



Minutes of a meeting of the ESPO Management Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield, Leicestershire on Wednesday, 18 September 2024.

PRESENT

Cllr. M. Jamil – Peterborough City Council (in the Chair)

Lincolnshire County Council  
Cllr. S. Rawlins

Norfolk County Council  
Cllr. J. James

Leicestershire County Council  
Mrs. M. Wright CC  
Mr. J. Poland CC

Apologies

Apologies were received Cllr. N. Shailer (Cambridgeshire County Council).

In attendance

Cllr. P. Butlin (Warwickshire County Council - online)  
Cllr. J. Bensly (Norfolk County Council – online)  
Cllr. A. Hagues (Lincolnshire County Council - online)  
Cllr. R. Baxter-Payne (Warwickshire County Council - online)  
Cllr. S. Ferguson (Cambridgeshire County Council - online)  
Cllr. C. Hogg (Peterborough City Council – online)

ESPO

Kristian Smith – Director  
David Godsell – Assistant Director  
Gary Tapp – Commercial Financial Controller  
Maurice Campbell – Assistant Director  
Gary Ford – Assistant Director  
Ceri Morgan – HR Business Partner  
Rachael Stone-Browning – Head of Customer Services

Leicestershire County Council

Lauren Haslam – Consortium Secretary  
Simone Hines – on behalf of the Consortium Treasurer  
Anna Poole – Democratic Services Officer

15. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were taken as read, confirmed, and signed.

16. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

17. Declarations of interests.

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. Items referred by the Finance and Audit Subcommittee.

There were no items referred by the Finance and Audit Subcommittee.

19. Director's Progress update.

The Management Committee gave consideration to a report of the Director which provided an update of the actions and progress made since the previous ESPO Management Committee held in June 2024. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 5', is filed with these minutes.

The Director informed Members that the summer peak sales activity was now reflected in the report and that sales volumes had increased on the top 500 priced products and remained on target despite a challenging market. The contraction of the market remained a challenge, but the Director reassured members that ESPO should be able to maintain its position without reducing pricing.

The Director informed Members that the warehouse extension was nearly complete and had been delivered on time and to budget, an achievement which was commended by the Committee. Members were invited to a tour of the new warehouse following the Management Committee meeting in November.

The Director assured members that, although sickness levels had risen, action to address this was being taken and no absence was attributable to work related activity.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Government schemes such as breakfast clubs and lunch clubs provided an opportunity for a new sales channel through ESPO's framework solutions;
- ii. The nursery group was a competitive market. ESPO had a team focussed on marketing which included, for example, attendance at events and launch of the nursery group package.
- iii. The increase in the minimum wage had not impacted ESPO although it was early days. It also would not affect ESPO's recruitment policy, as staff were recruited based on their skills.

It was moved by Cllr M. Jamil and seconded by Mrs. M. Wright CC that the update provided by the Director be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided by the Director be noted.

20. Annual Institute of Customer Services Benchmarking Survey.

The Management Committee considered a report of the Director concerning ESPO's Annual Institute of Customer Services Benchmarking Survey. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the high scores had been achieved across the board showing that customers believed that ESPO was doing the right thing. It was highlighted that the highest scores were in Ethics and Customer Ethos although all ESPO scores were higher than the scores for the Retail Non-food sector. Members were informed that any score above 50 was deemed excellent, above 80 was aiming towards being world class. It was hoped that ESPO would gain the Service Mark Achievement by the end of the year

Officers would be identifying emerging themes from the Survey and would use these to support improvement. The issue of the ease of website usability was already being addressed.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Although the results for Customer Service had highlighted a need for a quicker response time, the current speed was 36 seconds, compared to the industry average of 4 minutes. The concerns related to email resolution where people expected a quick response and did not relate to service provided by telephone.
- ii. Customers' concerns about complaints handling were mainly caused by the length of time taken to investigate complaints, especially for damaged items and the need to understand why the issue had occurred. Officers acknowledged there was a need to be quicker in addressing issues and an electronic process to handle returns was being put in place which would speed up the process.

Members commended officers for the scores achieved recognising the emotional connection by customers to the ESPO brand.

It was moved by Cllr M. Jamil and seconded by Mr. J. Poland that the summary results of ESPO's Annual Institute of Customer Service Benchmarking Survey be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the summary results of ESPO's Annual Institute of Customer Service Benchmarking Survey be noted.

21. Human Resources and Organisational Development Business Partner and Work Programme for ESPO.

The Management Committee considered a report of the Director which provided an update on the Human Resources Work programme for ESPO. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Although the key reasons for sickness absence were not related to work activity, as an employer, ESPO had a role to play in supporting the development of a healthy work force so as to address absence management. A range of activity would be undertaken to encourage a healthy workplace which included a discussion with individuals about their general wellbeing and personal circumstances; offering health checks – blood pressure and cholesterol; and manual handling training and the need to use the same techniques at home to prevent injuries.
- ii. The work programme would include activity to support retention and recruitment and succession planning which would include identifying and explaining ESPO, its uniqueness in being a private sector orientated organisation which was rooted in the public sector which was something that appealed to many people. Activity would consider how this was promoted to individuals, and the benefits that it could bring to employees.
- iii. ESPO followed Leicestershire County Council policies and procedures in terms of flexible and alternative working patterns, and many staff at ESPO already worked alternative patterns. Requests were considered alongside service delivery requirements. Officers would keep a careful watch on Government developments in this area.
- iv. ESPO used Leicestershire County Council's wellbeing support programmes to encourage employee wellbeing, including occupational health, counselling and talking therapies, as well as formal health checks. Supporting individuals was a priority.
- v. Every service within ESPO was now represented in the Employee Engagement Group. The Human Resources Business Partner had attended Group meetings to consult on what staff would like to see and how they wanted to move forward. Staff involved in the Group appreciated the opportunity to raise issues and concerns through the Group. Key issues raised were the need to have more responsibility to impact change and staff communications – to ensure that their voice was heard. This would be taken forward as part of the work programme.

It was moved by Cllr M. Jamil and seconded by Mrs. M. Wright CC that the intended work programme for HR Services for the next six months, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report, be noted and supported.

RESOLVED:

That the intended work programme for HR Services for the next six months, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report, be noted and supported.

22. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 10.30am at County Hall, Glenfield.

23. Exclusion of the Press and Public.

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100 (A) (iv) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business on the grounds that it would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in the Act and that in all circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exception outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

24. Supplementary Information Informing the Progress Report of the Director's Progress Update.

The Committee considered an exempt report of the Director which set out further supplementary information regarding the Director's Progress Update. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The exempt report was not for publication as it contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The Director responded to questions related to business opportunities in the school sector, inflation and volatile market conditions.

It was moved by Cllr. M. Jamil and seconded by Cllr. J. James that the update provided by the Director be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided by the Director be noted.

10.30 - 11.36 am  
18 September 2024

CHAIRMAN