



Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 2 February 2017.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC

Mrs. J. Fox CC

Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mrs. H. E. Loydall CC

Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. E. D. Snartt CC

24. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2016 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

25. Question Time.

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

26. Questions asked by Members.

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

27. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

28. 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. R. J. Shepherd CC declared a personal interest in respect of Item 8 on the agenda as a school governor (Minute 31 refers).

29. Managing Attendance.

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 November 2016. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

The Director reported that, as the revised Attendance Management Policy was currently in the process of consultation with the trade unions, it had not been possible to bring it before the Committee at this stage. The revised Policy would be shared with the Committee when it had been finalised.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was clear that a significant level of improvement was required to tackle sickness absence levels, which currently cost the Council an estimated £4 million per year in direct and productivity cost (45,000 total days lost). It was felt that it was important to stress to managers the cost implication to the Council of the rising sickness absence levels;
- More analysis was required to see whether the implementation of flu vaccinations had impacted positively on flu-related absence levels;
- Staff were able to “self-diagnose” their illness for a period of up to 7 days. A doctor’s note was required for absences beyond this timeframe. It was acknowledged that mental health was a complex area and it could therefore be difficult for staff to initially self-diagnose these conditions, though the increased focus nationally on mental health was welcomed. It was noted that a more detailed departmental breakdown of long and short term absence due to stress, depression and mental health issues would be valuable to the Committee;
- Despite the concern expressed in regard to the rising sickness absence levels, it was felt that the majority of Council staff were hardworking and committed to doing a good job in the face of significant savings and staff reductions. It was suggested that it was likely therefore that these pressures may have resulted in an increased level of stress and mental health issues amongst the workforce;
- The issue of sickness absence levels was linked to the organisation’s working culture. It was emphasised that managers were required to tackle issues where there were repeated instances of sickness absence or where patterns had developed. The measures aimed at improving sickness absence levels (paragraph 14 of the report) and those aimed at improving performance management across the organisation (agenda item 7 - Minute 30 refers) were acknowledged. However, if these proved unsuccessful, more robust measures would be required which would inevitably impact staff more directly;
- It was noted that some other authorities had identified dedicated HR resources to provide stronger support to managers in dealing with issues such as sickness absence;
- The importance of creating a good level of “team spirit” amongst staff was stressed as a means of attempting to address rising sickness absence levels and drive up performance;
- A view was expressed that, given jobs were being lost within the Authority as a result of the Council’s financial pressures, the Council must do all it could to address the rising sickness absence levels as a matter of urgency. The Chief Executive’s Department was the only Council department currently with a sickness absence level within the corporate target of 7.5 days. It would be necessary for the Chief Executive to hold Directors to account for the lack of progress made in their departments.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a letter be sent to the Chief Executive of the County Council highlighting the Committee's strong concerns with the Council's sickness absence levels and stressing that urgent action is required in order to address this;
- (b) That the letter set out the Committee's view that, if any subsequent action taken proves to be unsuccessful, it will be necessary for the Committee to consider stronger measures for those staff who do not maintain a good level of attendance at work;
- (c) That a report be submitted to the Committee's meeting in June setting out practice elsewhere around the links between pay and attendance.

30. Performance Management and Productivity.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning further planned work aimed at enhancing performance management and productivity across the organisation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 7' is filed with these minutes.

The Director reported that, whilst the Council had a very good reputation externally for being well run and providing quality services, performance could always be improved to drive up productivity and standards.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was important not to look at the Council's sickness absence levels in isolation. Improvements to working practices would only be made if key messages were driven through from the top of the organisation;
- Approaches to "smarter working" for staff (such as flexible and home working) would continue but would only be applied where there was a justifiable business need, and identified business benefit;
- It was acknowledged that more could be done to improve networking channels across the organisation for managers to share best practice and drive up performance;
- Training programmes were available to managers aimed at improving performance management amongst teams.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that updates on the implementation and impact of the various measures outlined in the report to improve performance management and productivity at the Council be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

31. Pay Policy Statement 2017/18.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources outlining the Council's Pay Policy Statement 2017/18 which, subject to the Committee's endorsement, would be submitted to the County Council for approval at its meeting on 22 March 2017. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Director reported that no confirmation had yet been received from the Government in relation to caps on severance pay though further developments were expected imminently. The Pay Policy Statement would likely require amendment and subsequent approval of the Committee and the full County Council following any changes.

RESOLVED:

That the County Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2017/18.

32. Employee Volunteering.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning proposals for the implementation of an Employee Volunteering Policy. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Policy would provide staff with the option of taking two days paid leave to volunteer in communities. Whilst it was acknowledged that this would create some added value for the Council via the enrichment of its employees, little was known about the direct cost implications of adopting such a scheme;
- It was suggested that it might be more prudent to adopt any scheme on a trial basis to enable the Council to consider the impact on resources and productivity. The consideration of a "cap" on the associated costs might be worthy of consideration alongside any trial period.

RESOLVED:

That a further report be submitted to the Committee setting out more clearly the cost implications of adopting the Policy.

33. Dying to Work Charter.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources seeking views on whether the Council's existing policies require modification to support the principles of the "Dying to Work" Charter. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

The Director reported that current practice at the County Council was within the principles of the Charter. The only area of concern was around where staff were made compulsorily redundant and there were no options for redeployment.

RESOLVED:

That the Council sign up to the "Dying to Work" Charter.

34. Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: 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 11' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

35. Date of Next Meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on 29 June at 10.00am.

10.00 - 11.50 am
02 February 2017

CHAIRMAN

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