

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Your attendance is requested at a meeting to be held at
The Jeffrey Room, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE.
on Monday, 14 February 2011
at 6:00 pm.

**D Kennedy
Chief Executive**

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Minutes**
- 3. Declarations of Interest**
- 4. Deputations / Public Addresses**
- 5. Matters of Urgency which by reason of special circumstances the chair is of the opinion should be considered**
- 6. Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee -
Absence Management**
- 7. Update on the Revised Terms and Conditions of Service of Council
Employees**
- 8. Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations**
- 9. Exclusion of Public and Press**

THE CHAIR TO MOVE:

“THAT THE PUBLIC BE EXCLUDED FROM THE REMAINDER OF THE MEETING ON THE GROUNDS THAT THERE IS LIKELY TO BE DISCLOSURE TO THEM OF SUCH CATEGORIES OF EXEMPT INFORMATION AS DEFINED BY SECTION 100(1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS LISTED AGAINST SUCH ITEMS OF BUSINESS BY REFERENCE TO THE APPROPRIATE PARAGRAPH OF SCHEDULE 12A TO SUCH ACT.”



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE 1 FEBRUARY 2011

Report Title	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ABSENCE MANAGEMENT
--------------	--

Agenda Status: PUBLIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to General Purposes Committee for consideration, the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Review – Absence Management.
- 1.2 The Executive Summary to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report is attached at Appendix 1. Members of Cabinet have been issued with a copy of the full report. All Overview and Scrutiny Review reports are published on the Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's Webpage and a copy of the this report can be located: www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny - Previous Scrutiny Reviews.
- 1.3 A copy of this report has been presented to Cabinet for consideration. The recommendations contained within this Overview and Scrutiny report have been directed to Cabinet; however, it is felt that this report should also be presented to the General Purposes Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that:
 - 2.1.1 Cabinet is informed that the Scrutiny Panel welcomes the newly implemented Nurse Led System of absence reporting, particularly as it assists both the employer and employee.
 - 2.1.2 All Health and Wellbeing Policies are consistently considered across all Service areas within the Council and an annual review of the implementation and consistency will be reported on through the Annual Equality Report.
 - 2.1.3 All Managers and Team Leaders receive adequate and appropriate training and support on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures and that refresher training is provided on a bi-annual basis.

2.1.4. Training on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures be included in the Induction Programme for new Managers and Team Leaders.

3. Background and Issues

3.1 The purpose of the Review was: -

- To evaluate the impact that staff absence has upon service delivery;
- To review the effectiveness of the Council's Health and Well Being Policies in reducing sickness absence; and
- To ensure absence management systems are robust and applied consistently in all departments.

3.2 This Review has been part of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for some time and it was agreed that it was timely for the Review to commence in 2010. The Review took place between June 2010 and December 2010.

3.3 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Jane Hollis (Chair); Councillors Ifty Choudary, Kevin Reeve and Pam Varnsberry, together with non-Executive Councillors Jamie Lane and Sadik Chaudhury.

3.4 Information obtained from the following sources formed the main body of evidence gathered by the Scrutiny Panel:

- A synopsis of all information available;
Various Policies, including Absence Management Policy;
Health and Well Being Policy;
Flexible Working Policies;
Dependency and Emergency Leave Policy;
- Sickness absence trends, department by department;
- Details of the impact sickness absence has on colleagues;
- Accident at work data;
- Management Plans to tackle sickness absence;
- Best practice Councils;
- Details of Absence Management Training and take up statistics;
- Examples of other organisation's Absence Management Policies, for example Northampton PCT;
- Witness Evidence;
Trade Unions; and
Heads of Service from Leisure and Neighbourhood Environment.

3.5 In considering the evidence the following conclusions were made: -

3.6 The Scrutiny Panel supported the introduction of the Nurse Led System of absence reporting. It felt that it assisted both the employer and employee.

3.7 It was recognised that the introduction of the Nurse Led system of absence reporting, could in time reduce the number of employees referred to Occupational Health. Within Neighbourhood Environment, the Nurse Led System has helped to tackle short-term illness and the associated culture. Sickness Absence data is now accurately reported.

