

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 21 September 2021 at 12.00 pm at the Council Chamber - The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (in the chair)

Councillor Lewis Gosling
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Jeanette Smith

Officers Present

Peter Budd, Assistant Director of HR
Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services
Merydydd Hughes, Assistant Director of Buildings
Richard Lock, Procurement Manager
Lynda Martin, Health & Safety Manager
David Williams, Chief Executive

13. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Matthew Atkins and Cllr Cal Corkery.

14. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest from the members present.

15. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2020 (AI 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 March 2021 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

16. Living Wage Accreditation - Progress Update Report (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress made towards becoming an accredited Living Wage employer. Richard Lock, Procurement Manager and Jess Goble from the Living Wage Foundation were also present to answer questions.

In January 2021, Employment Committee Members instructed Officers to work with the Living Wage Foundation to seek to progress Portsmouth City Council towards accredited status. As part of the work to achieve

accreditation status the working group had been expanded to include representatives from Procurement, Finance, Legal, HR, Trade Unions.

All employees, including those who transferred to the council under TUPE, apprentices, those on the Kickstart Scheme and Local Authority maintained schools pay increased on 1 April 2021 to reflect the new Living Wage rate of £9.50.

Procurement were actively incentivising take up of Living Wage through explicit incorporation within Social Value award criteria for relevant contracts in line with the Council's Social Value Policy.

The main work undertaken to date centred around the development of contract pipelines to identify all contracts which were up for re-tender or renewal over a 3 year implementation period starting from 1st April 2022. The team were working with high impact providers, such as adult social care, to identify key suppliers and identify any impacts that the introduction of the living wage may have.

Engagement would be undertaken with peer authorities who had implemented the living wage to understand the different approaches that had been taken. Ms Goble believed that Sunderland City Council was the most recent comparable authority to have introduced the real living wage and would liaise with colleagues to inform PCC's approach.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Living Wage Foundation were content that the council was moving in the right direction to implement the real living wage for the 2022/23 financial year, although adult social care was a key area to address.

The budget pressure figure of £3.2m was confirmed as a straight profile, but any peaks in the three years would be identified once further data had been gathered through the pipeline process. £3.2m would be a difficult figure to find, however much would depend on the council's overall priorities.

During the discussion the committee confirmed its commitment that the real living wage should be implemented, with a particular mention of improving the lowest wages of those in adult social care. Acknowledging the significant pressure on the care system it was hoped that the real living wage would assist with staff retention and encourage new staff.

The committee recognised the complexities of introducing the real living wage due to contractors delivering care to PCC, Hampshire County Council (HCC) and self-funded clients. The scheme therefore needed to work for those delivering care to PCC funded residents whilst not subsidising care to HCC funded residents when HCC was not a real living wage employer.

Following the discussion it was RESOLVED that the update be noted.

17. Quarterly Sickness Absence Report (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Peter Budd, Assistant Director of HR introduced the report which updated the committee on the levels of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote employee wellbeing.

The committee was advised that many services were operating differently as a result of the coronavirus pandemic with many staff now working remotely. Compared to the start of the pandemic, overall absence levels were down, however they had increased in some areas during the last two quarters.

The level of sickness absence for this quarter had increased slightly from 9.45 to 9.47 average days per person per year, with the main cause being psychological stress followed by Musculoskeletal.

In respect of wellbeing, the findings of the Staff Wellbeing survey showed that levels of anxiety, stress and nervousness had increased by 3% since June 2020. The levels of happiness saw little movement, but there was a 1% increase in staff feeling happier. Over two-thirds of staff stated that they were satisfied with work at the moment, those working exclusively at home being most satisfied and those working both at home and workplace are least.

In response to questions the committee was advised of the steps that were being taken to manage psychological stress, which had included a number of wellbeing campaigns. The committee was advised that it was important to note that the findings were a snapshot of a period in time during the pandemic and the results could be correlated to a higher workload. Staff working at home often worked longer hours, hence the renewed focus on mental health.

In response to the benefits of face-to-face human contact within teams the committee was advised that future working models were being explored and team contact was encouraged. The Chairman believed that it would be logical for future working models to be considered by the committee in due course.

RESOLVED that the Employment Committee:

- (i) Continue to monitor sickness absence and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.**
- (ii) Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**
- (iii) Note the additional wellbeing activities specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic; and**
- (iv) Note the change in absence levels across the organisation.**

18. Health & Safety Annual Report (for period 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021 (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Lynda Martin, Health & Safety Manager, introduced the report which sought to provide assurance to the Employment Committee that Portsmouth City Council was complying with health and safety legislation and was ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of those affected by the council's activities.

In light of covid-19 the committee requested an update report at alternate meetings of the committee.

RESOLVED that the report be NOTED.

19. Reward and Recognition (AI 7)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Peter Budd, Assistant Director of HR introduced the report which detailed the existing mechanisms that were in place for recognising employee's resilience and hard work during the on-going pandemic period and outlined options for what could be put into place for the future.

This included a recommendation to provide an additional day's annual leave to all staff to be taken on either Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve (or at a later date for those rota'd to work on these days) in recognition of the efforts of all staff during the pandemic and recovery in 2021.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Members note how PCC has already publicly acknowledged the outstanding services and efforts that council officers have made and are continuing to make during the ongoing pandemic. Future email communication from the Leader and the Chief Executive to staff, recognising this and thanking them for their efforts is continued;**
- (ii) Members note what reward and recognition systems are already in place across the whole City Council (contained in Appendix 1);**
- (iii) Members provide an additional day's annual leave to all staff to be taken on either Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve (or at a later date for those rota'd to work on these days) in recognition of the efforts of all staff during the pandemic and recovery in 2021; and**
- (iv) Members note the options for future reward and recognition. That they confirm the mechanism of reward and recognition they wish to implement in the future, not discounting the arrangement of an awards ceremony when it is safe to do so, and that they confirm the level at which they wish staff to be recognised.**

20. Appointments Sub Committee (AI 8)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report which sought authority from the Employment Committee for the establishment of an appointments sub-committee and sets out recommendations for its composition for the appointment to the role of Director of Children, Families and Education.

The Chairman read aloud a representation from Cllr Corkery which questioned the proposed make up of the Appointments Sub-Committee.

He did not believe it fair or proportionate that the Liberal Democrat group of 15 councillors should be entitled to two seats on the sub-committee but the Labour Group of seven councillors should be entitled to none. He felt that a fairer representation would be two Conservative councillors, two Liberal Democrat, one Labour and one independent.

The committee supported representation from all four political groups on the council. In addition, the Chairman requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting to look at the appropriate level of delegation for member involvement in the selection of Assistant Directors, as a number had quite large areas of responsibility.

Resolved that:

(i) the Employment Committee delegate the appointment to the role of Director of Children, Families and Education to an appointments sub-committee

(ii) the appointments sub-committee be composed of:

2 Liberal Democrat members (Cllr Horton/Cllr Dowling)

2 Conservative members (Cllr Brent/Cllr Norton)

1 Labour member (TBC)

1 Independent Group member (Cllr Smith)

The meeting concluded at 12.56 pm.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Chair