

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday 17 June 2014 at 3.30 pm in the Executive Meeting Room, third floor, The Guildhall, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda and reports for the meeting which can be found at www.portsmouth.gov.uk.)

Present

Councillor Donna Jones (Chair)
Councillor Luke Stubbs (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Lynne Stagg
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Councillor John Ferrett

Officers Present

Michael Lawther, City Solicitor
Jon Bell, Head of HR, Legal & Performance
Gemma Limburn, Assistant Head of Human Resources - Strategy
Shaun Tetley, Payroll & Pensions Manager
Chris Ward, Head of Finance & Section 151 Officer
Mark Folkes, HR Business Partner

8 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from David Williams, Chief Executive.

9 Declarations of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of members' interests.

10 Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 March 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Employment Committee held on 10 March 2014 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

11 Job Evaluation

(TAKE IN REPORTS FROM UNIONS - item 4A
FROM HEAD OF HR, LEGAL and PERFORMANCE - item 4B)

The chair of the committee invited Mr Richard White to introduce the report from the unions. Mr White said that if the intention was to continue with the existing scheme, the unions suggested that

- Greater levels of transparency around the scoring of job evaluation questionnaires (JEQs) should be provided

- The process of submitting JEQs should be reviewed
- The level of involvement of Felt Fair Panels in the evaluation process should be reviewed and
- If greater levels of transparency cannot be achieved due to current contractual arrangements, the future use of JESS should be reconsidered.

Mr White explained that since the imposition of the JESS scheme on PCC staff in 2009, both Unite and Unison have experienced a number of issues regarding job evaluation. These issues mainly revolve around the transparency of the scheme, particularly in the scoring process.

Details of cases that the unions felt demonstrated their concerns had been included in the report.

Mr Chris Pickett said that he attended a recent Felt Fair Panel where he questioned a job role but the manager stated at the end of the meeting that if the person received an upgrade, that person would have to lose hours because the post could not then be afforded.

Councillor Donna Jones thanked the unions for the report and asked for Chris Pickett to send an email to herself and to Jon Bell outlining exactly what had been said at the Felt Fair Panel referred to.

The chair then invited Mr Harry Williams to make his deputation. Mr Williams spoke about job evaluation and his experiences as part of the Green and Clean team and expressed his view that the JESS scheme is not transparent enough as it does not provide any information on how jobs were scored.

Mr Mick Froggatt was then invited to give his deputation. He also said that more transparency was needed about how jobs were scored as there seemed to be many instances where very similar looking jobs had been placed in different job categories.

Councillor Jones thanked those who had made deputations.

Jon Bell introduced his report. He explained that at the Staff Joint Committee on 3 April 2014 a request was made to bring a report to the Employment Committee to provide a review of the job evaluation system, trade union involvement in the process and recommendations to address what trade unions perceive to be a lack of transparency around the JESS scheme. He said that they had also been asked to include in the report a review of trade union facilities time for trade unions to attend the Felt Fair Panel.

Jon Bell said that there was agreement on some of the points raised - for example transparency and feedback and also on the Felt Fair Panel. He said that there were contractual limitations on disclosing scoring information but that even if these were not in place, he would not support disclosing information on how jobs were scored as in his view that would lead to job evaluation questionnaires being written to "chase scores" rather than to accurately describe the job. He said that he thought the recommendations listed in paragraph 2 of his report should be adopted.

He said that in relation to market pay rates, PCC generally pays less than neighbouring councils, but if there are problems with recruiting and retaining staff, market supplements were paid subject to certain rules.

During discussion the following matters were clarified:

- With regard to the Reward Partnership, this has been rebranded and it is operating as a consultancy. Jon Bell said that he could provide details on how to look this up on the website and agreed to circulate details of how this could be done to the members.
- Mr Bell said that that he felt that the scheme covered all legal requirements and that there were enough checks and balances to enable fair evaluation to take place. He said that there was a need to ensure that those carrying out the evaluations are suitably skilled. He said that the reason for the Felt Fair Panel was to provide a sense check. He said that all evaluations were moderated by a different person. He confirmed that if there was no change in the grade, under the current system, that job would not go forward to the Felt Fair Panel. If the person receiving the grading was unhappy about it, then this could be dealt with via the grievance route. However the Employment Committee could not consider individual cases.

