Leicestershire County Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 21 May 2026.

PRESENT

Miss H. Butler CC
Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC
Mr. H. Fowler CC
Mr. B. Lovegrove CC
Mr. P. Morris CC
Dr. D. North CC
Mr. O. O'Shea JP CC
Mr. P. Rudkin CC
Mrs D. Taylor CC

1. Election of Chairman.

It was moved by Miss Helen Butler and seconded by Mr Peter Morris:

“That Mr Harrison Fowler be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

It was moved by Mrs Deborah Taylor and seconded by Mr Ozzy O’Shea JP:

“That Mr Brian Lovegrove be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

The Chief Executive informed members that both candidates had been duly proposed and seconded and in accordance with Standing Order 25 a secret ballot would therefore take place.

The Chief Executive announced the results of the ballot as follows:

Five votes for Mr Harrison Fowler, three votes for Mr Brian Lovegrove and one abstention. The motion “That Mr Harrison Fowler be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council” was therefore carried.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Harrison Fowler be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.

Mr H. Fowler CC - In the Chair

2. Election of Vice-Chairman.

It was moved by Miss Helen Butler and seconded by Mr Peter Morris:

“That Mr Paul Rudkin be elected Vice-Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

It was moved by Mrs Deborah Taylor and seconded by Mr Ozzy O’Shea JP:

"That Mr Brian Lovegrove be elected Vice-Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council."

The Chief Executive informed members that both candidates had been duly proposed and seconded and in accordance with Standing Order 25 a secret ballot would therefore take place.

The Chief Executive announced the results of the ballot as follows:

Five votes for Mr Paul Rudkin, three votes for Mr Brian Lovegrove and one abstention. The motion "That Mr Paul Rudkin be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council" was therefore carried.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Paul Rudkin be elected Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2026 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 32(1).

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.

No declarations were made.

8. Presentation of petitions under Standing Order 33.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 33.

9. Workforce Annual Report 2025-26.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on workforce information and performance measures for 2025/26, including details relating to headcount, Full Time Equivalent (FTE), absence rates and reason, and reported completion of Annual Performance Reviews (APR). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

(i) It was noted that there were fewer people employed overall by the County Council, but that, in some areas, employees were working increased hours.

(ii) Absence levels remained slightly above the Council's target of 7.5 FTE days lost, although the position had improved and reflected expected seasonal pressures over the winter period.

(iii) Members were assured that absence continued to be actively managed through established HR measures and that, from March, there had been a stronger emphasis on performance management and the consistent recording of absence data, with reminders issued where improvement was needed.

(iv) In response to questions, the Committee was advised that the numbers of staff absent for stress and mental health reasons had been consistent for a number of years and that, whilst no single trend had emerged, the causes reflected a combination of work-related pressures and issues in employees' personal lives. Members noted that wider uncertainty, including Local Government Reorganisation, could also be a contributing factor for some staff.

(v) A Member asked whether home working had altered sickness reporting arrangements and was advised that the same reporting and return to work procedures applied regardless of work location. Employees were required to notify their manager before their start time if they were unfit for work, and a return-to-work interview was required to be conducted within 24 hours of the employee returning.

(vi) A Member sought further information on the balance between permanent and agency staff numbers, what cost savings arose from this and what impact the national wage increase applied at the start of the financial year had on such costs/savings. The Director undertook to provide this information after the meeting.

(vii) At the request of Members, the Director undertook to provide additional information on critical vacancies, hard to fill posts and the extent to which labour market conditions, an ageing workforce and uncertainty associated with Local Government Reorganisation were affecting recruitment.

(viii) It was questioned whether the absence target of 7.5 FTE days remained realistic and should be reviewed. The Director confirmed that this remained deliberately ambitious to maintain focus on attendance management. Members were assured that Departmental Management Teams reviewed absence data monthly. It was acknowledged that there were notable variations between front-line and back-office services in terms of absence levels, and it was suggested that a breakdown across service areas might be beneficial so that the data could be better understood. The Director agreed to consider how future reporting could present a clearer analysis of absence data and where appropriate, how this might be considered by the

Committee in closed session.

