

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 25 May 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. P. Bedford CC
Mr. L. Breckon JP CC
Mr. B. Champion CC

Mr. B. Harrison-Rushton CC
Mrs. B. Seaton CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

It was moved by Mr. R. Shepherd CC and seconded by Mr. P. Bedford CC that Mr. L. Breckon JP CC be elected Chairman of the Employment Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2024.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. L. Breckon CC be elected Chairman of the Employment Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2024.

Mr. L. Breckon JP CC - in the Chair

2. Election of Deputy Chairman.

Nominations for the position of Deputy Chairman were sought. Mr. P. Bedford CC was nominated by Mr. R. Shepherd CC and seconded by Mr. B. Harrison-Rushton CC.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. P. Bedford CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Employment Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2024.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2023.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

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

5. Questions asked by members.

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

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. 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. L. Breckon JP CC declared a non-registerable interest in respect of agenda item 14: Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: Action Plans, as the Chair of the East Midlands Shared Services (EMSS) Joint Committee.

Mr. R. Shepherd CC declared a non-registerable interest in respect of agenda item 14: Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: Action Plans, as a member of the East Midlands Shared Services (EMSS) Joint Committee.

8. Presentation of Petitions.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

9. 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 March 2023 (quarter 4, 2022/23). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- i. Members noted that they had been presented with a long term trend of the year end sickness absence position from 2012/13 to 2022/23 and raised concern that there had been little progress made to the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) days lost per year. Members were assured that although sickness absence had not reduced over the long term, various initiatives had been attempted to reduce this, and that managers, alongside Human Resources, had persevered in applying attendance management policies and in supporting staff who were experiencing ill health. Members noted that there could have been a number of reasons why FTE lost per year had gone up over the latest twelve-month period, including the impact of COVID-19, cost of living challenges, and delays experienced within the health sector.
- ii. In response to concern that there had been a progressive increase in sickness absence recorded in Environment and Transport since 2020/21, members were advised that there had been a number of long-term individual cases of absence which had skewed the data. A deep dive exercise had been conducted to identify those individuals and HR Business partners had contacted managers to discuss how these cases could be addressed. HR business partners had also discussed attendance management with the Director of Environment and Transport, who was keen to address the issue.
- iii. A peer review had been conducted in (date) and the outcome showed that the Council's approach to attendance management was appropriate and that there was nothing further that could be recommended. The Council followed correct

legislation and had robust processes in place to monitor and address sickness absence levels.

- iv. The COVID-19 category for absence had not been broken down to identify long-COVID as this often presented in different health issues and had been categorised accordingly. The Director explained that COVID-19 would not be formally monitored going forward as testing in the community had reduced. It was suggested that instances of COVID-19 could be included within the cough/cold/flu category.
- v. In terms of Stress, Depression and Mental Health, members noted that it was only where individual cases had been examined that specific causes for this type of absence had been identified. Members were assured that managers would continue to be provided with training and guidance for supporting their employees with stress, depression and mental health concerns. A piece of work had been undertaken within the Adults and Communities department and Children and Family Services around bereavement and the impact this had on personal and work life. The Council's Wellbeing Service had further developed support for this and introduced groups whereby individuals could go for peer support which was facilitated by a counsellor. Members noted that these interventions had been successful and that the ideas would be utilised in offering employees struggling with mental health practical support to help them to operate in their role.
- vi. Absences recorded within the non-disclosed category were often a result of managers having not captured the reason in the first five days of absence rather than a refusal by an employee to provide a reason for their absence. Members were assured that work would be carried out with managers to reduce this type of administration error.
- vii. Sickness absence data could be analysed in attempt to understand the proportion of staff who are frontline, based at County Hall or working in a hybrid way, although, it was suggested that there would be a variety of variables to consider when analysing this type of data and a wide variety of reasons for sickness absence to consider.
- viii. The Council's sickness absence data had been compared to comparator local authorities within a report presented to the Committee on 2 February 2023. In response to a question as to why Kent County Council had lower rates of sickness absence than Leicestershire County Council, the Director explained that the same sickness policy was applied in both authorities but that there may be differences in the types of services offered by them, as well as cultural and organisational differences to consider. The Director had not discussed attendance management in detail with Kent County Council but agreed to do so in order to understand the differences in data and to identify whether different approaches could be attempted to reduce the Council's sickness absence figures.

