

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 2 February 2023.

PRESENT

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

Mr. P. Bedford CC
Mr. B. Champion CC

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

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

2. Question Time.

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

3. 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).

4. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

5. 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.

Mr Breckon and Mr Shepherd declared an Other Registrable Interest in relation to all items on the agenda as they were both members of the East Midlands Shared Services Joint Committee.

6. Presentation of petitions under Standing Order 35.

No petitions were received.

7. Chief Executive's Pay Award.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources to seek approval from the Employment Committee for the implementation of the 2022/23 Pay Award for Chief Executives. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

The Director also provided members with an update on the negotiations for the 2023/24 pay award for both Chief Executives and National Joint Council (NJC) employees. The Director reported that:

- i. The staff-side pay claim had been submitted which included a pay increase in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 2% on all spinal column points and a request for consideration of a flat rate increase to hourly rates of pay in order to bring the minimum rate up to £15 per hour within two years. In addition to this, the pay claim included a review and improvement of National Joint Council (NJC) terms for family leave and pay, an additional day of annual leave for personal or well-being purposes, a homeworking allowance for staff for whom it is a requirement to work from home, a reduction in the working week by two hours, a review of the pay spine, and discussions about the link between how remuneration can be used to improve retention.
- ii. The National Living Wage for those aged 23 and over was planned to increase from £9.50 to £10.42 per hour in April 2023. The Low Pay Commission projected that it would increase to around £11 per hour by 2024.
- iii. Considerations would need to be made regarding cost of living challenges when negotiating the pay award. However, wage inflation would present a challenge to the Council regarding how it is delivered within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- iv. Regional briefings, to discuss options with employers which would be considered for the 2023/24 pay award, were due to begin in the week commencing 6 February 2023, and the Committee would be kept updated as discussions progressed.
- v. It was expected that both Chief Executive and JNC for Chief Officers' terms would be negotiated at the same time.

In response to a question regarding the potential for a homeworking allowance for staff for whom it is a requirement to work from home, members noted that mandatory home working was not built into the contract of any Council employees, and that the Council planned to continue with a flexible approach to working as outlined in its Ways of Working programme.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the implementation of the 2022/23 pay award for Chief Executives be approved.
- b) That the update provided on the 2023/24 pay award be noted.

8. Gender Pay Gap.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which presented the initial results regarding Gender Pay Gap reporting for Leicestershire County Council. The report showed results for 31 March 2022, and a comparison is also made against the results for the previous three years. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director suggested that analysis of data had indicated that the widening gender pay gap was partly a result of the proportion of females being employed on lower grades as well as retention payments having been offered to HGV drivers and waste operatives, the majority of whom were male. In addition to this, payments made to employees in the Adult Social Care Reablement Service, the majority of whom were female, had been made through the Levelling Up Fund and had to be disclosed but could not be excluded in gender pay gap reporting.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- i. The Council offered monthly training sessions to employees and managers on understanding the impact and symptoms of menopause, as well as publishing menopause awareness and hosting a Menopause Network Group. The Director reported that the Council received good feedback for its menopause support package and offered to provide the Committee with attendance data for menopause training sessions.
- ii. It had been difficult to provide members with a detailed comparison with the gender pay gap of other authorities due to data not being available for 2022, before the report had been published. The Director explained that when making comparisons, structural and cultural differences between organisations should be taken into account. Members noted that discussions would be held with other authorities to understand their gender pay gap data and that detailed comparison data, relating to the previous reporting year, would be included in future reports.
- iii. The Council offered female employees a range of training and guidance on progression into higher graded roles and management, which continued to have a high participation rate. It was acknowledged that more work could be done in measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of the training programmes.
- iv. The Department would conduct an analysis of the feedback from the Staff Survey 2023 against gender pay gap data. The results from the staff survey and findings from the data analysis would be presented to members at the meeting on 28 September 2023.
- v. An equal pay audit would be conducted in 2024 and the results would be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the initial results regarding Gender Pay Gap reporting for 31 March 2022 and the comparison also made against the results for the previous three years be noted.
- ii. That the Director of Corporate Resources would provide members with attendance data relating to menopause training sessions for employees and managers.

9. Attendance Management.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources to provide an update on the Council's overall position on sickness absence, as at the end of September 2022 (Quarter 2, 2022/23). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director explained that a detailed analysis would be conducted on the 'not disclosed' category for sickness absence and that this would be included in future reports.

In response to concern that sickness absence had not decreased despite the work which had been carried out, the Director explained that the context regarding sickness absence should be considered when reviewing data. Issues such as Covid-19, challenges with recruitment and retention, cost-of-living pressures, and backlogs within the NHS system had influenced sickness absence. Members noted that a peer review had been conducted which had indicated that the Council had robust processes in place to manage and monitor sickness absence. The Council would continue to deliver its Attendance Management Policy, and managers would continue to be responsible for supporting the wellbeing of employees. The Director offered to present the Committee with a long-term trend analysis of sickness absence data in the next report on attendance management.

Arising from discussions, the following points were made:

- i. The Council's sickness policy allowed employees to receive full pay for a six-month period before being reduced to half pay for the following six months. Formal absence management procedures were being followed in advance of an employee moving to half pay. Members noted that the number of employees moving to half pay was relatively small.
- ii. Sickness absence relating to back and neck problems, as well as other musculo skeletal issues, had decreased over the long-term and this was thought to be a result of health and safety interventions such as training, support, and risk assessment offered to all employees.
- iii. Stress/depression/mental health continued to be the highest reason for lost time due to sickness. The Director explained that the reason behind this type of absence was both work and home related challenges, and that working from home was not thought to be a contributing factor. The Council would continue to offer wellbeing support to employees and deliver preventative work around mental health, as well as providing training to managers on supporting employees with mental health.

Members noted that the Council's sickness absence target of 7.5 days had been in place for some time. The Director explained that the target, which had been set to match that of comparators, was reasonable and there would be no reason to amend it.

The Director agreed to present the Committee with a report on wellbeing support offered to employees at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the update provided on the Council's overall position on sickness absence as at the end of September 2022 be noted.
- b) That the Director agreed to present a long-term trend analysis of sickness absence data in the next report on attendance management.

- c) That the Director agreed to present the Committee with a report on wellbeing support offered to employees, at a future meeting.

10. Armed Forces Act 2021.

The Committee Considered a report of the Chief Executive to provide an update on progress made towards addressing the implications of the new Armed Forces Act 2021 (the Act). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the possible implications of the new Armed Forces Act 2021 on the Council as an employer and service provider; and the progress made towards meeting this obligation be noted.

11. 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 11' 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.

12. Date of Next Meeting.

That the next meeting of the Committee would be scheduled to be held on 25 May at 10:00am.

10.00 - 11.37 am
02 February 2023

CHAIRMAN