(ix) Members raised concern at the low recorded completion rate for annual performance reviews. The Director undertook to provide further evidence to give assurance that reviews were taking place but not always being recorded on the system.

(x) Further questions were raised regarding the overall cost of sickness absence to the organisation and what safeguards had been put in place to ensure that any reported absence was genuine. It was noted that the Council's approach relied on robust management oversight, supported by return-to-work interviews, well established trigger points within the process, scrutiny of patterns of absence and regular reviews by managers, Chief Officers and HR. It was acknowledged that no system could ever be completely fool proof, but Members were assured that a strong management culture and regular monitoring were central to the Council's approach.

(xi) It was noted that a range of support was made available for employees, including an in-house counselling service, externally commissioned support where required, stress risk assessments, wellbeing plans, a HSE stress assessment tool, and training on resilience and stress management. The Director further advised that management information on absence was circulated monthly through management chains and that an update could be included in the Health, Safety and Wellbeing report due in September specifically on this area.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the update on workforce information and performance measures for 2025/26, including details relating to headcount, Full Time Equivalent (FTE), absence rates and reason, and reported completion of Annual Performance Reviews (APR) be noted;

(b) That the Director of Corporate Resources be requested to provide further information on the following:

(i) The general cost of staff absence;

(ii) the overall saving in the total pay bill, if as suggested the Council was employing few staff and less agency workers;

(iii) the impact fewer agency staff had on the total pay bill, given the national hourly rate wage increase;

(iv) additional information on critical vacancies, hard to fill posts and the extent to which labour market conditions, an ageing workforce and uncertainty associated with Local Government Reorganisation were affecting recruitment;

(v) to provide further evidence to give assurance that Annual Performance Reviews were taking place;

(c) That the Director of Corporate Resources be requested to consider how future reporting could present a clearer analysis of absence data across service areas and where appropriate, how this might be considered by the Committee in closed session

(d) That all written answers to questions taken away from the meeting be circulated to all members of the Committee and also recorded in the minutes for the public record.

[Subsequent to the meeting the following information was provided to Members on the matters requested in paragraph (b) above. The Committee had requested that this be recorded in the minutes.

(i) An average FTE absence was 8.92 days which relates to a 3.5% absence rate to the workforce. This was an estimated cost to the Council of just over £400,000 a month.

(ii) An overall saving on the total pay bill had not been achieved, compared with last year. As whilst we have made savings against agency costs from the last financial year this has not translated into an overall saving in the total pay bill because our FTE increased and workforce costs increased.

(iii) Fewer agency staff helped offset the impact of the national hourly rate increase, resulting in lower agency expenditure than last year. However, this did not reduce the total pay bill due to wider workforce cost pressures.

(iv) For some professional groups, the available supply of candidates is limited because roles require specific qualifications, training and experience. This is particularly the case in areas such as social work, engineering and educational psychology. At the same time, demand for these skills remains high across the wider labour market, increasing competition for experienced candidates. In services such as social work, waste management and driver roles, the Council is competing with other authorities as well as private sector employers for a similar workforce.

Recent agency caps and related controls in children's social work have supported some conversion from agency to substantive posts. However, these measures do not in themselves address the underlying shortage of qualified professionals or the sustained level of demand.

The longer-term response lies in workforce planning, including growing and developing talent through recruitment, training and retention activity. While there remains a risk of losing employees to the wider market, investing in development can strengthen workforce resilience and support retention. The full impact of Local Government Reorganisation is not yet clear, although it is creating some uncertainty, particularly at senior level, while potentially changing the competitive landscape over time.

(v) Evidence from the departments indicates that Annual Performance Reviews are taking place, although completion is not yet recorded consistently on the central system.

HR is therefore strengthening the recording and reporting process, including simplified system requirements and automated reminders, to provide greater assurance through future reporting.]

10. <u>Occupational Health Report 2025-26.</u>

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, the purpose of which was to provide an overview of the Occupational Health (OH) Service Provision between April 2025 and March 2026, as requested by the Committee at its meeting on 5 February 2026. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

(i) It was noted that arrangements with the current OH provider operated on a pay-as-you-go basis. A budget allocation of £175,000 to £200,000 had been made to support the use of such services as and when necessary.

