

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 September 2023

PRESENT: Councillor P A Jordan – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, S Cawley, C M Gleadow,
M A Hassall and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D N Keane and J E Kerr.

12 MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the second sentence of the fourth paragraph of Minute No 6 to be replaced by “In response, Councillor Hassall commented that generally, in staff consultation pay fell number six in staff priorities but this varied by individual”, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st June 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

14 WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT QUARTER ONE 2023-24

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 2023. 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 2023/24 was forecasted to be £980,000 lower than the year's budget. Members received clarification of which year the ongoing pay negotiations would have an impact on.

The report indicated that three employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employee's achievements and asked that their congratulations be passed on. In response to a question by Councillor

Councillor West expressed the view that if remuneration levels were not comparable with those of other councils, the Council would not be able to recruit individuals to deliver the services it wants to provide. He further stated that the Council should be able to set Council Tax at a level that would provide the resources needed without being capped. Having referred to the justifications for decisions taken by the previous administration, he drew attention to the financial difficulties faced by residents and options for additional Government support. The

Strategic HR Manager acknowledged that pay was challenging. Councillor Hassall reminded Members of decisions taken on financial matters since 2013 and agreed with Councillor West on the subject of capping currently but pointed out that since 2013 the Council had not raised Council Tax to the level of the cap. In response to a question by Councillor Gleadow the Strategic HR Manager pointed out that most councils had adopted the National Joint Committee terms of employment, but agreed to provide benchmarking information at a future meeting.

Following questions by Councillor Blackwell, the Strategic HR Manager undertook to obtain data on staff turnover compared to other local councils and on sickness levels compared with other councils. Councillor Cawley congratulated Officers on reducing the level of sickness but asked if an investigation could be carried out into whether there were any links between performance measures and sickness. In addition, it was suggested these data should be augmented with details of reasons for leaving and analysis of sickness trends within the Council.

The Committee then discussed the management of stress amongst the workforce. The measures in place included Mental Health First Aiders, and assistance programme and other support services. In response to a question by Councillor West, it was confirmed that some individuals who had left had been Mental Health First Aiders and that some, but not all of the First Aiders had been replaced.

The Employee Representatives Group drew Members' attention to the fact that the number of disciplinary hearings had taken place but that they had not been approached to provide support to the individuals involved. To enable them to provide the necessary support training would be required. The Strategic HR Manager confirmed that the current caseload was higher than normal but it did not represent a trend, which made it difficult to plan for. 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 contribution made by the employees who had recently retired from employment in the local government service and pass on its best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

15 WORKFORCE PROFILE AND ACTION PLAN

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 profile of the workforce according to their protected characteristics as required by the Equality Act 2010. Members discussed plans to provide mental health awareness training for managers and suggested that equal opportunities training should be mandatory. They also reviewed ways to improve declaration of protected characteristics and to reduce unconscious bias during recruitment. It was then recommended that all Equality Action Plan actions should be provided in a one-page document. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

16 NEW POLICY - FIXED TERM CONTRACTS

Consideration was given to a report by the Strategic HR Manager to which was attached a proposed new policy relating to Fixed Term contracts. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book. Members were informed that the Policy was required to ensure the Council complied with the Fixed Term Work Regulations 2002. Having expressed support for the Policy, it was

RESOLVED

that the Fixed Term Contract Policy appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

17 HR POLICY UPDATE

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 Job Evaluation Policy and the Working Time Regulations Guidelines. Subject to an amendment to paragraph 5.2 of the Job Evaluation Appeals Process so that an employee also could be represented by an external individual, it was

RESOLVED

that the Job Evaluation Policy and the Working Time Regulations Guidelines appended in the report now submitted be endorsed.

18 REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES

D Pope, on behalf of the Employee Representatives Group (ERG), drew Members' attention to employees' concerns surrounding the pay dispute. He referred to the survey of employees and the Union's notice of industrial action. The ERG was endeavouring to allays these concerns. Reference also was made to the implications of the reasons for the dispute for employee retention.

The Chair confirmed that the ERG's comments would be noted. Councillor Hassall stated the HR had a significant amount of information available and any questions employees had should be addressed to HR. Councillor West then expressed his gratitude for the information provided to Members on this subject.

