

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 4th September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs A Dickinson, D N Keane and D M Tysoe.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs P A Jordan, T D Sanderson, Mrs J Tavener and D Terry.

14 AGENDA ITEM 6 - ESTABLISHMENT OF EMPLOYMENT COMPANY

Having noted that this item would be replaced by more comprehensive details of the proposals and the arrangements for feeding Members' views into the decision-making process, it was

RESOLVED

that this item be not determined.

15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd May 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

17 EMPLOYEE SURVEY 2019

By means of a presentation by Mr D Buckridge, Business Intelligence and Performance Manager, and Mrs E Charter, Performance and Data Analyst, the Committee was acquainted with the headline results from the Employee Survey 2019. Members were informed that 471 responses had been received to the Survey, which equated to 75% of the workforce. This compared with 395 (63%) responses in 2018.

The rate of response to each question and the direction of change were presented. Reference was made to employees' views on the Senior Leadership Team, their experience of working for the Council, the ICARE values, stress and communication. While the positive rating in respect of some questions had declined since 2018, the position had improved compared with when the Survey was first undertaken. Finally, reference was made to the actions that would be taken in response to the Survey findings.

Members commented on the high rate of responses to the Survey and the fact that the rate had again increased. They then discussed the frequency with which the Survey was carried out. On the one hand it was argued that if it took place every two years, there would be adequate time fully to address all of the issues raised. Alternatively, it was suggested that the Council should focus on a smaller number of priorities or hold “pulse” surveys to gauge trends in specific areas. In addition, it was suggested that in-depth qualitative data and analysis by section should be produced. In response, it was confirmed that this information would be made available to sections together with mean data to avoid any potential demoralising effect that comparisons with other sections might have. Importantly, it was noted that different trends had been seen across all sections, with no one section showing adverse trends in a majority of areas.

Staff Council representatives expressed support for the proposal to focus on fewer, more significant actions. They also drew attention to the fact that considerable effort had been made to enable and encourage front-line employees to respond to the Survey.

Having noted that the Human Resources section would be responsible for identifying and overseeing implementation of the actions arising from the Survey, it was

RESOLVED

that the Employee Survey 2019 headline results be noted.

18 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 £230k in the cost of interim staff. All expenditure was within budget.

Members recognised that in some areas such as the preparation of the Local Plan, there was little choice but to use interim staff. The report contained justifications for this kind of spending. It was confirmed that overall savings in permanent staff costs equated to the amount spent on interim staff.

In response to a comment by the Staff Council representatives, the Committee was informed that the Council might employ external resources when the Council did not have the required internal expertise, that the decision would depend on the level of skills needed and that mechanisms existed to control such procurement. Having noted that the format of the report would be reviewed for future years, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

19 WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 1)

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 2019. 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 report indicated that two employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and conveyed their congratulations to them.

The Committee was informed that the workforce headcount was slightly higher than at the end of the previous quarter and that the total spend on pay for employees in 2019/20 was forecast to be £1.1m less than the year's budget. Members' attention was particularly drawn to the fact that 84% of the workforce had no instances of sickness absence during the quarter and 13 employees had experienced long-term sickness compared with 17 in the previous quarter.

Members discussed the positive trends being experienced in relation to sickness with the result that rates were at the lowest levels since 2014. They then concurred with a suggestion from Staff Council representatives that in future contextual information on temporary employees should be provided in relation to the budget position on pay for employees. 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 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.

20 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONSTITUTION OF THE STAFF COUNCIL

Pursuant to Minute No 19/12, the Committee gave consideration to proposed Staff Council Terms of Reference and Constitution, which had been further updated since the last meeting to reflect the current membership. Copies of the documents are appended in the Minute Book.

Members were informed that Staff Council would focus on employees and employee protection. Comment was made that while some of the provisions of the documents were not likely to be needed, they might be necessary on rare occasions. Staff Council's intention to adopt a positive approach was supported. Having noted that Staff Council would endeavour to improve its communication practices and would collaborate with HR on the results of the Employee Survey, it was

RESOLVED

- that Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Staff Council as appended in the Minute Book be endorsed.

21 STAFF COUNCIL

Staff Council representatives expressed concern that they had not been consulted in accordance with the Terms of Reference on the subject of Minute No 14 ante prior to the meeting. The Head of Resources undertook to confirm that consultation would take place.

Having clarified that as at the date of the previous meeting, they had not expressed a view on the 2018/19 pay proposals, Staff Council representatives outlined their intention to carry out a survey of employees. It was suggested that Staff Council should exercise care to avoid both survey fatigue and creating unrealistic expectations in relations to pay.

Chairman