(ii) Members noted that the current contract was operating well and that the service was meeting the ten working day target to see referrals in all cases.

(iii) The Committee asked for additional information on the total number of referrals made and the success rate in supporting employees back into work. The Director confirmed that this could be included in the planned Annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing update to be presented to the Committee in September.

(iv) A Member commented that future reports would benefit from a more presentation-based and user-friendly format, with a clearer explanation of graphs and acronyms. The Director further undertook to consider this when presenting the Annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing update in September.

(v) In response to questions about contract history, the Committee was advised that the Council had always maintained an OH service, that a number of different providers had been used over time and selected through the Councils required procurement process.

(vi) It was noted the OH providers performance was regularly monitored. Whilst previous providers had not always delivered the standard of management information required, reporting by the current provider had significantly improved. Managers could seek advice through HR and OH at various stages when managing staff absence.

(vii) It was noted that self-referral by employees to OH was not available as it was not intended to operate as a diagnostic service. It was noted that referrals were completed with input from both the employee and employer so that a holistic view could be taken.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the overview of the Occupational Health (OH) Service Provision between April 2025 and March 2026 be noted;

(b) That the Director be requested to provide further information on the total number of referrals to OH made and the success rate in supporting employees back into work as part of the planned Annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report to be presented to the Committee in September;

(c) That the Director consider how best to present the data contained in the Annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report noting that a presentation-based and user-friendly format, with a clearer explanation of graphs and acronyms would be beneficial.

11. Working Arrangements Update.

The Committee received an update on the revised Working Arrangements Policy previously approved by the Committee and which would come into force from 1 June 2026.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

(i) Following the Committee's decision in February, the proposals had been revised and agreement reached with the trade unions allowing for implementation activity to commence at the beginning of March. Staff had been given advance notice of the changes and managers had been asked to hold discussions with their teams about future office attendance. To support a consistent approach to communication with staff advice had been provided and sessions held with senior managers and line managers.

(ii) In preparation, work was being undertaken ahead of the 1 June implementation date both at County Hall and within departments to ensure that workspaces, team locations and desk availability were aligned with expected attendance levels. Car parking arrangements were also being reviewed and new permits reissued in light of changing workplace patterns with checks to be introduced to ensure that facilities were used appropriately.

(iii) In response to questions, Members were advised that the policy had been available internally online from the beginning of March.

(iv) It was noted that the Policy would apply from 1 June rather than being introduced on a phased basis, although some individuals might still be making practical adjustments at that point which would be overseen by their managers.

(v) It was noted that staff behaviour had already begun to change, with more employees attending the workplace in advance of formal implementation.

(vi) Work was underway to assess daily attendance levels, available desk capacity and any emerging accommodation gaps. It was proposed that a report on the overall impact of the changes would be brought back to the Committee in September.

(vii) In relation to productivity, Members were advised that baseline work had recently been undertaken across the organisation, with support from Newton, to enable future comparisons to be made.

(viii) A Member queried if parking pressures arose, whether additional land could be used to increase the amount of parking space available. It was noted that there site and planning conditions applied to this land related to the provision of sports facilities on the site.

RESOLVED:

That the update now provided on the revised Working Arrangements Policy previously approved by the Committee be noted.

12. Organisational Change Policy and Procedure: Action Plans.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on current Action Plans which contained provision for compulsory redundancy. A copy of the report marked ‘Agenda Item 12’ is filed with these minutes.

A Member questioned the need for such Action Plans to be presented to the Committee, noting that to have clear oversight of these, more detail would be needed which would be impractical and possibly inappropriate for the Committee to receive. It was noted that a review would be undertaken regarding future reporting to the Committee on such matters to check if this remained appropriate and aligned with its current terms of reference.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the update on current Action Plans which contain provision for compulsory redundancy be noted;

(b) That the Chief Executive consider the reasons and merit of presenting this type of report to the Committee in future.

13. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee be held at 10.00am on 10 September 2026.

10.00 - 11.05 am CHAIRMAN
21 May 2026