

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 24 November 2020 at 2.00 pm as a Virtual Remote Meeting

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

Present

Councillor Ben Dowling (in the chair)

Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Luke Stubbs
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

Officers Present

David Williams Chief Executive
Natasha Edmunds, Director Corporate Services
Rochelle Kneller, Assistant Director HR
Shaun Tetley, Payroll and Pensions Manager
Sue Page, Finance Manager
Liz Walder, IT Category Manager, Procurement

18. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

The Chair, Councillor Ben Dowling, welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that it was being held virtually because of restrictions imposed following the outbreak of Covid 19.

He agreed to vary the order of the agenda to hear item 6 first. (For ease of reference the item will remain in its original place in the minutes.)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Donna Jones. Councillor Luke Stubbs deputised for her.

19. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of Members' interests

20. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 September 2020 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

21. Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report which updates the Employment Committee about the levels of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote employee wellbeing.

Section 3.2 shows this quarter's sickness absence figures as compared with the last quarter (September 2020). Most directorates have reported a decline in sickness absence levels this quarter.

Appendix 1 shows absence levels by directorate for the period from November 2019 to November 2020.

Appendix 2 provides a summary of reasons for sickness absence for the last year.

Section 4 of the report provides information about the success of the Council's work on wellbeing - in particular that the Council's wellbeing champion programme has recently been recognised by the Local government Association (LGA). The LGA's lead on mental health and wellbeing of the adult social care workforce was informed of PCC's work in supporting our staff and as a result has compiled a case study which is now live on their dedicated webpage on the topic.

Members were advised that the Council is now signed up and registered as a Hidden Disabilities Scheme and that staff training will be rolled out across the Council.

During discussion

- A query was raised about a comparison of the tables not showing an expected increase in the numbers of those off sick with cold-like symptoms (in view of the Covid pandemic.) It was explained that this was because Covid related sickness was recorded separately and self-isolation was not being recorded as sickness absence.
- In response to a query concerning recording work related stress, it was confirmed that this had not been recorded as a separate category for a complete year as yet so comparisons could not be drawn.

Members asked that their appreciation for the hard work done by all those involved in the wellbeing champion programme and their thanks to all Council employees who had worked so hard during the pandemic to look after people across the City, be formally recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED that Members

- (1) Continue to monitor sickness absence and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism**
- (2) Noted the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance**
- (3) Noted the additional wellbeing activities specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- (4) Noted the reduction in absence levels across the organisation**

22. Reward and Recognition (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report which has been updated since the last meeting to include what the Council had already done, what existing mechanisms were in place for recognising employees' resilience and hard

work during the on-going pandemic period (Appendix 2) and to outline options for what could be put into place in the future.

Sections 4.4 and 4.5 of the report set out monetary and non-monetary reward and recognition.

Members were advised that honoraria payments were not appropriate for council wide staff recognition.

Since the last meeting, the leave situation across all employees in the Council had been collated and this showed that awarding an additional day's leave to everyone would be feasible if Members agreed to this as suitable reward and recognition. The recommendation is that the additional day would either be Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve.

During discussion

- Officers said they considered that following a difficult year, employees would notice and appreciate being given an extra day's leave even though sandwich days had been given as leave in recent years.
- Members were advised that Appendix 2 contained details of how other authorities were rewarding their staff.
- Reference was made to additional information from other authorities having been received since the report had been published and this would be circulated to Committee members after the meeting and would be attached to the minutes.
- Members agreed that the pandemic had adversely affected the economy but did not unanimously agree about whether a pay freeze for public sector workers was an appropriate response.

A discussion took place about which day the additional leave would be given but as a national announcement was expected imminently from central government about the relaxation of restrictions for a 5 day period over Christmas,

it was

proposed by Councillor Vernon-Jackson

seconded by Councillor Ben Dowling

that the Chief Executive be given delegated power to make that decision once the national announcement had been made and to adopt all other recommendations in the report.

This was agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that Members

- (1) Noted 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 thanking them for their efforts is continued.
- (2) Noted what reward and recognition systems are already in place across the whole City Council as contained within Appendix 2.
- (3) Confirmed the reward and recognition in relation to efforts made as a result of the pandemic through the arrangement of

an awards ceremony when it is safe to do so, or any other method of reward that Members wish to implement.

- (4) Agreed to provide an additional day's annual leave to all staff to be taken on either Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve as decided by the Chief Executive once the expected national announcement about relaxing Covid 19 restrictions over the Christmas period had been made (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.

23. Living Wage Accreditation Update (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT - information only)

The Chair agreed to vary the order of the agenda to hear this item first. (For ease of reference the item will remain in its original place in the minutes.)

Natasha Edmunds introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress. Since the last meeting in September, a working group had been established consisting of representatives from Procurement, Finance, HR, Market Research and Legal.

A survey had been devised and sent out to all relevant contractors with a closing date of 4 December 2020 and reminders are being sent to ensure the best possible response rate.

A meeting has also been arranged with the Real Living Wage organisation to be attended by the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Central Services as well as Rochelle Kneller and Natasha Edmunds.

In response to questions

- It was confirmed that trades unions have not been involved in the working group so far but there will be opportunities for engagement with unions going forward
- It was explained that the knowledge gap in the terms and conditions of employees working in organisations outside PCC that have contracts with us is largely because they are considered to be confidential. PCC does try to understand working practices and employment terms and conditions of organisations it works with.
- If suppliers do not reply to the survey by the deadline, the consequence would be that the financial analysis would be based on a greater number of assumptions than would be ideal - but the work would not be held up.
- Liz Walder, IT Category Manager, Procurement, advised that it was not possible within the rules relating to procurement to stipulate that certain employment conditions are in place before a contract is awarded to an organisation. It is possible to make requests but not to mandate. This can still be problematic even after an organisation becomes accredited. PCC is seeking to learn from other authorities' experience in this regard. The City Solicitor confirmed that PCC does not have a legal right to insist its contractors pay the Real Living Wage.
- One Member viewed seeking to pay the Real Living Wage in the current economic climate as unrealistic.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and the item was noted.

The meeting concluded at 2.44 pm.

Councillor Ben Dowling
Chair