

Schools' Forum 11 November 2008

Long Service Awards.

Proposal.

The Schools' Forum agrees that the Long Service Award scheme should be applied across all schools.

Schools meet the cost of awards already paid and the estimated average costs of around £75 per school per year over the next five years from their delegated budgets.

Background.

During September / October payments were made to individuals with more than 20 years service with Walsall Council and its schools.

The Long Service Award Scheme was set up by an agreement of the council's Executive Management Team in September 2005 to recognise and value the long service of many employees. The report provided for the initial costs of giving awards to those with more than 20 years service at the start of the scheme to be met corporately, with the intention that future costs should be met locally.

Recipients of Long Service Awards are also invited to attend a civic event to mark the occasion. Feedback from attenders has been universally positive.

Initially, eligible employees were issued with vouchers. However, employees had encountered difficulties in attempting to cash in the vouchers, which was destructive of the principles behind the scheme. Also, the value of the scheme meant that the arrangement needed to be put out to European tender using a full OJEC process every three years. For these reasons it was determined that an alternative approach should be taken. The issue of vouchers was suspended pending the implementation of the new scheme.

A further report in February 2008 effected changes to the scheme, ceasing the voucher based system and implementing awards through payroll. This report did not address issues of finance, except in so far as they related to the income tax costs of paying through payroll.

It is clear that opportunities to discuss the scheme with schools were missed at its inception and subsequently. As a consequence of these failures schools were unaware that the costs of the awards, valued at £125, would appear against their budgets. Some schools have complained that this deduction is inappropriate.

Present state.

Schools have received reimbursement of amounts deducted from their budgets. Credits will appear on their October budget reports.

No further awards will be issued in respect of school based staff until agreement has been reached on a way forward.

Costs and Benefits.

If the Schools' Forum agrees this proposal:

- School based staff will have their long service formally recognised
- The scheme will apply to staff of Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools
- the scheme would be applied equally across all schools and council services
- The awards would be generated automatically from payroll records and little additional administrative burden placed on school staff
- Schools would be able to see from budget records which employees had received awards.

Current records show that fewer than 430 staff in schools may become eligible for long service awards in the next five years, although the number will undoubtedly be lower than that as some people will leave employment before the award falls due.

This means that on average, 3 employees in each school will become eligible for long service awards in the next five years at a cost of around £75 per year. Larger schools are more likely to have slightly higher numbers, while some schools may have no-one eligible in the period. The highest number is 14 (in a large secondary school), this is the only school with ten or more employees due to become eligible in the next five years.

If the scheme is not applied universally to school based staff:

- it would continue to be applied to LA staff working in schools (eg cleaners)
- There is potential for damage to the morale of school based staff
- Unions are likely to claim that the scheme is a condition of service and apply pressure to have it applied across all schools
- The scheme may be offered to governing bodies to opt into, but this will:
 - create significant administrative burdens for schools and payroll
 - mean that some staff will receive that award while others will not.