

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 17 November 2022.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Breckon JP CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. L. Broadley CC
Mr. B. Champion CC
Mr. B. Harrison-Rushton CC

Mr. D. Harrison CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

13. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022.

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

14. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

15. 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).

16. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

17. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

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.

18. Pay Policy Statement.

The Committee considered a report to seek approval for the submission of the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 to the County Council for approval in December 2022. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Members noted that Appendix B to the Pay Policy Statement had been amended following the implementation of the 2022/23 National Joint Council pay award and that Appendix A would be amended to reflect changes to senior officer pay following the pay

award from the Joint Negotiating Committee, before submission of the report to the County Council in December 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be approved for submission to the County Council for approval at its meeting on 1 December 2022.

19. Pay Awards 2022/23.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources to seek approval for the implementation of the 2022/23 Pay Awards for staff on National Joint Council (NJC) terms and conditions for Chief Officers. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the implementation of the 2022/23 pay awards for NJC staff and Chief Officers be approved, and the position in relation to the pay award for Chief Executives be noted.

20. Settlement Agreements.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an overview of the approval process for Settlement Agreements required by the introduction of statutory guidance in May 2022 on the making and disclosure of Special Severance Payments by local authorities. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

In response to concern regarding the issuing of significant settlement agreements, the Director explained that the Council had not made any such large payments. He assured Members that such cases would seek guidance from the Human Resources Team, the County Council's Legal Services and the Director, and that the decision would follow the approval process outlined in the report. Members noted that the majority of settlement agreements had been issued in cases where an employee had been paid in lieu of serving a notice period. However, some settlement agreements in addition to this had been offered, where there had been a specific risk to the Council. Officers agreed to report to the Employment Committee on future cases where settlement agreements had been made.

RESOLVED:

That the overview provided on the development of an approval process for Settlement Agreements as required by the statutory guidance issued in May 2022 on the making and disclosure of Special Severance Payments by local authorities be noted.

21. Attendance Management.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the Council's overall position on sickness absence, as at the end of June 2022 and the subsequent verbal update, as at the end of September 2022, provided during the meeting. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director presented absence data for the period July to September 2022 (quarter 2). Members noted that overall sickness across the Council had slightly decreased in quarter 2 although it had slightly increased in the Adults and Communities and Public Health Departments. An overall reduction in absence had been thought to be a result of a focus on first line prevention and increased support available to staff. The Director explained that the increase experienced in Adults and Communities could be due to structural changes in the Department and that the 12-month full time equivalent (FTE) figure would appear low until data for the new structure had been reported on for 12 months.

Arising from discussions, the following points were raised:

- i. Stress, depression and mental health was the main reason for staff absence. Managers would often be aware that an employee had been experiencing difficulties before an official diagnosis was received from a GP and would offer support and guidance through a range of tools available to them, to support the employee and mitigate the need for absence from work where possible. Stress, depression and mental health was often reported together on a sickness note by the GP and individuals often found it difficult to distinguish between stress, depression and mental health themselves. The Director explained that discussions had taken place to understand whether the illnesses could be classified separately, and whether the cause was work-related or home-related issues, although it was recognised that this would be challenging to do.
- ii. Managers were aware that some staff may have worked at home through minor illness, where they chose to do so. However, the Director assured members that the Council never encouraged employees to continue working where they were seriously unwell. Managers supported employees to work flexibly where that had been deemed to be the most appropriate course of action.
- iii. Regarding the Council's recruitment and retention strategy, the Director explained that the Council had promoted the benefits of working for the organisation, such as a positive culture, good learning and development opportunities and a good standard of management support. Members noted that Market Premia had been applied to some roles where necessary, but in a balanced way so as to protect future financial commitments. It was acknowledged that some employees would leave the Council to accept higher paying opportunities or to consider agency work. The Director advised members that each department would have its own strategy on recruitment and retention.
- iv. The 2022/23 pay award had awarded a flat rate to all employees although it was acknowledged that a percentage increase would usually be applied which would result in larger increases for some staff. The Council continued to pay consideration to staff on lower salaries and issues such as the increasing cost of living, inflation and higher salaries in other organisations locally, particularly in the private sector, would need to be considered when negotiating future pay awards.
- v. Members' concern that some staff may have experienced stress, depression and mental health as a result of feeling isolated whilst working at home, was addressed by the Director who explained that there had been no evidence in the sickness absence monitoring to suggest that this was the case. Managers had been strongly encouraged to monitor and manage this carefully. The Council's Ways of Working programme aimed to provide a hybrid working pattern for

employees and managers provided support and flexibility to enable employees to work in the workplace and at home, to suit the needs of the organisation and also their own preference.

