

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT PANEL held in CVSO.1A, CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 1XY on Wednesday, 19 September 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor S Cawley – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, P J Downes,
R S Farrer, J A Gray, R B Howe and
R G Tuplin.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S Akthar.

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R S Farrer declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute Nos. 17 and 18 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council's Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were undertaking a review of Local Government Shared Services (LGSS).

17. MANAGING ABSENCE & ATTENDANCE WITHIN THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

(See Minute No.16 for Members' Interests.)

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/07 of the meeting held on 20th June 2012, , the Panel received a presentation by Mrs J Maulder, HR Business Partner on the management of absence and attendance within the Authority. (A copy of the LGSS powerpoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book).

As part of the presentation, Members were informed that the effective management of absence was key to the wellbeing and cost of an organisation. During 2011/12, the average sickness per employee was 8.5 days and the Panel noted that this was reasonable compared to other local authorities in the area and remained well below the average for local government. Information also was provided on the Council's existing absence management process, the challenges which Managers faced in dealing with sickness within their teams and the support provided from the Human Resources Team to assist them.

In response to the comments raised as part of the presentation, the Panel received information on the way in which the Human Resources Team dealt with stress related absence. Members were advised that the issue of stress and job security had been addressed in a recent presentation by Managing Directors and the Executive Leader to all staff, and that further work would be undertaken by LGSS to review the existing caseload.

Members requested that future reports should include information on the number of individuals who were hitting the prescribed trigger points within the absence monitoring process.

18. EMPLOYMENT REPORT

(See Item No. 16 for Members' Interests.)

The Panel received a report by the HR Business Partner (LGSS) which provided details of a number of human resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation.

Having congratulated LGSS on the quality of the report, Members suggested that in future reports it would be useful to be able to make comparisons with other public sector organisations. In this respect further information was requested on employee turnover and the number of days lost to sickness per quarter.

In considering the contents of the report, Members commented on stress related absences and the need to manage information to ease any perception of uncertainty amongst employees. The Panel also noted that various services would experience different types of absence depending on the nature of their work. The Chairman congratulated LGSS on their recent showcase event to demonstrate the training and development opportunities which were to be made available to District Council employees.

In terms of sickness absence, Members attention was drawn to a series of measures which had been designed to improve the Council's existing sickness absence procedures and clarification was sought on a number of aspects of these. Members also were advised that a review of the District Council's Sickness Absence Policy would be undertaken shortly and considered by the Panel at a future meeting. Having agreed that the role of the Manager should be strengthened within the proposed measures to give emphasis to the expectation that they should take action to address long and short term absences and unacceptable absence patterns or issues, it was

RESOLVED

that the recommendations set out in paragraph 11 of the report now submitted be endorsed.

19. ARRANGEMENTS FOR CORPORATE HEALTH & SAFETY

By way of a report by the Head of Environmental & Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel considered a new set of arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of District Council employees. These arrangements set out the

way in which specific health and safety issues should be dealt with and collated individual service based standards into a single document.

In considering the contents of the report, the Panel noted the disadvantages which had been highlighted in terms of the potential isolation of those individuals who were regularly working from home and sought assurances that these individuals were receiving adequate support. Members also noted that there were measures in place to ensure that employees were informed of the best ways to use Visual Display Equipment.

Having regard to a request from Employees' Side representatives that a representative should be appointed to the Council's Safety Advisory Group to help with consultation on health and safety matters, it was agreed that this request could be considered as part of a review of the operation of the Employment Panel and Employee Liaison Advisory Group. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Health and Safety Policy Arrangements appended to the report now submitted, be approved.

20. EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY RESULTS

A report by the Corporate Team Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting a summary of the results of the employee opinion survey undertaken during April 2012 to find out how employees felt about working for the Council. Members were reminded that the effect of recent reductions in local government funding, the general economic climate and a number of significant changes within the Council could have had an impact on the survey outcome. Attention was drawn to the actions which had been put in place to address the issues which had been identified as affecting the workforce and Members noted that the findings would now be used by the Senior Management Group in conjunction with LGSS and Team Managers to develop local action plans.

In considering the results of the survey, Councillor P J Downes expressed concern that only 75% of employees felt that they were treated with dignity and respect at work by District Councillors. In this respect, the Panel noted that arrangements were being made for a meeting of Group Leaders to discuss the matter further. Members also commented on the need to address some of the longer term issues which had been identified by the survey.

The Panel also discussed the views expressed by employees on the adequacy of information available to them on the Council and, having been reminded of the context in which the survey was undertaken, made a number of comments concerning the need to supply key concise and pertinent information to staff. Having commented that it was difficult for Members to interpret the general information which had been presented to them, the Panel noted that this had been analysed by Division for use by Heads of Service.

Whereupon, and having noted that the survey would now be

undertaken on an annual basis to ensure that the issues highlighted by employees were addressed, it was

RESOLVED

that the results of the executive summary be noted, together with the actions which were being developed to address identified areas of concern.

21. RETIREMENT OF PERSONNEL - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel received a report by Human Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in relation to the retirement of the following employees from the Local Government Service:-

Name	Division	Local Government Service
Mr A Bradshaw	Operations	4 years
Mr D Bacon	Environmental Management	15 years
Mr D Hartley	One Leisure, St Ives	17 years
Mr M Smith	Operations	5 years
Mrs P Prior	Environmental Management	10 years

RESOLVED

that the Council places on record its recognition of and gratitude for the excellent contributions made by the above-named employees during their employment in the Local Government Service and conveys its best wishes to them for a long and happy retirement.

22. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relation matters between the Council and its employees.

23. HDC PAY REVIEW PROJECT 2012: BRIEFING NOTE

With the assistance of a briefing note (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book), the Panel received an update on progress being made with the Council's Pay Review project. Members were informed that Phase 2 of the Job Evaluation Work Stream was expected to commence shortly and that the outcome would enable work to start on the modelling of a new District Council pay structure early in the New Year.

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress made to-date on the Pay Review be noted;
and
- (b) that the Managing Director (Resources), after consultation with the Chairman of the Panel and the Executive Leader be authorised to offer a pay award to District Council employees in the 2013/14 financial year.

Chairman