- 3.8 From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted the Nurse Led System needed time to embed before absence data could be analysed but it was informed that this system of absence reporting had begun to reduce short term absences, example as detailed in paragraph 3.7 above.
- 3.9 Some of the Policies that Northampton Borough Council has in place, which are recognised elsewhere as examples of best practice include: -
- Nurse-Led Absence Reporting Call Centre;
 - Flexible Working Policy; and
 - Special Leave Policy, including dependency leave and emergency leave.
- 3.10 Within its Absence Management Policy, the Authority has in place all of the measures that are recognised by SART as best practice. The Authority has also recognised the six key elements of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance.
- 3.11 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there should be a move to frameworks to allow Managers to utilise their common sense, within clear boundaries, that would allow them the discretion with regard to their management of staff during exceptional times. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there would be the need to look at different solutions, such as working at home/split shifts/moving to weekend working, and other such alternatives to help solve any unique problems.
- 3.12 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there was a need for certain Service Areas to be fully staffed at all times, for example, Neighbourhood Environment and Leisure and Culture, and that it is difficult to operate flexible working due to the nature of the work.
- 3.13 After hearing the evidence from the expert witness, the Scrutiny Panel realised that here is a need for all Health and Wellbeing Policies to be consistently considered across all Service areas, and the need for training is recognised.
- 3.14 It was acknowledged by the Scrutiny Panel that targets for employees returning to work after long-term sickness absence are set appropriately for individual employees, but they need to be achievable and common sense must prevail.
- 3.15 From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted that if an employee was a victim of domestic violence that such incidences would fall within the Council's Special Leave Policy. The Council's Community Safety Unit is working on an initiative to raise awareness in respect of domestic violence.

4. Options

- 4.1 Cabinet and the General Purposes Committee will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

5. Implications (including financial implications)

5.1 Policy

- 5.1.1 The work of Overview and Scrutiny plays a major part in the development of the Council's policy framework through its work programme.

5.1.2 The report and its recommendations have policy implications in relation to Absence Management. Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response will need to consider these issues in detail.

5.2 Resources and Risk

5.2.1 Cabinet and the General Purposes Committee will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made.

5.3 Legal

5.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response to the recommendations

5.4 Equality

5.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response to the recommendations.

5.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

5.5.2 The Committee consulted and took evidence from a variety of sources as detailed in paragraph 3.4 of this report.

6. Background Papers

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report – Absence Management
- (December 2010)
- Minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - 20th December 2010
- Report to Cabinet – 19th January 2011 – Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Absence Management

Report Author and Title: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Christopher Malpas, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Telephone and Email: 01604 837408. ttiff@northampton.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Review was to:

- Evaluate the impact that staff absence has upon service delivery;
- Review the effectiveness of the Council's Health and Well Being Policies in reducing sickness absence; and
- Ensure absence management systems are robust and applied consistently in all departments.

This Review has been part of the Committee's Work Programme for some time and it was agreed that it was timely for the Review to commence in 2010 and a Scrutiny Panel was established.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report.

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

The Scrutiny Panel supported the introduction of the Nurse Led System of absence reporting. It felt that it assisted both the employer and employee.

It was recognised that the introduction of the Nurse Led system of absence reporting, could in time reduce the number of employees referred to Occupational Health. Within Neighbourhood Environment, the Nurse Led System has helped to tackle short-term illness and the associated culture. Sickness Absence data is now accurately reported.

From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted the Nurse Led System needed time to embed before absence data could be analysed but it was informed that this system of absence reporting had begun to reduce short term absences, example as detailed above.

Some of the Policies that Northampton Borough Council has in place, which are recognised elsewhere as examples of best practice include: -

- Nurse-Led Absence Reporting Call Centre
- Flexible Working Policy
- Special Leave Policy, including dependency leave and emergency leave

Within its Absence Management Policy, the Authority has in place all of the measures that are recognised by SART as best practice. The Authority has also recognised the six key elements of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance.

The Scrutiny Panel felt that there should be a move to frameworks to allow Managers to utilise their common sense, within clear boundaries, that would allow them the discretion with regard to their management of staff during exceptional times. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there would be the need to look at different solutions, such as working at home/split shifts/moving to weekend working, and other such alternatives to help solve any unique problems.

The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there was a need for certain Service Areas to be fully staffed at all times, for example, Neighbourhood Environment and Leisure and Culture, and that it is difficult to operate flexible working due to the nature of the work.

After hearing the evidence from the expert witness, the Scrutiny Panel realised that there is a need for all Health and Wellbeing Policies to be consistently considered across all Service areas, and the need for training is recognised.

It was acknowledged by the Scrutiny Panel that targets for employees returning to work after long-term sickness absence are set appropriately for individual employees, but they need to be achievable and common sense must prevail.

From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted that if an employee was a victim of domestic violence that such incidents would fall within the Council's Special Leave Policy. The Council's Community Safety Unit is working on an initiative to raise awareness in respect of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

Scrutiny Panel R&P – Absence Management therefore recommends to Cabinet that:

Cabinet is informed that the Scrutiny Panel welcomes the newly implemented Nurse Led System of absence reporting, particularly as it assists both the employer and employee.

All Health and Wellbeing Policies are consistently considered across all Service areas within the Council and an annual review of the implementation and consistency will be reported on through the Annual Equality Report.

