

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 29 November 2016 at 12.15 pm at the The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Donna Jones (in the chair)
Councillor Luke Stubbs (Vice-Chair)
Councillor John Ferrett
Councillor Jim Fleming
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

Officers Present

David Williams, Chief Executive
Michael Lawther, Deputy Chief Executive
Jon Bell, Director HR Legal and Procurement
Roland Bryant, HR Business Partner
Alison Jeffery, Director Children's Services
Innes Richens, Director of Adult Services & Chief Operating Officer NHS Portsmouth CCG
Angela Dryer, Deputy Director Adult Services

19. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 1)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

20. Apologies for Absence (AI 2)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Chris Ward. Julian Pike attended in his place.

21. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 June 2016 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2016 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

22. Sickness Absence Quarterly Report (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Chair thanked Alison Jeffrey, Innes Richens and Angela Dryer for attending the meeting.

Jon Bell introduced the report saying that there had been a small increase in absence levels but generally the sickness absence levels appeared to have

reached a plateau. Mr Bell said that at the last meeting members requested that the director of children's services and the director of adult services be invited to attend this meeting to answer questions from members about sickness absence as it was high in both directorates.

Alison Jeffrey referred to a paper that had been circulated before the meeting and explained that it had been prepared by Sarah Newman. She began by referring to the benchmarking summary.

She said Brighton and Hove are the most comparable children social care department who responded to the bench marking data request. Sickness absence at PCC was 11.17 compared with 11.42 average days lost per employee recorded by Brighton and Hove. However, Plymouth children social care department showed a lower number of days lost due to absence with only 6.3 average days lost per employee.

Alison outlined the measures put in place since the last employment committee. Recent activities included

- (1) introduction of values based recruitment (VBR), this is to ensure CSC recruit the right workforce not only with the right skills and in the right numbers but individuals who have the right values to support effective team working and who indicate an ability to be resilient to working in a CSC environment
- (2) developing a strong culture of addressing problems early
- (3) introduction of an absence champion role within CSC. This has been taken on by senior manager Debbie Price.
- (4) building resilience across the service
- (5) benchmarking against other CSC teams within comparable local authorities.

Alison Jeffrey said that although the figures are better than they were, there is still room for improvement.

During discussion the matter of return to work interviews was raised. It was agreed that these should not be perfunctory. Jon Bell agreed to check whether there was a way for the electronic system to notify managers about whether return to work interviews had taken place or not.

A comment was made that the employee assistance programme (EAP) needed to be promoted as often employees were not aware of it

The chair thanked Alison for her comments.

Innes Richens was then invited to speak. He said that adult social care experienced similar problems to those encountered by CSC. Adult social care was also carrying out a benchmarking exercise. Some figures were still awaited - including from Plymouth, but data received so far showed there is an issue around long-term sickness absence rather than medium and short term sickness. He said that often staff go off sick while working out their voluntary redundancy notice.

He hopes that the data will show an improvement going forward. He has an active list of the top 20 employees going off sick and is arranging for conversations to be had with those people and also for return to work interviews to take place. Training is also taking place on-line. There had been a problem with sickness absence in residential units so there is now a dedicated senior manager to try to address any issues. This arrangement has been in place since the beginning of December because of the knock-on effects of those not off sick having to do more work.

There was some perception that the occupational health referral service was not felt to be sufficiently responsive. Angela Dryer said that there was a perception that referring employees to occupational health was not helpful. She said it was important to refer employees early where stress was a factor in sickness absence and it was also important to realise that often stress was not only work related.

The chair asked for details of the cost of EAP and Jon Bell advised that it was between £2.50 and £3 per head based on the number of employees. The chair asked Jon Bell to bring back to a future meeting of employment committee detailed information about the EAP contract, usage and how to publicise its existence.

During discussion the following matters were raised

- A suggestion was made that the council should ensure that the good practice outlined in the paper provided by Alison Jeffrey be applied consistently across the council. It was suggested that an additional recommendation should be made to that effect.
- Members commented that the fifth most common reason for absence was recorded as "blank". In effect this meant that no data was being collected in this category. Jon Bell said he would look into this and report back.
- Members asked whether the condition of the Civic Offices which was part of the Well-being survey could be a factor in sickness absence and also the requirement for some staff to "hot-desk". Jon Bell said that for the majority of employees the hot-desking arrangements with the multi adjustable seating worked well. The Chair commented that there had been much feedback on the temperature variation within the office.

The Chair suggested that changes were made to the original recommendations in light of the discussion on this item and this was agreed.

RESOLVED that Members

- (1) Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.**

- (2) **Note the findings from the Health and Wellbeing Survey and instruct Officers to continue to develop actions to improve the management of sickness absence and the promotion of employee wellbeing.**
- (3) **Request that a report be brought back to this Committee to explain how sickness absences are recorded in the EBS system, including recommendations about how this could be improved, particularly with regard to employees returning to work, and avoiding the need for absence reasons to be recorded as "blank".**
- (4) **Request that a separate report be brought back to this Committee (following discussions between the Chair and the Director of HR) on the Employment Assistance Programme (EAP) to include**
 - a. **Details of the contract itself and options available to PCC**
 - b. **Details of the current low usage of EAP and potential reasons for the low take-up**
 - c. **Details of what is being done to increase awareness of EAP**
- (5) **That consideration be given by HR to the good practice being operated in Children's Services to ensure that measures across the rest of the Council are equally as effective.**

23. Employee Opinion Survey (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Jon Bell introduced this report which provides members with the results of the recent employee opinion survey and seeks approval from members for the proposed actions arising from the survey results.

