

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 Tuesday, 25th February 2025

PRESENT: Councillor A Blackwell – Chair.

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

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor L Davenport-Ray.

23 MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of Councillor P Kadewere from the attendees, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th November 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

25 WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT QUARTER THREE 2024-25

The Committee received and noted a report on Human Resources (HR) matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st October to 31st December 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 at 668 the total number of employees at the end of the last quarter was slightly higher 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 £1.119m higher than the year's budget. The report also indicated that three employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and asked that their congratulations be passed on.

The Committee commented on the positive sickness trends reported and expressed appreciation of the role of HR in bringing them about. Following a question by Councillor Cawley on a related subject, Members were informed that the key to dealing with long-term sickness was to maintain contact with employees from an early stage and to refer them to occupational health so any required additional support could be put in place. In addition, under the Absence Management Policy, managers and HR were involved in the process. The Employees Representative Group and the Union also were involved. It was emphasized that, generally, HR had a role in ensuring that all managers followed the Policy.

In response to questions by Councillor Jordan, it was confirmed that Occupational Health services were provided by an external organisation and that the service was regularly reviewed to ensure it met the Council's requirements. Following a recent review, the waiting time for the service had been reduced to two days, but this could be expedited when necessary.

Councillor Cawley mentioned the positive trend in the number of HR cases that were active and, following a question, was advised of the formal procedures that might be used in this respect, including disciplinary procedures.

At the conclusion of their deliberations on the report, the Chief Executive referred to the importance of training for managers. The view had been expressed in focus groups that managers would benefit from internal training and therefore, training sessions had been booked. The purpose was to provide managers with support.

Having recognised the achievements of the apprentices, 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.

26 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/2026

With the assistance of a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee considered the draft 2025/2026 Pay Policy Statement. The Statement provided information about the Council's policies relating to the pay and reward of Chief Officers and other employees, as required by the Localism Act. Members were informed that the Statement would be published on the Council's website together with data on Senior Officers' salaries as required by the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/2026.

27 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT - MARCH 2024

Consideration was given to the Council's Gender Pay Gap Report, which had been prepared by the Interim Head of HR (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The Report was based on the Council's employees as of 31st March 2024. The Council was legally required to publish gender pay gap information each year. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the Mean Pay Gap was -1.6%, which indicated the extent to which women earned on average more per hour than their male counterparts. Members were informed

that this demonstrated the Council's ability to recruit and retain an equal workforce.

The Committee discussed the Mean Bonus Pay Gap. Following questions by Councillors Keane and Cawley, it was reported that the figures related to honorariums and showed they were higher for women. Honorariums were based on the level of additional work carried out and were granted at the discretion of managers. They were signed off by Heads of Services. HR had oversight of the payments to monitor for anomalies and ensure they complied with the guidance on accepted reasons for payment of honorariums.

RESOLVED

that the Gender Pay Gap Report – March 2024 be endorsed for publication.

28 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 Workforce Strategy. During the presentation, reference was made to actions completed against the Action Plan, including holding roadshows to capture employees' views, establishing a Buddy Scheme, revising the Employee Handbook, securing new support services for employees and the completion of a workshop on introducing objectives at all levels of the Council. Having then seen a video on iCare, Members were acquainted with the next priorities in the Action Plan, which related to electric vehicles, One Leisure discounts for employees, access to ICT for all employees and the social committee.

Following a question by Councillor Lowe, the Committee was informed that all new starters were invited to a session where Directors welcomed them to the Council. The Chief Executive added that to ensure she was accessible to employees, she held regular drop-in sessions and produced a "Friday e-mail" each week to maintain a channel of communication.

After a further question by Councillor Cawley on the Action Plan priorities, the Chief Executive emphasised that employee benefits were key to recruitment and that by hosting a live document containing responses to employees' feedback and requests, the Council was able to build organisation wide trust and confidence.

RESOLVED

that the information presented be received and noted.

29 HR POLICY UPDATE - FLEXIBLE WORKING SCHEME

By means of a report by the Acting Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was acquainted with the outcome of a review of the Flexible Working Policy. The change meant all employees below Director level were eligible for flexitime. The format of the Policy also had been amended.

In response to questions by Councillor Cawley, the Acting Strategic HR Manager stated that the Council had adopted a process and form to enable line managers to determine requests for flexible working. The law only permitted the Council to refuse such requests for certain reasons and the Council was required to demonstrate why it could not accommodate a request. If refusal was being considered, Human Resources would be involved so that the Policy was followed. However, generally, the Council tried to accommodate requests. It was suggested that the decision criteria should be incorporated into the procedure document, and that the Policy should refer to the procedure.

Councillor Cawley asked further questions on how the Council balanced its own business needs with those of individuals and whether decisions to allow flexible working were reviewed. In response, the Committee was informed that managers were encouraged to review flexible working arrangements, and that advice was provided on how to proceed if they were not working. This would be incorporated into the procedure document.

After a question by Councillor Cawley about hybrid working, the Chief Executive reported that this was the subject of a review by Internal Audit and further consideration would be given to it in light of the outcome of that review. Having received a comment by Councillor Lowe that the review should cover mental health, it was

RSOLVED

that the Flexible Working Policy be endorsed.

30 REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES

David Pope, Employee Representative, informed Members that the main issue for employees was Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The impact of LGR had been mitigated by open communication with employees. This was demonstrated by the drive to show employees that they were valued. Mr Pope welcomed the fact that employees were being engaged with.

31 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information:

- relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information);
- relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority; and
- in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

32 LEISURE UPDATE

By means of a presentation by the Head of Leisure and Health (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to exempt information relating to One Leisure. Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the information presented be received and noted.

**33 WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND DUE DILIGENCE FOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

The Committee gave consideration to an exempt report by the Head of Paid Service (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) on the Workforce Strategy and due diligence for Local Government Reorganisation. Members discussed the matters raised and accordingly

RESOLVED

that the recommendations contained in the exempt report now submitted be endorsed

Chair