

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, 7th February 2024

PRESENT: Councillor A Blackwell – Vice-Chair in the Chair.

Councillors S Cawley, C M Gleadow, D N Keane and J E Kerr.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M A Hassall, P A Jordan and R J West.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor L Davenport-Ray.

25 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

26 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

27 WORKFORCE STRATEGY INTRODUCTION AND PILLAR 1

Consideration was given to a report by the Strategic HR Manager to which were appended the draft Introduction and Pillar 1 (Attraction and Retention) of the Workforce Strategy. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

In response to a question from a Councillor, the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources informed the Committee that the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy contained a sum for the delivery of the Workforce Strategy.

The Committee discussed the level of staff engagement in the Strategy. It was concluded that in conjunction with the Union and the Employee Representative Group, a good level of engagement had been achieved because Officers had produced communications directed at different sections of staff seeking views on what they wanted and had planned sessions at times to suit them and in different formats. In this way a very broad reach across the workforce had been made possible. The next steps would be to produce a detailed action plan and establish governance arrangements. A full project management methodology would be employed including timescales and budget.

Following a question, the strategic HR Manager informed Members that the training budget was held centrally but that some sections had budgets for specialist training. She then agreed to look at suggestions that the standing Workforce Report might be simplified and that it should include a log of the Committee's requests and responses received.

Members commented positively on the engagement sessions and placed on record their appreciation of Officers' efforts to launch the Strategy and maintain its momentum. The role of Unison and the Employee Representative Group also was recognised. It was then:

RESOLVED

that the Workforce Strategy – Introduction and Pillar 1 (Attraction and Retention) be endorsed.

28 WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 3)

The Committee received and noted a report on Human Resources matters impacting on the performance of the Council during the period 1st October to 31st December 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 £686,950 lower than the year's budget. However, the expected overspend on contractors and agency staff meant there was likely to be an overall overspend of approximately £340,000 against the staffing budget.

The report indicated that two employees had retired in the quarter. Members recognised the employees' achievements and asked that their congratulations be passed on to them.

The Strategic HR Manager drew Members' attention to sections of the report relating to recruitment, staff engagement, the ICARE Awards, sickness trends and the HR caseload. She made particular reference to the Gender Pay Gap Report, which was attached as an Appendix and which reflected a positive pay gap position.

Following a question by Councillor Cawley relating to Health and Safety, the Strategic HR Manger reported that she had requested information on near misses in order to learn lessons.

Councillor Keane suggested that the Council should offer work experience to school age children, as it would give them a valuable and meaningful experience.

In response to a question by a Councillor, the Strategic HR Manger confirmed that the annual report on the use of consultants, and hired and temporary staff would be submitted to the meeting in June and would contain detailed information on the financial implications of employing contractors and agency staff. 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.

29 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/2025

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 2024/25 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. 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.

The Committee discussed ratios between the lowest and highest paid employees. Having noted the requirement for the Statement to be approved by the Council, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25.

30 NEW POLICY - DOMESTIC ABUSE STAFF SUPPORT POLICY

Consideration was given to a report by the Strategic HR Manager to which was attached a proposed new policy relating to Domestic Abuse Staff Support (Employees). A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book. At the suggestion of the Chair, the Strategic HR Manager agreed to change the word "lockdown" to a more generic term for a period of absence. Following a question by Councillor Cawley, it was confirmed that the Council operated a confidential reporting line via Internal Audit and that its use had been relatively low in the last 12 months. Having expressed support for the Policy, it was

RESOLVED

that the Domestic Abuse Staff Support Policy (Employees) appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

31 POLICY UPDATES - FLEXIBLE WORKING SCHEME AND PENSIONS DISCRETION POLICY

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 Flexible Working Scheme and the Pensions Discretion Policy.

Members were informed that the Flexible Working Scheme had been amended to comply with changes to flexible working rights. In response to a question by Councillor Cawley, the Chief Executive confirmed she had discussed attendance in the workplace with the Union and the Employee Representative Group. She went on to provide details of activities that now took place in offices, including Inductions and Management Team meetings. Regarding the Pensions Discretion

Policy, Members' attention was drawn to a change relating to shared cost Additional Voluntary Contributions. Following a question by a Councillor the Strategic HR Manager undertook to obtain details of the operation of the Pension Fund. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Flexible Working Scheme and the Pensions Discretion Policy appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

32 REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES

David Pope reported that since the last meeting of the Committee the Employee Representative Group (ERG) had held productive meetings with Senior Management on a number of issues and that progress was being made. The ERG had training planned, which would enable them better to support employees and was pleased that stress and depression was decreasing as reasons for absence. Finally, Mr Pope expressed his gratitude to those who had made ICARE Award nominations.

33 EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING - 17TH APRIL 2024

Members noted that an extra-ordinary meeting of the Committee would be held on 17th April 2024 to consider the next Pillar of the Workforce Strategy.

Chair