Members noted that the Council was aware that a number of employees were struggling with the increase in the cost of living and the potential impact on their wellbeing. The Director explained that advice and guidance was available through the Council's intranet, on warm homes, claiming weekly payments for travel expenses and signposting to credit unions and mental health support. Assurance was given that employees would be offered support and guidance for mental wellbeing.

Following a request from members, it was agreed that the report on attendance management presented at the next Employment Committee would include a comparison with sickness absence data from other organisations. It was explained that it would be challenging to provide such a comparison with the private sector due to differences in structure and variations in sickness absence policy. The Director explained that the sickness absence had been comparable to that reported by other upper tier authorities. The Council offered a supportive sickness absence policy but would work to minimise the risk of it being exploited.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the update provided on the Council's overall position on sickness absence within this report as at the end of June 2022, and the verbal update to the end of September provided during the meeting, be noted.
- b) That the Attendance Management report presented to the next Committee meeting would include a comparison to similar organisations.

22. Corporate Ways of Working.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the Council's Ways of Working programme and shared the recommendations from the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which met in December 2021. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Director explained that there had been a great deal of success with implementing the Ways of Working Programme, with leases agreed with external tenants for space at County Hall which was not being used. He added that the leasing of such space was being handled in a measured way while the Council's internal structures were settling but there were significant opportunities to increase rental income. A pilot office model project had been running in County Hall room 700 for some time and feedback had been received from staff involved. The feedback would be used for future development with a key focus on developing a positive and flexible working culture and to ensure managers had the resources to effectively manage a hybrid team. A considerable amount of organisational development support was in place in order to support teams in generating the right culture for the new ways of working to be successful and to fully exploit the benefits that were set out in the organisational business case. Moving forward, productivity and efficiency would be the main focus across the organisation, in light of the future MTFs reductions predicted and managers would be using their skills to manage performance regardless of where people worked.

In response to concerns expressed by the Committee, the Director explained that:

- i. Staff would not be pressured to work from home as it was recognised that this could lead to isolation. The majority of staff across the Council who were previously completely office based had been included in the transition to flexible working and there were no staff members working permanently at home. Each service had developed a bespoke Ways of Working Action Plan to bring about the benefits of flexible working for staff, service delivery to customers, the organisation and productivity. There would be a focus on collaborative working, effective management of productivity and sufficient social interaction within teams rather than focussing on staff being based in the office for a specific number of days. The Director explained that managers understood that some staff may feel isolated and would hold regular reviews with their staff to discuss the best working environment for them and to offer support, ensuring that they were engaged, productive and included. He added that, the offer of flexible working would form a key part of the recruitment and retention strategy, to mirror the offer from the Council's competitors as this was now an expectation from potential applicants.
- ii. The safety of staff working from home was paramount. All staff were required to complete an online DSE assessment for their home environment and managers received results of the assessment. Managers were holding conversations with staff around their general wellbeing, working location, conditions and provision of the correct equipment for carrying out their role. Members noted that there would be difficulty in the Council eliminating all hazards around the employee's home environment which did not relate to their work-based activity.
- iii. Managers would use a range of methods to monitor performance and productivity effectively, as well as supporting the wellbeing of their staff, such as regular one to one meetings, wellbeing conversations, customer feedback and tracking key deliverables. Staff performance would be easier to measure in areas where activities would be tracked through numerical targets, such as the Customer Service Centre, rather than in teams where, for example, project working would be more common. A Performance Compendium had been produced which indicated that productivity had been high across the Council.

Arising from discussions, the following points were made:

- i. There had been a reported increase in employees working at County Hall, particularly in requests for meeting rooms, which demonstrated that teams had been working collaboratively and some had been meeting in person. It was predicted that a consequence of the current increase in heating costs maybe that people choose to work in the office; there would be capacity to support this, although it would need to be managed within teams.
- ii. The quality of service to the Council's customers remained paramount and would always be a key consideration when designing and delivering services to ensure they were delivered in the most effective and efficient way. Feedback from customers was regularly collected and was built into future service planning.

RESOLVED:

That the report and the progress made towards the Council's Ways of Working programme be noted.

23. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021-22.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which presented the Annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report for 2021-22, detailed the Council's overall position on health, safety and wellbeing, and provided an update on the performance of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Following questions, it was explained that a violent incident would be a RIDDOR (in full) reportable incidents and was defined as an incident which had caused concern such as a bite or pushing from a child to a teacher or a physical assault to a Council employee.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021-22 be noted.
- b) That the work undertaken in partnership with departments by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service to keep the Council compliant in this area be acknowledged.

24. Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: Action Plans.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented the current Action Plans which contained provision for compulsory redundancy and details of progress made with their implementation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

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

25. Date of Future Meetings.

RESOLVED:

That future meetings of the Committee would be scheduled to be held at 10:00am on the following dates:

2 February 2023
 25 May 2023
 28 September 2023
 7 December 2023

10.00 - 11.59 am
 17 November 2022

CHAIRMAN