All Managers and Team Leaders receive adequate and appropriate training and support on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures and that refresher training is provided on a bi-annual basis.

Training on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures be included in the Induction Programme for new Managers and Team Leaders.

Agenda Item 7



General Purposes Committee

AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Report Title	Update on the Revised Terms and Conditions of Service of Council Employees
---------------------	---

Date of Meeting:	14 February 2011
Directorate:	Finance and Support
Ward(s)	None Specifically

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the Pay and Grading project, for employees of the Council covered by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report.

3. Update

3.1.1 On the 14 September 2010 General Purposes Committee approved the new pay and conditions for employees covered by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services.

3.1.2 On the 15 September 2010 Cabinet approved the funding arrangements for the new pay and conditions of service for NJC Council employees.

3.1.3 Discussions continued until 28 September 2010 with the Trade Unions to try and achieve a collective agreement. However this was not achieved and on 30 September 2010 it was confirmed to the Trade Unions that as per the General Purposes Committee and Cabinet decisions, the workforce would be approached directly and seek mutual agreement to the new contractual terms. This offer would be time limited to 5 November 2010.

3.3.1 On the 5 October 2010 all employees covered by the NJC for Local Government Services received a letter from their line manager (or appropriate officer) which provided them with the results of the job evaluation for their role, the financial implications for the employee, the full terms and conditions, the appeals policy and a offer from the authority to voluntarily sign up to these new terms and conditions. A deadline was provided for each employee to make a decision by the 5 November 2010 and register if they wish to appeal by 1 December 2010 (with a full appeal needing to be completed by 14 January 2011).

3.3.2 In total 81% of the workforce affected have signed to voluntarily change their terms and conditions.

- 3.3.3 On 15 November 2010 the Trade Unions were notified that as per the General Purposes Committee and Cabinet reports that the authority would be moving to a formal 90-day consultation process, compliant within Section 188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (as amended). Consultation has and will continue throughout the 90-day period from 15 November 2010 to 12 February 2011. To date we have had five meetings with the trade unions during this consultation period.
- 3.3.4 On 5 January 2011 GMB informed the authority that they would be balloting their members for industrial action. On 28 January 2011 GMB confirmed that their members had voted against industrial action.
- 3.3.5 We are still consulting with the trade unions on proposals that would enable us to avoid dismissing and re-engaging staff who have not voluntarily signed the new contract. An update of the outcome of this consultation will be provided at the meeting.
- 3.3.6 On 14 January 155 job families appealed. Stage 2 of the appeal process was completed on 17 and 18 January 2011, and 6 appeal forms did not meet the criteria for appeal. The 149 job families are now going through Stage 3 of the appeals process. Two panels have been set up consisting of a Head of Service, a Human Resources representative, a manager and a representative from each of the recognised Trade Unions – GMB and UNISON (all trained in the National Job Evaluation Scheme). These panels commenced on 20 January 2011. It is estimated that the appeals process and the quality assurance associated with this process will be completed by the end of March 2011.
- 3.3.7 If no proposals are reached with the Trade Unions by the 12 February 2011 then the authority will move forward to dismissing those staff who have not signed voluntarily (providing 90 days notice) and re-engaging them on the new contract. This will have no impact on an employee's continuous service.

4. Background Papers

Background Papers are: -

- General Purposes Committee 14/09/10
- National Agreement for Local Government Services (Human Resources Service)
- Various internal departmental papers.

Name and Title of Author: Catherine Wilson, Head of Human Resources
Telephone and Email: 01604 837377

Agenda Item 8



General Purposes Committee

AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Report Title	REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS
---------------------	---

Date of Meeting:	14 February 2011
Directorate:	Chief Executive's Office
Ward(s)	All

1. Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its Final Recommendations on the Further Electoral Review of Northampton Borough Council on 12th October 2010. The draft Order (the legal document which brings into force their recommendations) was laid in Parliament on the 29th November 2010 and having received no objections the Order came into force on 29th January 2011 for the purposes of preparing for the May 2011 election including work on the register but otherwise it comes into force at those elections. The Further Electoral Review fundamentally altered a large number of the ward boundaries within the Borough, which made it necessary to conduct a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in order to bring these in line with the Borough's new ward boundaries. On 25 October 2010, Full Council noted the commencement of this review and delegated to the General Purposes Committee the power to make the decision on any changes to polling districts and polling places. Responsibility for choosing polling stations lies with the (Acting) Returning Officer, however the details of the proposed polling stations are included in this report for the Committee's reference.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 General Purposes Committee is asked to note the outcome of the public consultation on the polling districts, polling places and polling stations review.
- 2.2 General Purposes Committee is asked to agree the changes to the polling districts and polling places within the Borough in order that preparations can be made for the election to be conducted on the new ward boundaries.
- 2.3 The Returning Officer be able to amend the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations as required for operational purposes.

