

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

13 October 2010

STATEMENT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Corporate Services, Finance, Performance Management and Procurement)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES

Restructuring and staff reductions

Managers are currently reviewing structures and staff costs, and restructuring to remove posts and make savings. This activity will increase substantially over future months and indeed the next couple of years. The County Council makes every effort to redeploy affected staff into other posts, including supporting them with retraining and acquiring new skills. This keeps compulsory redundancies at a minimum, thereby reducing the costs of redundancies to the Council and retaining valuable skills and knowledge. It is only where staff are in specialist positions, where alternative posts are at locations too far away, or where the volume of staff to redeploy in one area is large, that redundancies may be necessary. The County Council has a good record for redeploying staff and to date has already successfully redeployed into other posts some 65 staff since April. This contrasts well with only 3 compulsory redundancies of staff in senior specialist posts.

In order to ensure that Directorates are doing all they can to redeploy staff, and not paying expensive redundancy packages, a new process has been set up whereby the Leader and myself consider and approve any redundancy payments requested by Directorates. These are then funded from a corporate budget. All redundancies have to be approved by the Director in any case and this new process provides an additional check at least in financial terms. This is not a check on the decision to make a post redundant, as that is a Directors responsibility.

The County Council has set up additional arrangements between HR and Unison to ensure close working during the next couple of years, to regularly share information and keep Unison appraised and involved in the restructurings and supporting staff.

Directorates have put in place vacancy vetting and approval arrangements and the number of posts recruited to has significantly reduced over recent months. This has resulted in a reduction in the overall number of staff employed by the Authority. It is expected that this will continue to reduce over the next couple of years. New arrangements have been put in place at a Council level for the use of agency staff, which will provide greater control and monitoring, as well as a reduction in rates charged. That said the use of agency staff is also reducing significantly.

Restructurings and staff reductions will be managed at a Directorate and service unit level and there is no intention to seek volunteers at a Council wide level. Some Authorities are doing this, but it is costly in that only staff with the greatest entitlements around redundancy pay and access to pension usually volunteer, and it removes the ability from managers to decide the level of skills and experience they wish to retain and to achieve a balanced team.

Staff Pay Awards

It is now clear that there will be no pay increase this year for staff except teachers. The Government's proposal of a 2 year pay freeze but with an increase of £250 for staff paid below £21K has not been incorporated into this year's national agreement, so there is no increase at all. Negotiations will begin at a regional and national level in December to determine whether there should be a pay increase for 2011/12.

Budget Consultation

In previous years the County Council has sought the views of the public on the County Council's budget through the NYTimes, website and by inviting members of the public to attend Area Committee meetings dedicated to the budget. Given the state of the public finances we now need to listen even more carefully to the public. The usual channels of seeking the views of the public will be used but a new series of public budget consultation meetings have been arranged throughout November in each of the districts - some of them shared with the relevant District Council.

The meetings have been arranged for the evening so that more of the general public can attend and the majority of the session will be for the public to ask the questions that they want and to offer their views. Whilst the meetings are open to all, invitations will also be sent to Parish / Town Councils and other local partners. The local press will be used to publicise the meetings to encourage attendance. Members are requested to promote these meetings within their local communities and to attend the meetings themselves where they are able. "

Policing in the 21st Century - Reconnecting the police and the people

I recently responded on behalf of the County Council to this Home Office white paper which sets out the government's vision for policing and how it will cut crime and protect the public, be more directly accountable to the public and offer value for money. A key proposal is replacing each police authority with a single directly-elected police and crime commissioner.

In responding I stressed that:

- Whilst the police have a crucial part to play in preventing crime and disorder, the police do not and cannot tackle crime and disorder alone. Partnership working, together with the support and involvement of local communities, is the key to reducing crime and disorder.
- There is a significant risk that the public will not understand the different roles and powers of the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable, in particular the public may assume that a commissioner can direct the chief constable on every matter, including operational matters.

Meet the Buyer

The County Council has again conducted a highly successful series of 'Meet The Buyer' events across the county, all of which were well attended. The events were supported by colleagues from District/Borough councils, YPO and Business Link who also provided the administrative support. The County Council was well represented by officers from each Directorate and NPG. NPG delivered a main presentation on how local businesses can help themselves when bidding for work opportunities, and ran a series of workshops on the Supplier and Contract Management System, Finding out about Business Opportunities and the Pre Qualification Questionnaire.

The collaborative Office Supplies and Stationery contract continues to go from strength to strength with the number of public sector participants up to thirty five, all of whom are benefiting from the quality of the County Council's procurement. A recent review of the total spend going through the contract has shown a value in excess of £10.5m and further analysis indicates the public sector will have saved in the region of £1.92m over the first year.

Publication of Information on Spending and Contracts over £500

Earlier in the year the Government announced it's intention to increase the transparency of both central and local government on a range of issues, including contracts and spending. After a period of consultation, draft guidelines have now been issued on the information that authorities will be expected to publish on items of expenditure over £500. This will be a monthly listing with sufficient information to describe who has been paid, and for what service. Steps are now being taken to implement the guidance from January. Safeguards are available in the guidance regarding the ability to ensure that some key personal and confidential data can be withheld, for example information on payments to foster carers, although the spirit of the guidance is to maximise the information that is made available.

Guidance is awaited on the practical application of the other strand of this work relating to contracts. Again the initial announcement set an expectation that information would be published for items over £500. This is much less straightforward, because of issues about defining the scope of the reporting. At present, work is in hand to ensure that the current arrangements for publishing the availability of tender and quotation exercises, and related documentation, and then the outcome of those in a contracts register is robust and accessible. This applies at the moment for contracts over £10,000,. Once further guidance is available the Council will be able to consider whether these systems are sufficient to meet that guidance, and how the issue of lower value contracts might best be tackled

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