

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE held as a REMOTE MEETING on Wednesday, 16th September 2020

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs P A Jordan, D N Keane, C J Maslen, J M Palmer, Mrs J Tavener and D M Tysoe.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D Terry.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 12th February and 17th June 2020 were approved as correct records.

5 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

6 WORKFORCE REPORT QUARTER ONE 2020-21

The Committee received and noted a report on Human Resources matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st April to 30th June 2020. 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 was informed that the workforce headcount at the end of the last quarter was the same as at the end of the previous quarter and that the total spend on pay costs for employees in 2020/21 was forecast to be £0.9m less than the year's budget. The latter could partly be attributed to the fact that recruitment had been put on hold, but it also was the result of other factors such as pensions. Councillor Maslen enquired whether recruitment usually took place within departments or centrally. It was reported that it depended on the post and that the Council had recently appointed a recruiter to help fill strategic and hard to fill roles.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that 91% of the workforce had no instances of sickness absence during the last quarter, while 18 employees had experienced long-term sickness compared with 28 in the previous quarter. While the availability of comparative data was limited, it appeared that Council had lower rates of absence than other local authorities. However, trends in mental health and musculoskeletal related absence would be closely monitored.

The Strategic HR Manager reported that owing to other Covid related demands and an inability to hold meetings, it had not been possible to devote much time to casework. This was particularly the case where unions were involved.

In response to a question by Councillor Jordan on trends in stress, anxiety and depression, it was reported that these reasons for absence could be complex and often arose from other issues. The aim was to find a way to get these individuals back to work as soon as possible. The Council had made significant investments in mental health provisions and monitored trends against a number of factors. After a related question by Councillor Keane, it was agreed that in future the report would contain a greater level of analysis relating to absence.

Regarding the sections of the report on high earners and the figures for average pay by gender, it was stated that reporting requirements in respect of the latter had been suspended. The Committee discussed the definition of high earners. Given that it had not changed for a number of years, the Strategic HR Manager was requested to consider whether the threshold should be increased.

The report indicated that four employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and conveyed their congratulations to them. For other leavers, a new questionnaire had been introduced to provide greater insight into the reasons why employees left the Council and for use in recruitment. The Committee endorsed a suggestion by Councillor Tysoe that in future the data on leavers should differentiate by age ranges and department. It was considered that this would have the added advantage of identifying potential reasons for changes in performance. It was then

RESOLVED

- a) that the contents of the report be noted, and
- b) that the Council place on record its recognition of and gratitude for the excellent contributions made by the four employees who have recently retired from their employment in the local government service and convey its best wishes to them for long and happy retirements.

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STAFF SURVEY

With the aid or a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee considered proposals for a changed approach to the annual staff survey. The change was required because a significant number of employees in Operations and Leisure services were not able to respond online and some had been furloughed. It was, however, suggested that steps should be taken to obtain employees views and concerns via small, targeted consultations. This suggestion was endorsed.

Following a comment from Councillor Tysoe, the Committee was informed that shorter surveys had been carried out on employees' feelings about working from home and being redeployed in response to the pandemic. Policies and guidance would be developed to reflect new working arrangements.

In response to a further question by Councillor Jordan, Members noted that the previous representatives had resigned from their roles on the Staff Council. A new approach to the way Staff Council worked was being devised. Members would be provided with details once they had been finalised.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

8 USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED STAFF AND TEMPORARY STAFF

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing the annual monitoring information on the use of interim staff. Members were informed that compared with the previous year there had been a net increase of £201k in the cost of interim staff. All expenditure was within budget.

Having been informed of the legal context surrounding the use of interim employees, Members were acquainted with the reasons for the increase in expenditure. The key projects that had required additional expert external input were the development of market town master plans and future high street funding bids and strategic investments.

Councillor Tysoe made the observation that for the Committee to be able to comment meaningfully on the report, more detailed information was required. In response, Councillor Keane, as Executive Councillor for Corporate Services, undertook to discuss with the Chief Finance Officer the information that was required for future reports. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

Chairman