback by e-mail. There is a 28 day response guideline to notify people whether their suggestion has been accepted or rejected, although complex suggestions can take longer to evaluate but the suggestor will receive this feedback.

Q. Has the scheme made a net loss?

A. It is difficult to audit because some ideas feed into others, and there are suggestions that don't make a cashable saving but do improve the way the organisation works.

AGREED

- **That the report and details of rewards would be circulated to all members.**
- **That the results of the review would be reported back to the CFEC committee after April 2011.**

EG

5.

Partner Funding

The report of the Head of Finance circulated for information was considered. Members requested a response from the Head of

Finance as to whether there is a perception that there will be a significant change to partner funding next year.

SJ/KC

6. Forward Plan and next meeting

Members noted the Forward Plan. All scrutiny members will be invited to the CFEC meeting on 12th January when the budget proposals will be presented.

Because the budget consultation timetable is so tight, members were asked to read the proposals as soon as they are available, and to put forward their questions in advance so that answers can be provided at the scrutiny committee meetings in January. Members will be provided with a hard copy of the proposals as soon as they are available. BT commented that in the past some appendices to the proposals had not been available before the Cabinet meetings and that they should be made available as soon as possible.