

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 4 February 2016.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mrs. J. Fox CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mr. W. Liquorish JP CC
Mrs. H. E. Loydall CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

33. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2016 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

34. Question Time.

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

35. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

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

36. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

37. 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.

38. Sickness Absence.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the Council's overall position on sickness absence at the end of November 2015. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was advised that as part of the Attendance Management Action Plan, new workshops were being rolled out to managers. Their aim was to develop practical skills and build confidence in managers to carry out action plans effectively. Members were also advised that the Attendance Improvement Audit which assessed the effectiveness of a range of improvement plans aiming to reduce short and long term sickness absence, was reaching its conclusion. The feedback from the Audit would be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

In response to questions raised, members were advised as follows:-

- (i) The increase in instances of absence in the “stress/ depression, mental health” category could be as a result of the removal of the “Other” category from the Oracle system. This increase would be monitored and reported on at the next meeting of the Committee. Members were of the view that such an increase could be positive in the sense that the stigma surrounding mental health illness was being challenged;
- (ii) The Committee noted the near half way split between long and short term absence and was advised that long term absence was decreasing. Both types of absence were being closely monitored. Members were advised that for the first six months of long term absence staff received full pay, half pay after six months, and only Statutory Sick Pay for absence over 12 months. The Committee was also advised that the breakdown of long term absence into absence up to six months and beyond six months would be presented to a future meeting;
- (iii) In order to prevent the spread of viral infections, reported as the highest cause of absence, the use of antibacterial toilet door handles and hand sanitisers in the kitchen areas was being considered by the Absence Management Operational Group. In addition, as part of the County Hall Master Plan and the move to 8:10 desk ratios, work stations including keyboards and telephones would be sanitised daily;
- (iv) The benefit and cost of introducing flu vaccines for all employees was being reviewed by the Health and Safety Manager and an update would be provided at a future meeting of the Committee;
- (v) In response to concerns raised in respect of the waiting list of staff to receive counselling for mental health/stress and depression issues, members were advised that the service was currently provided by the equivalent to two full time counsellors operating within County Hall, and that additional external provision was available when the service was reaching capacity.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made towards achieving the corporate target of 7.5 days per FTE be noted;
- (b) That the breakdown between long and short term sickness absence be noted;
- (c) That a breakdown of long term sickness absence of up to six months and exceeding six months be provided in the future reports to the Committee.

39. Mental Health First Aid.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of the Corporate Resources which provided an update on the impact of the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training programme and mental health first aiders in the workplace. A copy of the report marked ‘Agenda Item 7’ is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions raised, members were advised as follows:-

- (i) The aim of the MHFA training was not to provide mental health professionals within the workplace, but to provide preventative measures and peer support mechanisms amongst staff to recognise the early signs and symptoms of mental illness, stress and depression. The Committee was pleased to note that training had been made available to all staff and the number of employees trained in

MHFA had risen to 8% of the total workforce to date. Members were however of the view that more could be done to spread awareness of the training amongst the work force;

- (ii) Members welcomed the positive feedback received from employees trained in MHFA, however they were concerned that the impact of the training had only been assessed on a limited basis thus far. This was expected to increase as more employees completed the training;
- (iii) Members noted that the latest sickness absence figure as a result of “stress/depression, mental health” was actually 10.82% of total absence at the end of November 2015 and not 6.54% as stated in paragraph 2 of the report (page 11).

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the continued implementation and further development of Mental Health First Aid be supported;
- (b) That further evaluation feedback based upon the continued delivery and evaluation of Mental Health First Aid be received at the future meetings of the Committee.

40. Pay Policy Statement 2016-17.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources outlining the Council’s Pay Policy Statement 2016/17 which, subject to the Committee’s endorsement, would be submitted to the County Council for approval at its meeting on 16 March 2016. A copy of the report, marked ‘Agenda Item 8’ is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, members were advised as follows:-

- (i) Annual increments were in place to reflect the progress of staff within their roles. The annual increment was not automatic and progression could be stopped if performance was unsatisfactory, though this was rare. In response to a suggestion made, the Committee was advised that officers would investigate the feasibility and implications of linking performance and attendance to the payment of increments based on the experience of other councils who had implemented such measures and the findings would be presented at a future meeting;
- (ii) Members noted that the Soulbury Pay Agreement, which covered teachers and educational psychologists, differed from the National Joint Council conditions of service which applied to the majority of the Council’s employees. The Committee was advised that officers would investigate whether it was possible to link annual pay increments to satisfactory performance for “Soulbury employees” and would report back to a future meeting;
- (iii) Members were informed that they were likely to receive an in-year update on the Pay Policy as a result of the proposed changes which the Government had recently consulted on, including a proposed £95,000 cap on severance payments and potential pay back of severance applying to those paid over £80,000 should they be re-employed in the public sector again within 12 months;
- (iv) National negotiations over the pay award continued. The current proposal was for a 1% increase in each of the next two years. It was likely that this would be bottom loaded in order to reduce the impact of the living wage;

- (v) The Council paid professional fees for those staff that required a qualification to carry out their roles. A proportion of the cost was claimed back from the employee if they then left the Authority within a prescribed timescale;
- (vi) Members were advised that the cost of professional fees and market premia to the Council was very small. It was however noted that the Authority did struggle to compete on pay in certain job sectors.

RESOLVED:

That the County Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2016/17.

41. Employees as Foster Carers and Shared Lives Carers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which sought the Committee's approval for the changes to the Leave Arrangements Policy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Members were pleased to note that the Policy would offer the same fostering friendly additional leave as available to employees of the Department for Education. The Committee also welcomed the flexibility within the Policy, which provided up to 148 hours of leave to be used as required to fulfil the additional duties of those employees who were or wished to become Local Authority Foster Carers or "Shared Lives" Carers.

RESOLVED:

That the new wording for the Leave Arrangements Policy in respect of those employees who are or wish to become Local Authority Foster Carers or "Shared Lives" Carers, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

42. Organisational Change Policy and Procedure - Summary of Action Plans.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented a summary of current Action Plans which contained provision for compulsory redundancies and details of progress in their implementation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

43. Date of Next Meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 23 June 2016 at 10.00am.

10.00 - 10.59 am
04 February 2016

CHAIRMAN