

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 12 March 2014.

PRESENT

Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC  
Mr. Max Hunt CC  
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mrs. H. E. Loydall CC  
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC  
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC

In Attendance:

Mr. L. Spence CC (for Minute 37)

30. Announcement.

Head of Democratic Services and Administration

The Chairman reported that this would be the last meeting of the Committee to be attended by David Pitt, Head of Democratic Services and Administration who would be retiring from the County Council at the end of the month. Members joined the Chairman in paying tribute to David's service to the Authority and in wishing him a long and happy retirement.

31. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2013 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

32. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

33. Questions asked by Members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

34. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

35. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

36. Change to the Order of Business.

The Chairman sought and obtained the consent of the Committee to vary the order of business from that set out in the agenda.

37. Veterans' Interview Programme.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the implications of either the full adoption of a Veterans' Interview Programme or some elements of the Programme. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. L. Spence CC, who was present to make representations about the adoption of the Programme. In support of the Programme, Mr. Spence made the following points:

- It was important that the contribution made by ex-servicemen and women was recognised. It was felt that assisting veterans back into employment was one important way of doing this;
- The Veterans' Interview Programme had widespread national support;
- Whilst he hoped that the Programme could be fully adopted by the County Council at some point in the future, some of the legal and financial issues presented by the Programme (and as outlined in the report) were recognised. The Committee was urged to consider agreeing to take steps towards adoption of the Programme, as outlined in paragraphs 16-20 of the report.

Whilst the aspirations of the Programme were fully supported by the Committee, full commitment to it was complicated by the Public Sector Equality Duty, which required the Council to give due regard to the elimination of unlawful discrimination and advanced equality of opportunity for those groups that fell within the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. Veterans presently did not feature on that list.

It was moved by Mr. Shepherd CC, seconded by Mr. Jennings CC and carried:

- “ (a) That, in recognition of the contribution made by ex-servicemen and women, officers be asked to pursue the actions set out in paragraph 20 of the report with the aim of supporting veterans into work;
- (b) That officers be asked to explore with Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council how its scheme has operated and in particular the effect the eligibility criteria it has put in place as part of its operation of the Veterans' Interview Programme (as highlighted in bullets 1-4 of paragraph 14 of the report) has had on the number of veterans applying for posts;
- (c) That an approach be made to the Department for Work and Pensions and the Equality and Human Rights Commission seeking views about the operation of a Veteran's Interview Programme in the context of the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010.”

38. Pay Policy Statement 2014/15.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources seeking the Committee's approval to the Pay Policy Statement for 2014/15 for submission to the County Council. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 6", is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the County Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2014/15.

39. Employee Code of Conduct.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources presenting a draft revised version of the Employee Code of Conduct. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 7", is filed with these minutes.

The County Solicitor explained that a revised Employee Code of Conduct had been developed as a result of a lack of awareness amongst staff for the previous version of the document. It was stressed that a guidance document was being developed in order to make the latest version of the Code more accessible for staff in order that they understood how it applied to their role at the Council.

Whilst the introduction of a revised version of the Code was welcomed, it was felt that it would be necessary to see the guidance document that it sat alongside before it was possible to approve the Code for submission to Council. In addition, some members felt that the Code was lacking in detail, particularly in respect of paragraph 6.2.1 and the rules around relationships between staff and elected members. It was subsequently explained that it was intended that the Code be a stand-alone document with cross-references to a number of other protocols in the County Council's Constitution, such as the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations. This avoided the need to have repeated content.

It was noted that, were the Code of Conduct not to be approved for submission to the County Council meeting in May, it would be necessary to bring forward the next meeting of the Committee (currently scheduled for 26 June) in order for it tie in with the timescales for submission to the following County Council meeting in July.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That an amended draft of the Employee Code of Conduct be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (b) That a copy of the latest draft of the proposed supporting guidance document be circulated to Committee members as soon as it becomes available.

40. Smoke Free Workplace.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Public Health concerning proposals to extend the County Council's Smoke Free Policy. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 8", is filed with these minutes.

In support of the proposals to make the County Council a Smoke Free Workplace, the following points were made:

- Under the current arrangements, staff were provided with designated on-site areas in which to smoke and were required to take unpaid smoking breaks, for instance during lunch breaks. However, it was known that managers found it difficult to enforce these arrangements;
- Under the new proposals, the designated smoking areas would be removed and staff would be required to move off-site if they wished to smoke;
- It was felt important that the County Council, as a Public Health Authority, took a lead role in committing to a smoke free workplace and it was hoped that this would inspire others to adopt a similar approach;
- The Council would continue to operate smoking cessation programmes to support staff to stop smoking.