Mr Richard White said that when a grievance is raised, there is a refusal to provide scoring details.

The chair of the panel said that individual cases could not be discussed specifically at this committee but that there were forums outside the committee that could consider matters such as these.

- Jon Bell confirmed that although the actual scoring mechanism could not be disclosed, members of HR held meetings with staff to explain how the gradings had been arrived at. He said that the way the system works is factor-based and scores were given within those factors. It was important that those who were more familiar with the scheme did not receive an unfair advantage over those who were less familiar. For that reason, only a small number of people in HR are trained to carry out evaluations.

The City Solicitor said that overall his view was that the scheme is a fair scheme and that this is borne out by the lack of challenge in industrial tribunals and that the city council has fared well as compared with other authorities. He said that it was a difficult balance to strike.

Councillor John Ferrett said that he shared concerns raised about the JESS system and whether it was still fit for purpose. He said it seemed that participation seems to be lacking in Portsmouth as compared with what happened elsewhere in similar schemes.

Jon Bell confirmed that there were a number of schemes available but said that they were all very similar. JESS was settled on some time ago and had been through a procurement process. He said there would be significant costs involved with introducing a different scheme.

The City Solicitor said that a consequence of changing the scheme is that everyone would have to go through a job evaluation again and there would probably also be issues around pay protection.

A discussion took place as to whether or not the JESS should be formally reviewed. Jon Bell said that the system had served PCC reasonably well and has operated for some years now and had been mainly successful.

Jon Bell confirmed that PCC purchased the licence up-front to use the JESS scheme and therefore in theory, PCC could move to a different scheme at any time. However the costs and disruption of doing so would be significant.

A discussion took place about the Felt Fair Panels as the union report referred to the representatives on these panels having a limited understanding of the posts being presented as well as a lack of knowledge of other comparable posts.

The unions put forward their view that job evaluation schemes have a shelf life and given the amount of change that has occurred over the years since the JESS scheme was introduced, then if greater levels of transparency cannot be achieved due to current contractual arrangements, the future use of JESS should be reconsidered.

The chair of the committee said she was pleased to see that there was so much common ground in the two reports. She said that the timescale between the JEQ being agreed and achieving a final outcome should be a specific period and suggested that four weeks should be put forward as a suitable timeframe. The chair agreed that officers would be instructed to look at how often other councils had reviewed the JESS scheme after introduction.

Members agreed to amend recommendation (i) of the report from the Head of HR, Legal and Performance to introduce a requirement for managers to deal with requests for re-evaluations within 4 weeks, by either determining (with advice from HR if necessary) that a post does not require re-evaluation, or by passing a completed Job Evaluation Questionnaire to HR.

RESOLVED that

- (i) Managers are provided with guidance as to when it is appropriate to review a post that needs to be re-evaluated, to ensure that re-evaluations are undertaken within a relevant timescale for the completed Job Evaluation Questionnaire to be passed to HR) and includes input from the appropriate people.**
- (ii) Job Re-evaluations are taken to Felt Fair Panel for consideration, even if the evaluation has resulted in no change to the current band.**
- (iii) Employees are offered feedback to explain the outcome of a re-evaluation where the outcome has resulted in no change to the band of the job.**

- (iv) The communication process is improved to inform employees of the outcome of the re-evaluation request, via written communication to both the employee and line manager.**
- (v) A wider review is undertaken of trade union facilities time and how this is put to best use to enable trade union representatives to have the time to attend the Felt Fair Panel.**
- (vi) Training is provided to the trade union representatives that will be present on the Felt Fair Panel process and the role of a Felt Fair Panel member.**

12 Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Gemma Limburn introduced the report and said that it updates the Employment Committee on actions being taken that have had a positive effect on the levels of sickness absence across services. She said that from 1 June 2013 to 31 May 2014, the level of sickness absence has decreased from 9.92 to 8.21 average days per person per year. This is against a corporate target of an average eight days per person per year. Ms Limburn advised that two services still have an average of over 10 days sickness absence per person per year. Gemma Limburn said that at the last Employment Committee meeting on 10 March 2014 members had asked for an analysis of the sickness absence at the Port. She said that the outcome of the review and the activities being taken to reduce sickness absence levels were shown in Appendix 2.