RESOLVED:

That the overall position on sickness absence, as at the end of March 2023 (quarter 4, 2022/23) be noted.

10. Update on Wellbeing.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the approach being taken on wellbeing. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the work being undertaken in support of staff wellbeing be noted.

11. Health in All Policies.

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Director of Public Health which informed members of the approach being taken to embed Health in All Policies (HiAP) across Leicestershire County Council. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Whilst introducing the report, the Director of Corporate Resources explained that the Health in All Policies approach would aim to link in with the Council's wider work on employee wellbeing and would present the opportunity for further understanding of health implications during decision making and policy development. In addition to the 2023 Staff Survey, a survey was being planned to cover aspects of lifestyle which would include wellbeing at work.

Members noted that rather than looking at policies which had already been implemented, this work would focus on new or revised policies. As the HiAP approach was developed, the Public Health Department would work with officers to assist them when determining how decisions and policy changes could affect the health of individuals. The Director of Public Health agreed to provide members with a copy of the HiAP e-form.

In response to a question around the link between the HiAP approach and staff attendance, it was acknowledged that there could be an impact in considering health implications within policies and the health of employees. It was suggested that a piece of work examining the baseline of employee wellbeing and how this had changed over time could be undertaken to understand the impact of the HiAP approach.

Members noted that the work had been commissioned as part of the Public Health grant.

RESOLVED:

That the approach being taken to embed Health in All Policies across Leicestershire County Council be noted

12. Performance and Productivity.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on update the progress made against the Performance and Productivity project within the Performance Management workstream of the People Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead member for Recovery and Transformation advised members that the Annual Performance Report and Compendium would be presented to the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 8 November 2023. The Report would include information relating to a new framework which would look at balance scorecards across departments

to ensure that the Council was operating effectively against the Ways of Working programme.

Members noted that the productivity survey conducted with Environment and Transport had asked staff to quantify the impact the pilot workspace had on productivity. Where staff said they were less productive, managers had been supported in making changes to their team's working environment and in adjusting the frequency of working in the office space.

In response to a question regarding the development of other office spaces across the County Hall campus, the Director explained that there would be a phased approach to re-designing each area.

Members noted that as a result of increased flexible working, business mileage costs had reduced. The environmental impact of the Ways of Working programme would be monitored.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made against the Performance and Productivity project within the Performance Management workstream of the People Strategy be noted.

13. Chief Officer Pay Award 2023/24.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources to seek approval from the Employment Committee for the implementation of the 2023/24 Pay Award for all employees on grades 18 – 21 inclusive. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

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

- i. Unison had launched a ballot for strike action with its members which would run until 4 July and if the mandate was received strike action could occur between September 2023 and January 2024. A decision on strike action would likely be made at a local level rather than a national level, meaning that union members in different parts of the country and county could make the decision to strike independently of one another.
- ii. GMB and Unite had consulted their members who rejected the pay offer and both unions had begun a ballot for strike action also.
- iii. Although inflation had reduced slightly since the report was published, it was acknowledged that inflation was still high and that there were ongoing pressures on the cost of living.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a. the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) pay award for the period 2023/ 2024, for all employees on Grades 18 – 21 inclusive, be approved.

- b. The update provided on the 2023/24 National Joint Council (JNC) pay award be noted.

14. 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 14' 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.

15. Date of Future Meetings.

RESOLVED:

That Meetings of the Committee in 2024 would be held at 10:00 on the following dates:

1 February 2024
23 May 2024
26 September 2024
5 December 2024

10.00 - 11.29 am
25 May 2023

CHAIRMAN