



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Pay Request from BCC Trade Union Group
Date:	22 March 2013
Reporting Officer:	Jill Minne, Head of Human Resources

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware of ongoing consideration of the request made by the Belfast City Council's Trade Union group that the Council makes a payment of £250 to employees earning less than £21,000 per year. This request was linked to a June 2010 budget statement which announced "*a two-year pay freeze for public sector workforces, except for workers earning less than £21,000 a year who will receive an increase of at least £250 per year in these years.*"

The pay awards referred to in the June 2010 budget statement were not, however, made by local government, and the Government's proposals in this regard were set aside by the Employers' Side of the National Joint Council (NJC).

Senior Counsel advice, commissioned by the Council on this matter, stated that while the payment would understandably boost morale and assist employee relations in a time when no pay award has been made to staff for the past three years, it would be retrospective, would not be limited to existing salaries, and would amount in his view to a gratuity, and therefore be unlawful.

Committee was advised, in February, that given this legal advice the Council could not make a payment on the basis of the request from the TUs.

The matter was deferred by the Committee in order for the Head of Human Resources to examine whether or not legitimate alternative options exist to make a payment to the lower paid staff in the organisation as members are keen to seek to ensure that good employee relations are maintained and employees receive recognition for the services they provide.

Key Issues

Discussions have been ongoing with the TUs and The Head of HR and on the basis of these discussions it is proposed that the Council makes a one off payment of £250 to employees below Senior Officer grade who give their commitment to make themselves available to the Council for emergency response situations.

Experience shows that emergencies often happen when least expected and in ways which cannot be anticipated. On many occasions the Council contributes to the response to an emergency, and the effectiveness of that response is often a reflection of the willingness of our staff.

It is understood that responding to emergency situations may require staff to work outside their normal working hours and also to carry out duties which may not normally be part of their own day to day work.

To achieve effective emergency planning, the Council needs the commitment of staff to respond to these potential situations.

Specifically, it is proposed that in consideration of the £250 payment, staff would commit to the following:

- Assist the Council in responding to emergency situations. This may include work during or outside of normal working hours (for which normal, agreed Council remuneration terms would apply) and also carrying out duties that are required as part of the emergency response, which may not be part of their normal day to day duties.
- Assist the Council in the recovery phase of an emergency. This may include work during or outside of normal working hours (for which normal, agreed Council normal remuneration terms would apply) and also carrying out duties that are required as part of the emergency recovery, which may not be part of their normal day to day duties.

The Council will require the relevant employees to provide their contact details and confirm their commitment before a £250 payment is made.

The Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive has confirmed that such a payment would be legal in these circumstances.

Resource Implications

The cost of making such a one off payment to officers below Senior Officer grade would be approximately £469,150.

Equality Implications

There are no equality implications with this proposal.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree that the Council makes a one off payment of £250 to employees below Senior Officer grade who give their commitment to make themselves available to the Council for emergency response situations.

Documents Attached