

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE held in THE CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 23 July 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor A Blackwell – Chair.

Councillors S Cawley, L Davenport-Ray,
S A Howell, P A Jordan, P Kadewere,
D N Keane and C Lowe.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th February 2025 and 15th May 2025 were approved as a correct record and later signed by the Chair.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

6. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 4)

The Committee received and noted a report on Human Resources (HR) matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st January 2025 to 31st March 2025. The report included the latest position and trends relating to employee numbers, salary costs and sickness absence. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

The Committee heard that the workforce totalled 678 people, the fulltime equivalent working out at 620.13 Officers, which was an increase from the previous quarter. The Pay bill had also increased this Quarter and ended with an overspend of £1.137 million. There had also been an increase in Contractor and Agency costs which had been factored into the 2025/26 budget.

It was confirmed that 21 individuals left the Council in Quarter 4 which continued to be a decrease from the previous Quarter when 33 employees left. The overall turnover was 19%. Sickness had decreased from 8.5 days FTE to 8.3, however long-term sickness had increased from 17 to 22 employees.

After a question from Councillor Cawley relating to long-term sickness, referencing depression and other mental health issues, Members were informed that Managers were being trained in how to support their teams when issues such as stress have been raised. The areas covered included Occupational Health referrals and highlighting early intervention as key in ensuring employees were supported from the outset and that they received help getting back

into the workplace.

Further information regarding Health and Safety 'Red Doors' and Near Misses were requested by the Committee as this could be useful in spotting trends which could prevent incidents from happening and highlight any issues or training gaps. Members were advised that there was a system in place to monitor this and the information would be shared with them after the meeting.

Councillor Davenport-Ray asked why recruitment for One Leisure was still high in this Quarter. It was confirmed to the Committee that there were still gaps following the restructure and this was a long-term impact from that.

In response to a question from a Member, it was explained that My Conversation was a new 1-2-1 form which had been in use since April 2025. It provided a structure for a 1-2-1 conversation between a Line Manager and Officer. It was confirmed that this was to be completed monthly.

Following a question from Councillor Cawley, the Committee heard that the course descriptor for the new Management and Leadership course would be circulated via email to Members. The course included HR practises and how to have informal HR discussions. It was co-designed to ensure the training included the necessary information relevant to managers. After the first training cohort, the Committee would receive feedback to review.

In response to a question regarding events that helped with employee wellbeing, the Committee was advised there was an engagement calendar that was being developed with Communications. It would be taken to management teams to promote participation in events.

Special mention was made relating to the Shared Service graduate who had recently secured a contract with the Council.

It was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

7. WORKFORCE PROFILE REPORT

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which contained the annual summary of the profile of the workforce according to their protected characteristics as required by the Equality Act 2010. It covered the period to 31st March 2025.

The report showed that non-declaring of disability was 78 for the year and 61 for ethnicity, both of which represented a decrease from previous years. The Council would take steps to achieve a higher declaration rate in the coming year, such as sending reminder emails to individual employees who had not completed them and offering assistance. Having noted the link between this data and the Workforce Strategy Action Plan, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

8. USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED STAFF & TEMPORARY STAFF 2024/2025

Consideration was given to the report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing the annual monitoring information on the use of interim staff. The Committee was advised that the report covered consultants, hired staff and temporary staff and had been split between capital and revenue.

After a question from Councillor Cawley, it was explained that the increase in cost arose from a change to the way the budget for agency hiring was compiled, particularly in relation to the Operations Team. This ensured the Council could deliver a key service such as refuse collection by a team that had a high staff turnover. The aim was to assess the staff, train them and then transfer them to permanent positions.

Councillor Keane asked how the use of consultants for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would be managed. The Committee was advised that the Council would develop and utilise the staff it already had so the knowledge that was gained through the LGR process would be retained by the new workforce. The aim was to upskill some Officers and backfill their posts. It was confirmed that knowledge gained from consultants was used to upskill the workforce. Further information would appear in next year's report.

After a further question from Councillor Keane, it was confirmed that there would be a hiring freeze which would reduce redundancy costs. There would be discussions around recruitment once more information was received next Summer.