Members of the committee were pleased with the reduction in sickness absence levels generally and wished to record their thanks and congratulations to managers in achieving this. Members also looked forward to the predicted reduction in sickness absence levels at the Port being realised over the next year.

A discussion took place concerning the reasons for the reduction in sickness absence levels. The City Solicitor said that specific interventions, for example in the Port, had resulted in very impressive improvements being made. Members felt that health and wellbeing interventions with the close involvement of Dr Janet Maxwell had made a significant difference. The chair of the committee, Councillor Donna Jones said that as an employer she felt that PCC could do some things to make staff feel more motivated and that this could perhaps be addressed by providing more facilities on site for example making space on the ground floor for facilities such as a coffee shop or a hairdressing salon or similar. She suggested that a report could be brought back to the committee at a future date to look at these issues.

The chair said that she still had concerns about sickness absence levels at the Port and that she asked that Martin Putman be invited to attend the next meeting to answer questions from members about the sickness absence at the Port - unless the average sickness absence is at 10 days or below. Councillor Jones said that she wanted to be convinced that the strategies introduced at the port were working.

At Councillor Stagg's suggestion, Councillor Jones said that she would write to Councillor Wylie, the Lord Mayor, to ask whether he would continue to arrange formal thank you meetings on a quarterly basis in the Lord Mayor's parlour for staff nominated by their line managers who are deemed to have gone above and beyond their call of duty.

RESOLVED that the Employment Committee

- (1) Continue to monitor sickness absence on a quarterly basis, and to ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism;**
- (2) Implement the actions for improving sickness absence at the Port; and**
- (3) Congratulate managers on the significant drop in sickness absence levels and the strategies that have been put in place to achieve this improvement.**

13 Discretionary Pension Policy Statement Review

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Mr Chris Ward introduced the report and said that the introduction of the new Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) from 1 April 2014 requires all scheme employers to review their existing discretionary pension policy statements and publish new policy statements effective from 1 April 2014. He advised that the report summarises the pension policies that need reviewing and makes recommendations for the adoption of a new pension policy statement. He said that the report also summarises the main provisions of the LGPS and provides a comparison with the existing scheme.

RESOLVED that the Employment Committee

- (1) approve the discretionary policy statement set out in appendix 1 of the report with effect from 1 April 2014;**
- (2) note the main scheme changes arising from the introduction of the new LGPS from 1 April 2014. Appendix 2 of the report provides a summary of the changes.**

14 Portsmouth City Council and Staff Joint Committee - Constitution - Provision for Changes to the staff side union representation to allow Unison to give up one representative to Unite

(TAKE IN SUGGESTED REVISED CONSTITUTION)

Members were advised that the purpose of this item is to seek authority to change the constitution of the Portsmouth City Council and Staff Joint Committee as agreed with the unions at a meeting of that Committee on 3 April 2014. The change would mean that instead of Unison having six representatives with a right to attend and vote they would in future have five

and Unite would have two representatives rather than one.

RESOLVED that the constitution of the Portsmouth City Council and Staff Joint Committee be amended with immediate effect (as attached to the agenda for the meeting) to allow a change in the representation of the unions as currently set out in the constitution so that Unison give up one representative to Unite.

15 Hampshire Pension Fund Panel Appointment

The chair of the committee, Councillor Donna Jones said that she had asked Councillor Hugh Mason to take on this role with immediate effect and that he had agreed to do so.

RESOLVED that Councillor Hugh Mason be appointed to serve on the Hampshire Pension Fund Panel to September 2015 (subject to his remaining an elected member).

16 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next scheduled meeting is 16 September 2014.

The meeting concluded at 5.15 pm.