

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, 20th November 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor A Blackwell – Chairman.
Councillors S Cawley, L Davenport-Ray, P A Jordan, P Kadewere and D N Keane.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S A Howell and C Lowe.

IN ATTENDANCE: D Pope- Employee Representative.

17. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18th September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

19. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 2)

The Committee received and noted a report on Human Resources matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st July to 30th September 2024. 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 slightly lower than at the end of the previous quarter and that the total spend on pay costs for employees in 2024/25 was forecasted to be £361,000 higher than the year's budget. The expected overspend on contractors and agency staff meant there was likely to be an overall overspend of £1,411,000 against the staffing budget.

The report indicated that three employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and asked that their congratulations be passed on. Having noted that there had been one death in service during the report period, Members requested that their condolences be sent to relatives of the deceased.

The Committee congratulated Officers on their achievements in terms of recruitment. However, Councillor Jordan also enquired why turnover was high. In response, Members were informed that while some turnover was desirable, detailed analysis of reasons for leaving

had not yet been carried out. This would be done once an improved exit interview process had been introduced. A request was made for the outcome of this analysis to be submitted to a future meeting. Members also discussed whether staff turnover should be included in the Council's Risk Register and whether succession plans should be introduced for key roles and roles that were difficult to recruit to. The Chief Executive assured the Committee that these had been discussed by the Senior Leadership Team and consideration was being given to including recruitment to the Planning section as a separate entry in the Risk Register. Separately, some teams operated their own informal succession plans.

Having reviewed the section of the report containing reasons for sickness absence, Members requested details of the manual handling training provided by the Council.

Councillor Davenport-Ray enquired about the effect the change to National Insurance would have for the Council and how any risks associated with it might be mitigated. It was stated that the likely cost would be incorporated into the financial plans. Support would be made available to the Council, but the amount and form were not known. The change would come into effect in April 2025, so it would be factored into the Budget in February. The effect would be incorporated into the regular Employment Committee monitoring report.

David Pope, Employee Representative, asked several questions about contractual and budget matters. In response, the Committee was informed that there had been no change in policy but, where possible, the Council was endeavouring to move to permanent contracts for employees rather than variable ones. Work also would be undertaken on the use of contractors and agency staff when accurate projections had been made.

The Committee was acquainted with Employee Representatives' concerns at the number of individuals leaving the Council, particularly those with management experience. However, Representatives were pleased with the use of exit interviews, the high calibre of candidates applying to the Council and the trend for employees to transfer to new roles within the Council. Finally, comment was made on sickness absence and the potential this had to add to levels of stress. Regarding the latter, it was reported that managers were supported to intervene earlier to address sickness absence. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to review trends from exit interviews at a future meeting.

At the conclusion of their deliberations on the report, the Chief Executive informed Members of a forthcoming opportunity to showcase to other employers the Council's apprentices in conjunction with partner agencies. One of the aims of the event was to demonstrate to businesses the pipeline of talent that had been created. Whereupon, 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 contribution made by the employees who have recently retired from employment in the local government service and pass on its best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

20. WORKFORCE STRATEGY UPDATE

By means of a presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Kiran Hans, HR Manager – Project Delivery, provided the Committee with an update on the progress of Workforce Strategy actions. The presentation covered recent activity including holding roadshows, the deployment of a health kiosk and the establishment of internal resources for the Strategy. She went on to refer to the Strategy's first five priorities and the position in relation to the Action Plan compared with the previous month.

The Committee welcomed Chloe George, HR Coordinator – Project Delivery, who had recently been appointed to support work on the Strategy and who was attending her first meeting. The Chief Executive stressed that following comments by Members at a recent full Council meeting about the importance of making resources available to deliver the aims of the Strategy, funding made been brought forward for this purpose.

The Committee commented on the transparency of the Action Plan and the importance of providing advice on pensions. Councillor Davenport-Ray suggested compiling information on how the pension fund was invested. Members then endorsed the continued engagement with employees. Councillor Cawley suggested that a summary of the comments made should be submitted to a future meeting.

David Pope, Employee Representative, commented that the Strategy had been positively received by employees and that employees felt the roadshows demonstrated that their views had been listened to.

21. POLICY UPDATES - DISCIPLINARY AND RAISING CONCERNS POLICIES AND EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

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 Disciplinary and Raising Concerns policies and of the Employee Handbook.

In response to a question by Councillor Cawley, the Committee was informed that employees were engaged on policies through a new learning management system. Furthermore, the Leadership Management Development Programme contained an element on employee relationships. Councillor Cawley expressed an interest in receiving more information on these.

Following a further question by Councillor Jordan, it was reported that occupation health services were provided by an external organisation and that the Council recently had changed provider.

After a question by Councillor Davenport-Ray on the Disciplinary

Policy, David Pope confirmed that employees' concerns had been resolved.

The Committee then discussed whistleblowing. It was agreed that while it should remain separate, reference to it should be included in relevant policies. Having also agreed to consider alternative ways of making the documents available, it was

RESOLVED

that the Disciplinary and Raising Concerns policies and the Employee Handbook be endorsed.

22. REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES

David Pope, Employee Representative, outlined staff concerns at changes to National Insurance and its implications for the Council's finances, pay and job security. The Chief Executive confirmed that this was discussed with the Employee Representative Group and the Union during their ongoing dialogue.

Following a request from Councillor Cawley, it was agreed to submit a report to a future meeting on changes to One Leisure, the impact on staff and the service and lessons learnt.

Chairman