During discussion the following matters were raised.

- One third of staff who completed the survey said they had not had a Performance Development Review (PDR) during the last 12 months. Jon Bell said this was disappointing given that the process had been reviewed only about a year ago when the recording process had been simplified. Of those who had received a PDR during the last 12 months only half considered it to be a useful experience. Members felt that this should be addressed.
Members were aware that there had been a persistent conflict between the "systems thinking" approach and carrying out PDRs on a regular basis particularly in the Property and Housing directorate. In the past clear instructions had been given that PDRs had to take place for everyone. Members queried why this was still not happening and wanted steps to be taken to ensure that PDRs are done for everyone.
- With regard to the percentage of responders who did not think they were paid fairly, Jon Bell said that on recruitment HR made clear the whole reward package, not just the baseline salary figure.

Members asked about the low percentage of people completing the employee opinion survey. Jon Bell said that there was a huge differential across the organisation concerning completion of the survey and that it was lower where employees worked outside the civic offices.

In future members suggested a joint message is sent out from HR and the trade unions to encourage employees to complete the survey.

Actions

- Director of HR to work with unions so that when surveys are done in future, a joint communication can go to staff from unions and management to encourage participation.
- HR to look in greater detail at the percentage of those saying they had not had a PDR in the last 12 months (32.76% of those who completed the survey) and to email the results to members outside the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- (i) Note the results of the Employee Opinion Survey (attached at Appendix 1)**
- (ii) Note the further actions taken to better understand the results of the survey and approve the further actions (Appendix 2)**
- (iii) Request that the Director of HR provides further information (to be circulated to members by email) with regard to the levels of PDR completion across directorates**
- (iv) Request that, where PDR coverage is low, Directors devise individual plans to address this.**
- (v) Requests the Director of HR to consider how to increase the response rates for future surveys, including discussing the role of Trades Unions in encouraging response rates.**

24. Apprenticeships (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Jon Bell and Roland Bryant introduced the report. Good progress had been made in recruiting apprentices overall - especially in Adult Social Care. Jon Bell said that details of the levy itself were set out in section 9 of the report. He said that paragraph 4.2 of the report detailed the number of apprentices in post and that Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of apprentices by Directorate, detailing the qualification being undertaken.

The Chair said that this was a key report and that the number of apprenticeships represents a success story for the Council. She wished to place on record on behalf of the Council her thanks to all concerned.

A discussion took place concerning whether the apprenticeship levy was an example of the government placing additional burdens on councils without providing the money to fund it. A contrary view was that this did not amount to

a new burden - it was about making sure that this was managed so as to be able to claim the money back for training.

RESOLVED that Members

- (i) **Note the progress in recruiting apprentices across the City Council**
- (ii) **Note the requirements of the Apprenticeships Levy, the planned public sector targets and the financial implications of these**
- (iii) **Place on hold the recruitment of apprentices from February 2017 in readiness for the introduction of the Levy from May 2017 thus enabling the City Council to make full use of the Levy from day one**
- (iv) **Request the Director of HR to report back to members on the plan for optimising use of the levy funding.**

25. Legislation Briefing (AI 7)

The Chair commented that parts of the report were now out of date as it had been prepared prior to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

Jon Bell said that he wanted to draw attention to matters in the first part of the report at this meeting and this was agreed. He said that 3.1 of the report set out details of the likely cap on public sector exit payments and possible consequences of this. 3.2 sets out information on recovery of exit payments and 3.3 sets out the response to government consultation on further reforms to exit payments.

In response to queries

- it was confirmed that HR was not aware of any employee being affected by 3.6 of the report concerning English language requirements.
- Although there will be a gender pay gap within PCC, this did not mean that there are equal pay issues.

RESOLVED that Members

- (1) **noted the changes and any implications for the Local Authority detailed in the first part of the report**
- (2) **requested that an update dealing with item 3.8 onwards and to include details of implications from the Government's recently issued Autumn Statement be circulated to Employment Committee as soon as practicable.**

26. Exclusion of Press and Public (AI 8)

RESOLVED that in view of the contents of the following items on the agenda, the committee adopted the following motion

"That under the provisions of Section 100 A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded for the consideration of the

following item on the grounds that the appendix contains information defined as exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972" exemption paragraph 5."

27. Living Wage (AI 9)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Jon Bell advised that the report had been brought to allow the decision taken on 14 June 2016 to be reconsidered.

He advised that there were two options that could be adopted

- (i) Continue to implement the recommendation agreed by members at Employment Committee on 15th December 2015. This was to continue to pay the 2015/16 Living Wage Foundation rate of £7.85 per hour and allow the National Living Wage (currently £7.20 per hour but anticipated to increase in April 2017) to catch up.
- (ii) Following the recent announcement on 31st October 2016 by the Living Wage Foundation, regarding the increase to the rate, to adopt the 2016/17 Living Wage Foundation rate of £8.45 per hour, with effect from 1 April 2017.

Discussion took place in exempt session about the affordability of the two options. The legal advice and the equality impact assessment were unchanged from the previous reports on this matter.

The meeting resumed in open session.

The Chair proposed that option (i) be approved and this was seconded by Councillor Luke Stubbs.

Upon being put to the vote, this was carried.

RESOLVED that

Employment Committee agreed to continue to implement the recommendation agreed by members at Employment Committee on 15th December 2015. This was to continue to pay the 2015/16 Living Wage Foundation rate of £7.85 per hour and allow the National Living Wage (currently £7.20 per hour but anticipated to increase in April 2017) to catch up.

The meeting concluded at 2.05 pm.

Councillor Donna Jones

Chair