

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday 15 January 2013 at 12.15 pm in Conference Room A, Floor 2, Civic Offices, 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 Gerald Vernon-Jackson (In the Chair)
Councillor Lynne Stagg
Councillor Rob Wood
Councillor Donna Jones

Officers Present

Mr David Williams, Chief Executive
Mr Jon Bell, Head of Audit & Performance Improvement
Ama Juss, Employment Lawyer
Mr Shaun Tetley, Payroll & Pensions Manager
Ms Jacqueline Coonie, Senior Manager HR –
Employee Relations
Ms Dominique Shaw, Business Partner
Mr Michael Lawther, City Solicitor and Strategic Director

40 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leo Madden.

41 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Rob Wood declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in that his son-in-law works for Harbour School.

42 Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 October 2012 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Employment Committee held on 2 October 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

43 Report on Sickness Absence (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Ms Lindsay Williams from Unison made a deputation on this item.

- Ms Williams said that stress, anxiety and mental health issues are shown in the report as being the most common reasons for absence but she felt the causes were being ignored.

- Stage 1 of the sickness absence process does not appear to be dealt with in a uniform way across the authority;
- Minute 27, July 2012 recorded a resolution that a working group to look at sickness absence levels be set up comprising two members of the administration and one member of the Conservative group. She felt that members should also work with officers.

The Chief Executive, Mr David Williams said that he would look into this after the meeting and Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson said he was happy to help with this.

Jon Bell said that he was happy to answer any questions members had on the report.

In response to questions the following matters were clarified -

- Due to recent changes to service structures it had not been possible to provide a break-down of absence rates across services in this quarter. Members were however reassured that this information would be provided to future meetings in the form of a table (as usually happened);
- Concern was expressed that no assurance could be found by Internal Audit that the process for recording absence is always followed. However future development of the Oracle System will make the process easier for managers to follow.
- Members were concerned that the reports coming to the Employment Committee seemed to show very little change to the sickness absence levels which were still too high.

RESOLVED that members -

- (1) Note the current levels of sickness absence across the council;**
- (2) Note the actions being taken by HR staff in support of managers in tackling sickness absence;**
- (3) Note changes being made to the Occupational Health Service.**

44 Report on Long Service Awards (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Members discussed long service awards and concluded that long service should be acknowledged, but not necessarily in the way suggested in the report. Members asked that an Options Report be brought back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED that an Options Report on ways to acknowledge long service be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

44 Public Health in Portsmouth - Update on Transition Arrangements (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Chief Executive Mr David Williams, introduced the report explaining that this was an information report for members. He outlined the vision for public health in Portsmouth and the key principles to achieve the vision. He said that he was pleased with the progress being made towards integration.

The Chief Executive said that he would make arrangements for members to meet with Dr Mortimore, the Interim Director of Public Health.

RESOLVED that Members note the content of the report.

45 Employment Law Update (AI 7)

(TAKE IN HANDOUT)

Ms Ama Juss, Employment Lawyer, updated the committee on various employment law matters including -

- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion - Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- Freedom of assembly and association - Article 11;
- Annual leave and sickness court cases.

Ms Juss also outlined proposed changes during 2013 including -

- Parental leave
- Third party harassment
- Discrimination questionnaires
- Collective redundancy consultation
- New employment tribunals rules
- Whistleblowing
- Disclosure and barring service

In response to a query about the collective redundancy consultation, Ms Juss confirmed that this would apply to new consultations after 6 April 2013.

46 Date of Next Employment Committee Meeting (AI 8)

The date of the next scheduled meeting is 19 February 2013 at 12.15 pm.