

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Friday, 27 September 2019 at 2 pm in The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Ben Dowling (in the chair)
Councillor Matthew Atkins
Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Councillor Matthew Winnington (Standing Deputy)

Officers Present

Natasha Edmunds, Director, Corporate Services
Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director, Buildings
Andy Kill, Acting Health & Safety Manager
Rochelle Kneller, Assistant Director of HR
David Williams, Chief Executive

19. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Natasha Edmunds, the council's new Director of Corporate Services, to her first meeting of the Employment Committee.

20. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Donna Jones and Darren Sanders. Councillor Sanders was represented by Councillor Matthew Winnington.

21. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2019 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2019 be confirmed and signed by Councillor Dowling as a correct record.

23. Sickness Absence Quarterly Report (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report by explaining that this is the first quarter that data produced by the Business Intelligence (BI) corporate reporting tool has been used to compare the current and previous quarters. From the next report onwards psychological reasons will be divided into stress, anxiety and depression as requested by the Committee at its June meeting.

The average number of lost working days in the Port has reduced from 11.56 to 8.75 and is expected to reduce further. Long-term absence has reduced and eventually legacy data will no longer affect figures. The previous day HR had met the Port's management team to advise on wellbeing initiatives such as the new Occupational Health provider, toolkits and reducing stigma around mental health issues. The Port is looking for staff to act as Wellbeing Champions.

Since the report had been written early feedback from the annual Employee Opinion Survey showed a positive trend in staff knowing how to access support for their health and wellbeing and feeling that the council provides support for mental and physical wellbeing.

HR will bring a report with the results of the Employee Opinion Survey to the next Employment Committee meeting.

In response to questions from members Rochelle Kneller explained:

- The breakdown of stress related reasons into three categories (as requested at the June meeting had only just gone live. HR is working with staff to obtain permission to change the way their absence is reported. The next quarter's report will show a breakdown of the three categories.
- HR has met the Trade Unions to discuss support for and awareness of the menopause. The lunchtime workshops which ran last year will be repeated. Unison has proposed a menopause policy and feedback is awaited from their members. HR is working with Corporate Communications to put toolkits on the intranet in the next few weeks. 65% of the council's workforce is female so awareness of the menopause is important. September is menopause awareness month.
- In the table in Appendix 1 the rolling average is updated every month and the figures in the last column are those in the most recent report brought to the Committee.
- Absence figures for Adult Social Care (ASC) are high because of the workforce and type of work. For example, even if staff who have had diarrhoea and vomiting feel well they cannot return to work for a certain number of days in case they infect service users. Furthermore, care home staff can only work onsite; they cannot work from home. At the February meeting Angela Dryer, ASC Director, highlighted the ageing nature of the workforce (over half are over 50) who are more susceptible to cancer. Take-up of cancer screening is being encouraged.
- HR is aware ASC is a key area for absence and is working to manage long-term absence and see if there is anything ASC management could be doing. For example, ASC could ensure remote workers can access the same resources as PCC based staff.

In discussion members raised the following points:

- The Employment Committee sets targets for sickness absence but advice about setting the figure might not have been followed.
- HR could build in factors in reporting to give the Committee a view of local authorities of a similar size, for example, Brighton or Southampton. Members agreed it would be interesting to see comparative figures.
- Councillor Matthew Winnington, as Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, noted that much work was done to support staff and he acknowledged the effect of stress and budget pressures. A breakdown of figures could differentiate between office and non-office based jobs and between short-term and long-term absence to see which was greater. He had worked for the DWP where there was early intervention to prevent short-term absence and staff were encouraged not to come into work when they were unwell so as to prevent longer absence later on.
- Rochelle Kneller said staff were currently not encouraged to stay away from work but wellbeing initiatives and early intervention are the key to a successful return to work. It is hoped the new Occupational Health provider will help. Staff could be encouraged to use the Employee Assistance Programme or see their GP. Colleagues can also be a source of support and signposting.
- It was noted that one or two cases of long-term absence in small services could cause figures to appear disproportionate, for example, the Port comprises only about 2% of the council's workforce.
- Members agreed the Cycle To Work Day had been very successful and thought regular cycle rides was a good idea.
- Members proposed that the words "you must have access to a car" in recruitment advertising should be changed to "a form of transport" or "be able to get around the city." A requirement to have access to a car should only be used where this is critical, otherwise it may deter good candidates.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1. Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.**
- 2. Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**

24. Health & Safety Annual Report (for period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019)

Andy Kill introduced the report, adding that training had been delivered to a learning disabilities group at the garden centre on the Avenue de Caen.

In response to questions from members officers explained:

The recent fatality at the Port happened after the reporting period but it will be included in next year's report. It had already been discussed at council committees, including Governance, Audit & Standards and the former PRED Cabinet portfolio. Although the Port is run by MMD (now known as Portico) officers agreed the council has a duty of care towards all services it owns or controls. Keith Sandford has been appointed as the new Health & Safety Manager at the Port and is investigating the issues. Portico functions as a separate company and has its own health and safety team who officers have met. The council offers advice and support but does not have direct control over Portico.

With regard to contractors such as construction or demolition firms the council subscribes to SSIP (Safety Schemes in Improvement), an overhead organisation which comprises bodies such as CHAS (Contractors Health & Safety Assessment Scheme) through which contractors are vetted. Project managers then check the RAMS (risk assessments and method statements), which they challenge if necessary. Officers have sometimes had to challenge contractors. Organisations have their own in-house health and safety teams who will have challenged poor practice. In addition, the council employs a clerk of works who examines health and safety and the quality of work.

Members noted it was a good achievement that there had been no fatalities at the council.

RESOLVED that the Committee

1. Note the 2019-2020 Health & Safety Unit corporate action plan.

Meredydd Hughes and Andy Kill left the meeting at 2.35 pm.

25. 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.

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

The meeting concluded at 2.40 pm.

Councillor Ben Dowling
Chair