

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the EMPLOYMENT PANEL held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 18 November 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor J W Davies – Chairman.  
Councillors Mrs A D Curtis, Mrs L A Duffy, T Hayward, R J West and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite and S Cawley..

### **21. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 23rd September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interests were received.

### **23. STAFF COUNCIL**

The Chairman of Staff Council informed the Panel that Staff Council had no specific issues to raise but would comment on Agenda items as and when they were raised by the Panel.

### **24. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 2)**

The Panel received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the period 1st July to 30th September 2015. The report included the latest position and trends relating to:

- employee numbers
- salary costs; and
- sickness absence reporting

Members were informed that the workforce headcount had decreased slightly since the last quarter as staff within Building Control and Legal had transferred to Cambridge City Council.

Discussion took place on the increase by 367 days in the level of absences through sickness when compared to the previous quarter. The Panel was informed that although overall sickness absences had increased, the level of short term sickness had reduced. The increase was attributed to long term sickness. In response to questions it was reported that stress was the biggest cause of long term sickness followed by musculoskeletal problems.

The HR Manager informed the Panel that the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) had established that the incidence of stress related sickness had risen across all the sectors. Stress within the public sector accounted for 79% of long term sickness absences compared to 34% within the Council. The CIPD put the causes of work related stress into four categories: workloads and volumes of work, non-work factors, pressure to meet targets and lack of support from managers.

In response to a question by a Member the Panel was informed that the Council encouraged employees to return to work by making reasonable adjustments for those on long term sickness absence. An example was provided of an employee within Operations could no longer drive a HGV for health reasons and the Council had modified his work and he was now able to resume working. The Panel was then informed that in Quarter 2, four out of 21 cases of sickness absence were caused by musculoskeletal problems. The injuries had been caused, or exacerbated, by work. Members were reminded that the definition of musculoskeletal injury extended to arthritic problems. HR liaised directly with Heads of Service regarding individual cases of long term sickness within their sections.

Following a request from Members, Staff Council updated the Panel on their experiences of long term sickness and stress within the workplace. Staff Council regularly met with the Managing Director to discuss these and other issues. The view was expressed that despite the restructuring that had taken place, employees continued to exhibit high levels of good will.

In response to a further question by a Member, Managing Director listed the benefits of working for the Council, which included the working environment, flexible working schemes, the absence of core hours, the leave entitlements, training opportunities, staff discounts at One Leisure, and childcare packages.

Finally, the Panel noted that short term sickness had decreased in all departments with the exception of the Corporate Management Team / Executive Support where there had been an increase. However, it was a small team and two employees had been absent though illness during the period reported on whereas there was no reported sickness in the previous quarter.

## **25. LGSS QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING REPORT (QUARTER 2)**

The Panel gave consideration to a joint report by the Corporate Team Manager, Programme and Project Manager and LGSS HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing data on the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development services against the key service measures agreed under the current contract during the period 1st July to 30th September 2015. LGSS' performance was measured in four areas, namely:

- General Service Standards
- HR Strategic and Advisory
- Recruitment and Payroll; and

- Organisational Workforce Development

Members were informed that the Council encouraged Officers to log issues to ensure they were addressed by LGSS. A number of policies would be coming to the Panel within the next six months as part of the process to rationalise policies across the Shared Service.

Following discussion on performance target PHT.02, Members requested a report on payment data accuracy.

The Panel was informed that LGSS provided the Council with 500 training places each year; however, these included 367 online accounts. It was not known how active the online accounts were. It was explained that new starters had to open online accounts to carry out mandatory training but afterwards some did not to use their accounts. The Council was now able to ascertain whether new starters had completed their mandatory training. Members welcomed the inclusion within the report of information on the courses attended by employees.

A Member asked whether employees who completed qualifications paid for by the Council were required to pay back the costs incurred if they did not remain employed by the Council for a defined period of time. In response the Managing Director stated that this had not previously been the case but that a clause to this effect was now part of new starters' contracts.

Chairman