

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 22nd June 2022

PRESENT: Councillor P A Jordan – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, S Cawley, C M Gleadow,
D N Keane, B A Mickelburgh, S L Taylor and R J West.

APOLOGIES: None.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor M Hassall

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 9th February and 18th May 2022 were approved as correct records and 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 matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st January to 31 March 2022. 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 total number of employees at the end of the last quarter was higher than at the end of the previous quarter and that the total spend on pay costs for employees in 2021/22 was £44k higher than the year's budget. Regarding the latter, following questions by Members, it was stated that a range of measures were employed to manage budgets, including analysis of monthly forecasts and regular meetings with managers, however some services had difficulties implementing short term fixes because, for example, there was a national shortage of professionally qualified individuals, so longer-term solutions were required. In addition, grants were available from the Government to cover specific short-term measures introduced as a result of Covid. Officers undertook to circulate a breakdown of pay costs to Members.

In response to a question by Councillor West, assurances were provided that should there be concerns over the ethical treatment of agency employees, they would be fully investigated.

The report indicated that two employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and conveyed their congratulations to

them. They also placed on record their appreciation of the contribution to the Council of Aileen Whatmore, Strategic HR Lead, who had recently left to take up alternative employment.

During discussion on workforce turnover it was noted that some leavers had identified working alongside contractors as one of the things they disliked about their employment with the Council, and this was because contractors were paid more and were only present for a short period of time. Furthermore, trends differed between sections, particularly in One Leisure where opportunities were available to fill vacant roles that did not exist for other services, such as recruiting part-time employees.

Members went on to examine the position in relation to sickness. The sickness procedure had been streamlined and the use of data had improved. While patterns of sickness from long Covid had not emerged, concern was expressed at the levels of overall days lost. Although short-term absences were decreasing, longer-term ones were harder to manage. Differences in the way sickness was treated when employees were working from home were also highlighted. Having identified a need to put in place comprehensive measures to support officers when working from home, it was

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 two 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.

7 USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED STAFF AND TEMPORARY STAFF 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report by the Chief Finance Officer (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 decrease of £67k in the revenue cost of interim staff and that all expenditure was within budget.

In response to questions by Councillor Gleadow, the Committee was informed that an internal team oversaw the cost of project management and that such costs tended to be incurred in the earlier phases of projects. Furthermore, transformation had benefitted from a successful bid for external funding and aimed to join up services across a range of providers.

The Committee discussed the use of temporary staff agency staff. Their main purpose had been to support the Development Management service, particularly its statutory functions. The recruitment of Planning Officers was a significant challenge for the Council and reflected a national issue. In the meantime, the Council had developed a future vision for Planning and, to start with, a new Planning Service Manager had been appointed. While some creative initiatives had been introduced to develop the Council's own staff, as fully qualified professionals were required, this was a long process. Having suggested the

Executive Leader should consider whether there would be any likely benefit of making representations to the Government on this matter, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

8 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 workforce according to their protected characteristics as required by the Equality Act 2010. Having had their attention drawn to the aims of the Equality Duty, Members discussed the methodology employed to collate the data. Having been informed that a direct survey would be undertaken with the particular aim of obtaining responses where the data was weakest, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

9 EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES GROUP

No matters had been identified for consideration.

Chair