In response to the proposals, members questioned whether a Policy for a Smoke Free Workplace would be enforceable on the public access roads that surrounded County Hall. The reputational damage of staff gathering to smoke along the A50 at the front of the County Hall building was also felt to be a concern. Similar concerns were raised in regard to other County Council sites.

It was further felt by some members that, whilst the Council should continue to encourage people to stop smoking, a Policy for a Smoke Free Workplace would go too far and that there had been no evidence presented to support the fact that the present arrangements were not working effectively.

It was proposed by Mr. Jennings and seconded by Mr. Hunt:-

“That the proposed action towards achieving a Smoke Free Workplace, as outlined in the report, be supported.”

The motion was put and not carried, 2 members having voted for the motion and 5 against.

RESOLVED:

That details of the extent to which employees have been helped to quit smoking by the smoking cessation programmes run by the Council be circulated to members of the Committee.

#### 41. Home Working Policy and Guidance.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning a new Home Working Policy and associated guidance. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 9”, is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- Though the Policy and Guidance were new, the Council already had a number of staff who had been working from home on an ad-hoc basis as part of the previous

Flexible Working and Occasional Home Working Policies. The new Policy provided a means through which a member of staff and a manager could make a more permanent arrangement, so long as it fit within the business needs of the Authority;

- Whilst some viewed home working as being less conducive to good communication within a team, the point was made that it often had the effect of placing an increased onus on effective communication. It was noted that productivity had generally risen amongst those staff that had worked from home under the previous policies;
- The Policy placed increased responsibility on the line manager and the member of staff to put in place a robust Home Working arrangement, taking into account business need, health and safety and other issues, such as effects on budget. There was a requirement to agree a timescale for one-to-one meetings between both parties to ensure the arrangement was working effectively;
- Paragraph 4 of Page 5 of the Policy and Guidance titled “Employee Instigated Home Working” required an amendment to remove the work “especially”;
- It was felt that the Policy would benefit from a firmer stance in relation to staff being contactable from home during working hours.

RESOLVED:

That the Home Working Policy and Guidance be approved for implementation, subject to amendment in light of the comments now made.

42. 2013 Pay Award.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning action taken by the Chief Executive to implement a 1% pay award for all employees on grades 2-17 with effect from 1 April 2013. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 11”, is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

43. Managing Attendance.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning an update on the overall County Council and Departmental performance in relation to sickness absence for the period 1 April to 31 December. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 12”, is filed with these minutes.

The Committee expressed concern that the current target figure of 7.5 days per full-time employee (FTE) was not being achieved and the justification behind being asked to approve an increased target of 8.0 days per FTE was therefore questioned. Particular attention was drawn to the projected outturn figure of 10.92 days per FTE for the Adults and Communities Department, which it was felt merited an explanation from a representative of the Department.

Despite the concern expressed, it was felt that more data was required, particularly in relation to the absence figures for sedentary and manual workers, in order to understand the reasons behind its targets not being met and how best it could begin taking steps to effect a positive change in this regard.

It was moved by the Chairman, seconded by Mr. Shepherd CC and carried:-

- “(a) That the performance of sickness absence levels across the County Council be noted with concern;
- (b) That the Director of Corporate Resources be asked to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee setting out a comprehensive breakdown of absence levels for sedentary and manual workers and further details about what action can be taken to improve the Council’s absence figure in the future;
- (c) That a representative of the Director of Adults and Communities be asked to attend the next meeting of the Committee to advise on levels and management of sickness absence in that Department.”

44. Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: Summary of Action Plans.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning a summary of current action plans with provision for compulsory redundancy and details of progress on their implementation. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 13”, is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the covering report contained an error in the date referred to in paragraph 2, which should have stated that the Committee approved a new Organisational Change Policy and Procedure at its meeting on 26 July, 2007.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

45. Date of Next Meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee had been scheduled for Wednesday 26 June at 10.00am, though as noted under Minute 36, it would be necessary to bring this meeting forward to deal with the Employee Code of Conduct.

10.00 am - 12.00 pm  
12 March 2014

CHAIRMAN