

Appendix A

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

16th February 2023

Questions from Members of the Public for Oral Reply

1. From Gill Slater, Unite Rep

The 22/23 NJC award of £2229 for Outer London was effectively a pay cut, however, every BR grade Bromley employee was a further £1,000 worse off, the lowest grade losing out by £1,772. How does the 2% (not backdated) help staff facing 16.8% food inflation? (ONS)

Reply:

There is no requirement for Members to provide any additional increase for 22/23 having already agreed the pay award in good faith. However, Members have proposed this additional amount in response to and in recognition of the unexpected spiralling inflation post 2022/3 pay award. The Council also actively promotes the employee benefits scheme to employees which includes savings on shopping including groceries as well as local discounts.

The Council like other employers were unsighted on the sudden and unexpected rise in the inflation at the time of 22/23 pay award. However, unlike many organisations/employers Bromley Council is proposing to offer an additional 2% from 1st April 2023.

Supplementary Question:

Mrs Slater asked whether sufficient consultation had been carried out with staff - she stated that Bromley employees had fallen behind other local government workers in 2022 and the current proposals would see this "baked in." The discussions at Local Joint Consultative Committee on 7th December 2022 showed the level of staff concerns about this.

Reply:

The Chairman asked the Director of Human Resources, Customer Services and Public Affairs to comment. His view was that all staff were aware of the proposals and there was no need for delay. The proposals should be supported in order to ensure that Bromley staff received their pay award in April, a key feature of coming out of national frameworks.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:

Cllr Jeal asked whether concerns had been raised about the rising cost of living by members of staff during the consultation period.

Reply:

The Director of Human Resources, Customer Services and Public Affairs confirmed that there had been a limited response from staff to the consultation. There had been concerns about financial pressures, but the majority were supportive of the proposals.

2. From Kathy Smith, Unite Rep

The Council's budget report indicated reserves in excess of £166m (including £18.5m not 'earmarked'). Many staff have no reserves to draw on. Since Bromley staff have fallen significantly behind other LA employees and may well again this year will Bromley set aside reserves to at least restore parity 'in year'?

Reply:

The 2023/24 Council Tax report to Executive on 8th February 2023 highlights the need for maintaining adequate level of reserves to ensure the long term sustainability of the Council finances which helps protect key services. Although the budget is balanced for 2023/24, the Council's faces financial uncertainty in the future with significant cost pressures and a significant 'budget gap' for future years rising to £29.6m per annum from 2026/27. It is not sustainable to use one off reserves to fund additional recurring costs. Full details on the approach to reserves is provided in Appendix 4 of the 2023/24 Council Tax report.

Supplementary Question:

Ms Smith referred to other recent pay deals and asked whether the Council could back-date the additional award for 2022/23 and provide a flat rate £2,000 increase that would benefit the low paid most of all.

Reply:

The Director of Human Resources, Customer Services and Public Affairs responded that there was no single right approach, but, on balance, the proposals were fair and reasonable, with a slight percentage adjustment at the lower end.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Nicholas Bennett:

Cllr Nicholas Bennett asked a question about pension contributions.

Reply:

The Director of Human Resources, Customer Services and Public Affairs responded that employer contributions were in the region of 17-18% (the Chairman of the Pensions Committee confirmed that the rate was about 17.7%). Cllr Bennett commented that the local government pension was far better than most schemes in the private sector.