

## AGENDA ITEM NO. 1

**REPORT TO:** Appointments Panel

**SUBJECT:** Harmonisation of Conditions of Service

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director - Resources and Corporate Services

### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To report on progress in negotiations with Trade Unions in respect of single status/harmonisation of conditions of service.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the Appointments Panel authorise the changes to conditions of service set out in the report.**

### 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Members will be aware that negotiations have been taking place with UNISON, GMB, TGWU and MPO with a view to harmonising conditions of service for all staff employed under "Green Book" conditions of service. This is not only as a result of the national single status agreement but also the need to harmonise Halton and Cheshire County conditions applying to differing groups of employees.

3.2 To date the following conditions, policies and procedures have been harmonised:

- hours of work
- car allowances
- Trade Union facilities
- management of sickness absence
- monthly, cashless pay
- annual leave
- extra statutory holidays
- flexitime
- discipline
- grievance
- appeals
- capability
- dignity at work
- first aid payment
- stress at work

3.3 Set out below, and in the appendices to the report, are further proposals for harmonisation covering the following areas:

- notice periods
- retirement awards
- part time workers entitlement to Bank Holidays

- subsistence allowance
- redeployment/at risk/pay protection
- alcohol misuse

If Members agree to the changes outlined, it is proposed that these will become effective from 1st July 2002, except for the provisions relating to Bank Holidays for part time staff which should be backdated to 1st April 2002, the start of the leave year.

- 3.4 Trade Unions have balloted their members on these proposals on the basis of them being a 'package' of measures i.e. acceptance or rejection is of the whole. The proposals were accepted by all unions.

The package of measures are also put forward to this panel on the same basis.

- 3.5 Granted agreement to the changes set out in the report, the process of harmonising conditions is largely complete except for a small number of relatively minor matters. Work has commenced with the Trade Unions and it is anticipated that a further report will be brought forward in the next few months.

Members will be aware, however, that little progress to date has been made on the subject of reviewing and revising the pay structure and policy including the introduction of an agreed job evaluation scheme.

- 3.6 The job evaluation element of the Single Status agreement has proved to be the most difficult and contentious matter.

Across the whole country only a very small number of relatively small district councils have implemented this to date. Not only is the size of such a task enormous for unitary, metropolitan and county councils (as each individual job would need to be evaluated once agreed job descriptions had been produced), but the cost implications are also hugely significant.

Cheshire County Council has undertaken a pilot study of the job evaluation scheme and project a £6m - £7m increase in the paybill. A neighbouring metropolitan authority anticipates a cost of £4m. On this basis, Halton would have to expect an increase of at least £1½m - £2m.

This sort of impact would clearly cause huge problems for the Council and force some difficult decisions to be made.

#### **4.0 THE PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 Period of notice to terminate employment. Currently, "manual" workers need only give one week's notice of the termination of their employment whilst office based staff (depending on salary grade) give one, two or three months.

In future, all employees will give a minimum of one month's notice (plus two and three months for higher grades as now).

- 4.2 Retirement awards. The current differences are between Halton and Cheshire conditions. It is proposed that in future only the Halton scheme will apply to all employees.

Under this provision, staff who retire at age 65, or due to ill health, or in the interests of the efficiency of the service (with Council agreement) and have a minimum of 20 years continuous service with Halton (or Cheshire County Council if transferred by S.T.O. on reorganisation in 1998) will receive a retirement award. This will be a sum of money to be spent on a gift of their choice, a framed certificate and (if they choose) a Mayoral presentation.

Staff will not be eligible to receive an award if they resign their post even if they are eligible to access their pension immediately under the regulations.

- 4.3 Part time workers entitlement to Bank holidays. See Appendix 1. There are currently two different methods of calculating entitlement. It is proposed that from 1st April 2002 the (Cheshire) method set out in the appendix will be adopted for all part time employees.
- 4.4 Subsistence allowance. The proposal is to adopt the scheme applying to Cheshire County employees for all employees. The rates in this scheme are marginally higher than the Halton scheme, however, the overall increase in cost will be minor. It is proposed to offset this increased cost (and ensure equal treatment to all employees under the "Green Book" conditions) by allowing second class travel only for all journeys.
- 4.5 At Risk/Redeployment/Pay Protection. See Appendix 2, which sets out a proposed new policy which will replace the existing Halton At Risk policy and the Cheshire Redeployment and Pay Protection policies.
- 4.6 Proposed new policy on Alcohol Misuse to replace the Cheshire policy. See Appendix 3.