



Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 3 December 2015.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC
Mr. W. Liquorish JP CC

Mrs. H. E. Loydall CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

23. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2015 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

24. Question Time.

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

25. 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).

26. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

27. 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.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented a summary of current Action Plans which contained provision for compulsory redundancies and details of progress in their implementation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

29. Employees as Foster Carers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which sought approval for changes to the Council's leave provision for employees who were foster carers, prospective foster carers and "Shared Lives" carers. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 7' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion Members were advised as follows:-

- (i) Foster carers were employed by the Council to provide emergency or planned care for children, whereas independent foster carers provided this service on behalf of an independent agency within the private or voluntary sector. "Shared Lives" carers delivered care for adults with complex multiple needs as an alternative to the residential care;
- (ii) The aim of the policy was to make it easier for existing carers to combine work responsibilities with those of being a carer, and to attract new carers by becoming a "Foster Friendly Employer". The policy sought to reflect good practice adapted by other authorities and businesses;
- (iii) The leave entitlement was to be available to the employees of the Authority and not based on their residency within Leicestershire. A resident of Derbyshire employed by Leicestershire County Council would be able to benefit from this proposal. This approach was consistent with the Council's strategy to maintain positive working relationships with neighbouring authorities.

The Committee welcomed the report and was of the view that supporting Council employees in their role as foster carers and "Shared Lives" carers was in the best interest of the recipients of the service and the Council. Members were of the view that the maximum additional paid leave should be allowed to support the employees who were or wished to become foster carers or "Shared Lives" carers throughout the length of their fostering commitments, not limiting that leave to the initial training and settling in period of a child/ vulnerable adult. The Committee was also of the view that the maximum flexibility for the use of that leave, including the option to use leave on an hourly basis and that the new policy should apply to both parents equally.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the provision of increased flexibility around paid leave for those employees who are or who wish to become Local Authority Foster Carers or "Shared Lives" Carers;
- (b) That a revised policy based on the feedback now provided be submitted to the Committee when available.

30. Pay Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on pay which addressed the potential implications of the implementation of the National Living Wage and forthcoming pay negotiations. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee expressed concern that reviewing the pay structure could have a disproportionate impact on some groups of employees, including those needed to work over seven days or outside traditional office hours. Assurance was given that this issue would in part be addressed by the introduction of the Smarter Working policy, combined with more flexible working practices, and greater contractual flexibility.

Members were advised that scoping work on the overall pay structure would be carried out over the next twelve months and would include the robust market analysis. The work would also take into consideration the progress around national pay bargaining and

consideration of linking any new pay structure with the Smarter and Flexible Working policies.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That a report on the effectiveness of Smarter Working policy be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

31. Sickness Absence.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the Council's overall position on sickness absence at the end of Quarter 2 2015-16. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was advised of the more recent figures which had become available since the publication of the report showed a significant drop in overall days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) from 9.32 to 8.80, with most of the departments showing a slight decrease in sickness absence.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Director of Adults and Communities who was present to respond to any questions of detail around sickness absence levels for his Department.

Arising from discussion Members were advised as follows:-

- (i) 'Star Chamber sessions' were being rolled out to departments to share good practice and to assess how sickness absence was being managed locally. Instances of long term sickness absence were subject to a robust management review;
- (ii) There was no evidence to suggest that stress was underreported through coding stress absence under other categories. Members were assured that a report on the work and effectiveness of Mental Health First Aiders would be presented at the Committee's next meeting in February;
- (iii) In response to concerns raised over the high absence levels at Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO), the Committee was assured that the overall absence figure had been dropping over the last two quarters and that strategies to reduce the level of absence further were in place. In addition, Members were advised that management of sickness absence in ESPO was currently being supported by HR;
- (iv) Sickness absence within the Adults and Communities Department continued to fall quarter by quarter. It was suggested that the breakdown of long and short term sickness (long term being defined as being over four weeks) within the Department was 65%:35% compared with a 50%:50% split for the rest of the Authority. There was no evidence to suggest that this was caused by the occurrence of workplace accidents, though this would be further investigated. Members were assured that any correlation between work place accidents and long term sickness would emerge as part of return to work interviews. All instances of long-term sickness were reviewed by managers and, when necessary, supported by HR and Occupational Health to ensure maximum support for the employee;

- (v) The 'Nothing stated' category had been removed from the Oracle Self Service System, however as with the 'Other' category, reporting on a rolling twelve month basis meant that it would take a full twelve months before this was reflected in the reports to the Committee;
- (vi) The Committee was advised that the possibility of shortening the length of sick pay was not favoured or recommended, and there was a lack of evidence to show that for the few Authorities who had done this, there had been a positive impact on sickness absence levels.

Members noted the reduction in overall drop in days lost per FTE, however were of the view that further comparison work with practices at other local authorities as well as private businesses would be beneficial. The Committee drew on anecdotal evidence from Buckingham County Council which had linked performance to receiving and maintaining pay increments (through a system of performance related pay) and was of the view that other ways of managing sickness absence in that Authority should also be investigated.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress towards achieving the corporate target of 7.5 days per FTE, and the overall drop from 9.32 to 8.80 days per FTE as at the end of October 2015 be noted;
- (b) That future reports to the Committee provide a breakdown for long and short term absence and that further details be provided in relation to absences that had occurred as a result of workplace accidents.

32. Date of Next Meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 February 2016 at 10.00am.

10.00 - 11.20 am
03 December 2015

CHAIRMAN