

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERSONNEL PANEL
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON 12 JANUARY 2004**

MEMBERS

* Cllr J O'Connell - Chairman

* Cllr J A Westacott - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr R F Croad

* Cllr R O Yonge

* Cllr M F Saltern

* Denotes attendance

Ø Denotes apology for absence

PP.23/03 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1 December 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PP.24/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting. These were recorded as follows:-

Chief Executive, Personnel Manager and Senior Member Support Officer declared an interest in item 5 'Local Government Pension Scheme: Policy Review (see Minute PP.25/03 below) by virtue of their participation in the Council's pension scheme. The interest being general to the organisation was none prejudicial.

PP.25/03 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME: POLICY REVIEW**

A report was considered which informed members of a policy review currently being undertaken by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) into the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). This constituted the second phase of the ODPM's review and it was anticipated that a statutory consultation based on the various policy proposals being considered by the ODPM would begin in Spring 2004.

It was proposed that, because of a number of concerns that had been identified with the proposals, the Council should submit comments to the ODPM in advance of the main consultation.

In the report, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the main proposals being considered by the ODPM:-
 - abolition of the “85 year rule”;
 - revision of the rules on access to benefits at age 50;
 - extension of partner benefits to same sex couples;
 - changes to employee contribution rates;
 - flexible retirement;

- (b) the key areas of concern with proposals:-
 - the apparent impetus for change to be introduced much sooner than had previously been indicated. Members were advised that the time-scale for change had been 2010 but that more recent indications from the ODPM demonstrated a desire for some changes to be introduced by 2005 and that this should have an immediate impact. Members were concerned that this would result in a significant detriment to some staff over others although they might otherwise be in very similar circumstances;

 - the detrimental impact on staff morale of the proposals, particularly for those with long service and close to retirement.

During discussion, mention was made of:-

- (a) Members concern that, having joined the scheme, staff should not find themselves subsequently disadvantaged because of changes introduced during their service;

- (b) support for the phased introduction of some proposals and limiting their impact to new staff members;

- (c) the risk of creating a market in local government pensions if councils were to act independently in establishing schemes. It was also believed that individual schemes would be more complex and costly to administer whilst also leaving councils more vulnerable to litigation;

- (d) Members’ suspicion that the Local Government Pension Scheme compared poorly with that for the Civil Service.

RESOLVED

That the suggested comments as set out in the report before the Panel be approved and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in response to the second phase of the Local Government Pension Scheme Review.

PP.26/03

**AMENDMENTS REQUIRED TO THE COUNCIL'S
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY AS A RESULT
OF RECENT REGULATIONS.**

Consideration was given to a report which sought the Panel's authority to amend the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy to take account of new regulatory requirements prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and religion or belief.

In discussion, some Members expressed the concern that the detail of the new legislation and its implementation might create some difficulties in interpretation for the Council. This was considered particularly likely in respect of the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. It was accepted, however, that the Council was required to abide by the regulations.

RESOLVED

That the requirements of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 be incorporated into the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

(Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.20 pm).

Chairman