

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 25 June 2019 at 12.15 pm at The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Ben Dowling (in the chair)
Councillor Donna Jones (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Matthew Atkins
Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

Officers Present

Peter Baulf, City Solicitor
Rochelle Kneller, Assistant Director of HR
Sue Page, Finance Manager

13. Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of the Chief Executive, Mr David Williams.

14. Declarations of Members' Interests. (AI 2)

Councillor Corkery declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as he is a member of Unison but this does not conflict with him being present for agenda item 4.

15. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 February 2019 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2019 be confirmed and signed by Councillor Vernon-Jackson as a correct record (Councillor Dowling was not present at the previous meeting).

16. Trade Union Facility Reporting (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report by explaining that it is a statutory report that has to be published annually in line with the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) 2017. Facility time is when an employee takes time off from their normal role to carry out duties and activities as a trade union representative. For central function employees the council halved its facility time funding to £37,500; the remaining cost is absorbed by services.

Deputation

A deputation was made on this item by Alan Tier, Unison Steward, Co-Branch Secretary and Education Co-ordinator, Portsmouth City Branch. The full content of the deputation can be viewed at the following link <https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785/Employment-25Jun2019>

The Chair thanked Mr Tier for his deputation.

In response to questions from members Rochelle Kneller explained:

The "assumptions" on teachers' contracts mentioned in paragraph 5.4 are based on contractual data held on teachers and depend on reporting from schools; the figures in 5.4 refer to education which has a different funding mechanism.

The format of the information in table 2 (percentage of staff time spent on facility time) is set out by the government but HR can provide more detailed information and more breakdown in future reports.

In discussion members made the following points:

- It is surprising how little time is spent on trade union activities, thereby more time is spent on core activities; the amount of money concerned is reasonably fair.
- Cllr Vernon-Jackson said the point about Spend To Save in Alan Tier's deputation was interesting and suggested Mr Tier provide written evidence.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1) Note the data in Appendix 1 and the fact that the Appendix will be the report published on the PCC website, and the Government maintained website currently being developed by the Cabinet Office.**
- 2) Note that the data will be included in any relevant Annual Report and Accounts that are published by PCC.**

17. Sickness Absence Quarterly Report (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining that it was the first quarterly report that has been produced using the Business Intelligence (BI) corporate reporting tool, available to all managers responsible for staffing and budgets. However, this means it is not possible to provide comparative data with the previous quarter as BI uses different calculations. EBS has been in place since 2002; it produced reliable quarterly comparators but lacked resilience.

The highest reason for sickness absence is psychological. If musculoskeletal disorders were not divided into three categories they would be the second highest cause of sickness instead of virus and gastrointestinal.

Wellbeing activities include mental health awareness, healthy walks at lunchtime, menopause awareness, mindfulness sessions, annual campaign for flu vaccinations. Solent Mind are being commissioned to provide training for managers on mental health; according to feedback these sessions have been very popular.

In response to questions from members Rochelle Kneller explained:

- The previous system was reliable when it came to producing the same data each quarter but it could not look at work patterns as it assumed everyone worked Monday to Friday. In Adult Social Care (ASC) absences reported at the weekend were not included. Weekend working, shifts longer than 7.4 hours and the day of week chosen for inputting were issues with ASC and the Port. The absences would have been used for calculating pay but were not collected for corporate reporting for the Employment Committee. BI uses the actual hours recorded by managers, who can see a detailed breakdown of absence reasons, for example, unusual circumstances, although this could not be brought to the Employment Committee as it is confidential information.
- The summary of absence reasons, for example, psychological, cannot be subdivided into work-related psychological conditions for reporting in the system but there is an area for managers to free type. However, this facility can be requested in the new HR and finance system due to start in 2021. Members agreed it would be helpful to see a breakdown of work-related stress from now onwards.

In discussion members raised the following points:

- There was some concern over the accuracy of the previous reporting system. However, the new system seems better and there are always some discrepancies with transitions; it can be difficult to compare across systems. The next step is how to tackle and reduce sickness levels. Staff work in a stressful environment and people with physically demanding jobs have higher levels of stress but there are also cultural issues.
- The new data is significantly higher in the new system than in the old one; it was asked how much the difference is due to inputting and how much is structural. It would be helpful to break figures down further for the three highest areas - the Port, ASC and Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services - as this may help members to assist officers with solutions. Rochelle Kneller said data for the top three areas could be split into specific service areas and job types as long as it does not identify individuals. However, some members thought it would be interesting to see overall data before investigating further as there might be uniform increases everywhere or aberrations.

- HR are prompted by a mechanism to ask managers for further information where absences are over 21 days; in some cases the absence has not been closed down after a return to work. Managers receive alerts about open-ended absence.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1) Note the change to absence management and reporting following the introduction of the Business Intelligence (BI) system**
- 2) Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism**
- 3) Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**

18. Appointment to the Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board (AI 6)

The Committee agreed that a Portsmouth councillor should be appointed to serve as a substitute member (if the full member from Southampton City Council cannot attend) on the Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board for the rest of the municipal year. It is an important and complex role.

RESOLVED that Councillor Jeanette Smith be appointed to the Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board for the rest of the municipal year.

The meeting concluded at 12.55 pm.

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Councillor Ben Dowling
Chair