Councillor Davenport-Ray asked for further information about the Strategic Insight Team. The Team had grown and the benefits included assisting with future modelling, understanding data information and the future for how the Council worked. The information was now being provided in a timelier way. This work was no longer being outsourced.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

9. WORKFORCE STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN UPDATE

By means of a presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Chloe George, HR Coordinator – Project Delivery, provided the Committee with an update on the Workforce Strategy. Reference was made to examples of training and development activities, such as the Management and Leadership programme. Managers had been divided into different cohorts so they could learn

from each other. A neurodiversity awareness and support webinar had been introduced along with the Bumps to Baby Midlife Matters and Infant loss support webinars. It was noted that there had been an increase in engagement at the Road Shows. The next Road Show would be in October.

Members' attention was drawn to the success of the ICARE awards and the new My Conversation form, which was now being utilised by Managers for monthly 1-2-1's with staff. Health kiosks were located in Pathfinder House and Eastfield House, and included a follow up day with a nurse on both sites. It was advised that the next work priorities would be the Communications Strategy, Hybrid Working, Mentoring and Coaching and Long Service Awards.

Further clarification regarding slide 4, 'Seeking feedback' was asked for by the Committee. It was advised that it referred to talks about possible pay increments, whilst managing expectations.

Councillor Keane asked if all diverse groups were included in the activities that are being set up for employees. The Committee heard that the Council strived to ensure nobody was left out, referencing setting up a Men's health week and the fact that the calendar covered all groups within the Organisation. The Road Shows were held at Pathfinder House, Eastfield House and One Leisure sites to ensure everyone had the opportunity to put their thoughts forward and to encourage engagement with all employees.

Councillor Jordan praised the efforts of the Teams and wanted it recognised that the ideas had come from the top. She commented that the Workforce Strategy appeared to be building momentum.

Councillor Davenport-Ray asked how staff who were not office-based accessed the learning modules and if Carbon Literacy was included in the modules. It was reported that Eastfield House had a computer that staff could access and that staff were supported through their Line Managers. Group training was available for modules that require multiple members of staff to complete as a means of support.

The Committee heard that after a successful recruitment campaign, four new members had joined the Employee Representative Group (ERG), who had received training.

In response to a question by Councillor Lowe it was confirmed that Officer qualified for the Long Service award after 25 years. Councillor Lowe suggested the award should be augmented by an email so employees felt valued in their work.

Employee Representative, David Pope, expressed his appreciation regarding the pace of delivery of items from the Workforce Strategy Plan and was happy with the attendance at the Road Shows.

Councillor Kadewere provided feedback from residents who found staff more approachable. It was reported this month 28 compliments and 18 complaints were received, which was a notable achievement for the Organisation.

RESOLVED

that the information presented be received and noted.

10. HR POLICY UPDATES

By means of a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was acquainted with the outcome of reviews of the Neonatal Care Leave and the Recruitment and Selection Policies.

Councillor Howell asked for clarification regarding how roles were being made more accessible to applicants. It was confirmed that when job descriptions were being prepared HR were challenging the Desirable and Essential criteria.

Regarding the Neonatal Policy, Councillor Cawley suggested that the legislation be quoted to lend it more weight and that the Policy should define a parent. He also suggested that more detail regarding the types of leave and clarification on the support and discretion a manager should provide staff in extreme cases should be included. He also requested clarity on how leave would be recorded through HR. In response it was confirmed that managers would receive a toolkit to assist them to follow the policy. Leave would be recorded in the same way as other absences, which was through the I-Trent system.

RESOLVED

that, subject to the adjustments suggested the Neonatal Care Leave and the Recruitment and Selection Policies be endorsed.

11. REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES

David Pope, Employee Representative, informed Members that Officers' main concern remained Local Government Reorganisation. The concerns were being addressed through the FAQs and the regular briefings with the Council's Chief Executive. He endorsed this process.

Mr Pope reported that there now were more Employee Representative Group (ERG) members, which would enable them to provide a better service to staff. He reflected that the ERG needed to engage better with staff to show they were there to support them.

Councillor Jordan expressed her thanks to Mr Pope and the work he did.

Chair