3. Report Background

- 3.1 Due to the significant changes to the Borough's ward boundaries that will be brought into force at the May 2011 elections, the Council was required to undertake a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in the Borough in order to bring them in line with the new ward boundaries.
- 3.3 A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts. A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are

fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.

- 3.4 Reviews of parliamentary polling districts must be undertaken at least once every four years. However, the Electoral Commission's interim report on the problems experienced at some polling stations at the close of poll at the 6 May 2010 elections recommends that all local authorities take steps immediately to begin the process of conducting reviews of polling districts and polling places, reflecting on the problems identified in some areas at the May 2010 elections.
- 3.5 Although polling districts and polling places for local government elections are not automatically part of the review, given that in practice polling districts and polling places for local government elections are based on UK Parliamentary polling arrangements, it is recommended that a review of local government polling arrangements is conducted simultaneously.
- 3.6 In late 2010, a draft scheme was developed for consultation with councillors and the public. In light of the fact that for the most part the boundaries for each type of election (General, County, Borough and Parish) are no longer coterminous, the new scheme has been required to introduce a number of polling districts that are substantially smaller than those that the town has seen previously. This is in order to enable an elector wherever possible to vote in the same polling district for a Borough Election as well as a County Election.
- 3.7 For the most part, the polling stations are the same as those used previously. Whilst there has been a desire to eradicate the use of mobile units as polling stations, this has not been possible in the New Duston, Banbury Lane, Ladybridge Drive and Link view areas, as there are no schools or community building in these areas.
- 3.8 The Polling Places (Polling Stations) have taken into account accessibility and tried to be in or as near the Polling Districts as practicable.
- 3.9 Where schools have previously been used as polling stations there has been an attempt to find suitable alternative premises. However, where this has not been possible the Council will continue to work with the schools to find ways to enable them to remain open on polling day and ensure that their use as a polling station does not jeopardise their security.
- 3.10 It has also been identified that there is a need to make an amendment to the Parish boundary in Wootton and East Hunsbury where 2 properties are not in the Parish but, as the boundary follows an old water course it would be much more sensible to include them with the surrounding properties.
- 3.11 A full Governance review will be undertaken later in 2011 and areas that have been brought to notice to be taken into account at present are:
 - The inclusion of SNUPA polling district in the Upton Parish (Area opposite Sixfields);
 - The inclusion of SNNVH polling district in the East Hunsbury & Wootton Parish (Area on old Turners site to London Road Roundabout); and
 - Review of the East Hunsbury & Wootton Parish.
- 3.12 Once a draft scheme had been developed, this was viewed and commented upon by the Council's Electoral Review Member Working Party and some slight amendments carried out following their discussions. All councillors were also contacted individually and invited to

comment on the scheme and make suggestions for any alternative premises that might be suitable for use as polling stations

3.13 On Monday 20th December 2010 public consultation on the scheme commenced, with it being made available on the consultation pages of the Council's website and being made available at the One Stop Shop in the Guildhall and in the Electoral Services Office. In addition, the Council wrote to a wide variety of stakeholders within the town, including Residents' Associations, disability charities and forums, political parties and community organisations, to request their views on the proposals.

3.14 The public consultation period lasted six weeks and no responses were received.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Resources and Risk

The review increases the number of Polling Stations and therefore staffing resource requirements. This does, however bring all Polling Stations into line with the Electoral Commission guidelines on the size of Polling Stations.

Increased costs will be incurred to improve quality of the provision of the mobile Polling station. This will improve the facilities for the staff and electors alike.

4.2 Legal

The Council has a legal obligation to conduct the May 2011 elections on the new ward boundaries as laid out in the Order which was brought into force on 29th January 2011. In order to do this, the Council has to conduct a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in order to bring these in line with the new ward boundaries.

4.3 Other Implications

A review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations includes an assessment of buildings available, of their location, size and suitability with a view to enabling access to all electors, including specific consideration of the needs of the disabled.

The republished register will be published on 1st March 2011.

5. Background Papers

Please Note: A Map will be provided at the meeting of the Committee and later attached to the approved published minutes.

Report to Full Council, 25 October 2010, item 11: Further Electoral Review and Subsequent Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

Available at

<http://www.northamptonboroughcouncil.com/councillors/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=242&MId=6514&Ver=4>

Working Maps available in Electoral Services Office.

NBC Web site consultations section.

Revised Lists of Polling Districts, Polling Stations and corresponding Maps are available to view in the Electoral Services Office.

Report Author and Title: Cassie Triggs, Democratic and Chief Executive Services Manager

Telephone and Email: 01604 837 680, ctriggs@northampton.gov.uk