

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 28 February 2019.

PRESENT

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

Ms. L. Broadley CC
Mr. T. Gillard CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

41. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2018 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

42. Question Time.

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

43. 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).

44. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

45. 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.

46. Attendance Management

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the County Council's overall position on sickness absence as at the end of December 2018. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:-

- i. Latest data for January 2019, showed an improvement in the levels of sickness absence; all Departments had shown significant reductions with the exception of Public Health, which showed a similar level to that recorded for December 2018.

Members were informed that this was due to the calculation of sickness absence over a 12 month rolling period and, as such, the high sickness levels recorded in January 2018 had been removed from the calculation. Members recognised the positive picture, but acknowledged that there was still much to do in order to reach the corporate target of 7.5 days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE);

- ii. The greatest percentage of time lost was due to 'Stress/depression/mental health', which continued to rise. Members were informed that it was felt that the fact that people were more confident about talking about mental health, both at the County Council and in society generally, had contributed to the rise, rather than there being an increase in illness. Levels of absence due to 'cough, cold, flu' had reduced and it was felt that the Council's flu vaccination programme had contributed to this;
- iii. In terms of the percentage split of absence due to short or long term illness, both Public Health and the Children and Family Services department had experienced a higher level of long term absence than short term. Focused intensive support was provided by Human Resources to support managers in addressing cases of long term absence. In response to questions, members were informed that there was a misconception that absence was due to work related issues, whereas anecdotally it was known that this was not always the case. It was planned to undertake a survey with staff who worked in the Children and Family Services and Adults and Communities departments who had been absent in 2018 due to stress, depression or mental health, to determine whether their absence was caused by personal or work related issues, whether the level of support received was helpful and what measures could have been put in place to support an earlier return to work. This survey would be anonymous and voluntary and officers had worked in partnership with Trade Unions. Members supported the establishment of Mental Health First Aiders across all departments;
- iv. A variety of measures had been employed in order to reduce the levels of sickness absence. The intensive support provided by Human Resources staff focused on specific departments, and supported managers with specific cases. The Employee Assistance programme, with a 24 hours a day seven days a week helpline, had been introduced for 12 months from April. It was hoped that this confidential service would be an initial step before people accessed the Wellbeing Service, which was a face-to-face service and for which there was high demand;
- v. Members were informed that it was recognised that the County Council was an excellent employer with a range of support measures in place to support both staff in managing and preventing illness and managers in managing cases of sickness, especially long term absence. Members were keen that short term absences should also be addressed;
- vi. Whilst members recognised the work of officers in addressing the high levels of sickness absence, it was acknowledged that there was more to do in order to meet the corporate target of 7.5 days per FTE.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the County Council's position on sickness absence as at the end of December 2018 be noted.

47. NJC Pay Award 2019/20.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the consultation related to the NJC Pay Award for 2019/20 and seeking endorsement for implementation of the Award from 1 April 2019. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:-

- i. In developing the revised pay scales, consultation had been undertaken with staff and Trade Unions and agreement had been reached with all parties on the proposed NJC Pay Scale for 2019/20 set out in the appendix to the report. Members commended officers in reaching an agreement on the pay scales from all parties involved;
- ii. The Pay Scale 2019/20 had been developed within a tight financial envelope. The model developed, attached at the appendix to the report, had been developed to take account of such potential future changes over the next few years. It was predicted that pay points at the lower grades may be lost in future should the minimum living wage increase;
- iii. As the proposed model had revised and removed some pay points, the remaining pay points had been renumbered. Members were assured that this did not mean that pay points had been downgraded; staff at all grades would see an increase in salary as a result of the revised model.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on the consultation related to the 2019/20 NJC Pay Award be noted and the implementation of the 2019/20 NJC Pay Award with effect from 1 April 2019 be endorsed.

48. Gender Pay Gap Reporting.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which presented the results of the Gender Pay Gap reporting for Leicestershire County Council for the year to 31 March 2018. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:-

- i. There had been a significant improvement in the gender pay gap results compared to the previous year, with an increasing number of females progressing through the grades. Whilst there were many reasons for this, it was highlighted that the Springboard management programme had contributed to this change;
- ii. The initial comparison to those councils which had already published their results showed that the County Council was broadly comparable; the intention was that further comparisons would be made once the results from other councils was published;
- iii. As the workforce was predominantly female, and the fact that 65% of staff at Grades 10 and above were female, it was recognised that the reporting of the data

could go the other way in the future should this progression continue. Members were informed that some councils had reported a negative Gender Pay Gap.

RESOLVED:

That the report regarding the initial results of the Gender Pay Gap reporting for 31 March 2018 and the comparison with the results which were published as at 31 March 2017, be noted.

49. Apprenticeships.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the progress made with the County Council's apprenticeship scheme following the introduction of the Government's Apprenticeship Levy in 2017. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:-

- i. The choice of qualifications available for apprenticeships was increasing; qualifications available ranged from level 2 to level 7, which was masters degree level. The qualifications delivered at the Council also supported professional roles. The number of apprenticeships being undertaken at the Council had increased from when the report had been written and was now 220;
- ii. The County Council was the first local authority to take part in the social work apprentice scheme, with apprentices placed in both the Adults and Communities and the Children and Family Services Departments. This was a joint initiative with Leicester City Council and a new cohort was expected every 12 months;
- iii. Under the County Council's corporate parenting responsibilities, officers were working with the Virtual School to offer apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers; the target of six placements had been reached and further opportunities would be offered. A mentoring scheme would be developed to support them in their roles and with functional skills;
- iv. As at the end of March, a comparison with other County Councils regarding the percentage of employees who were apprentices showed that the Council was the second best performing local authority nationally;
- v. 45% of the Levy paid by the Council was currently being spent on apprenticeships. Members were informed that plans were currently being developed to promote the opportunities available to young people at schools and colleges across the county in order to grow the Scheme further.

Members commended officers for the success of the apprenticeship scheme and agreed that this success should be promoted externally. Officers agreed to consider options, especially during National Apprenticeship Week in March.

RESOLVED:

That the report regarding the apprenticeships scheme, detailing progress achieved to date and the approach that is being taken to further develop apprenticeships within the Council, be noted.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented an update of the current Action Plans which contained provision for compulsory redundancy and details of progress in their implementation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the current Action Plans which contain provision for compulsory redundancy and details of progress in their implementation be noted.

51. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the Employment Committee is scheduled to be held on Thursday 27 June 2019.

10.00 - 11.00 am
28 February 2019

CHAIRMAN