

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Thursday 21 September 2023 at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Stuart Brown (Chair)
Councillor Dave Ashmore
Councillor Simon Boshier
Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Charlotte Gerada

18 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillor Darren Sanders had offered his apologies for absence. Apologies had also been received from David Williams, Chief Executive.

19 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillors Charlotte Gerada and Cal Corkery declared personal, non-prejudicial interests in that they are members of Unite the Union and GMB Union.

20 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

21 Sickness Absence Report (AI 4)

Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director of HR, introduced the report, informing Members that the report provides an update on the levels and causes of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to improve attendance and promote employee health and wellbeing. She added that compared to the last sickness absence report presented in March 2023 overall absence levels are down by 5,383 working days and that, overall, in August 2023 the average days absence per person was 9.89 (compared to 11.10 in January 2023). Since March 2023 seven directorates have seen a decrease in overall absence levels and four directorates have seen an increase and although these have lower absence levels historically. Resources are being targeted proactively to the areas with the highest absence levels, including the Port and Adult Social Services, leading to the overall decrease in sickness absence.

The Assistant Director of HR also informed Members that psychological (stress, anxiety and depression) has continued to be ranked as the highest reason for sickness absence, despite it reducing by 2,246

working days. Virus is now ranked 2nd and Musculoskeletal (Lower Limb) continues to be ranked 3rd, although if all Musculoskeletal categories were combined it would be the highest reason for sickness absence. It is important to note, she added, that work related psychological reasons for absence are ranked lower than non work related reasons. Coronavirus is now ranked 5th, and following conversations with colleagues in the NHS, Public health and other local authorities is now reported the same way as any other sickness absences.

The Assistant Director of HR explained that that to help identify the causes of Musculoskeletal absences more effectively and ensure the efficient use of resources, it is proposed to change to the names of the musculoskeletal absence reasons from lower limb, upper limb and back and neck to Musculoskeletal - injury, fracture or operation and Musculoskeletal - back and neck.

To help support the mental health of employees, the Assistant Director of HR, explained Solent Mind have continued to deliver one-hour interactive wellbeing training sessions. Since the last Employment Committee meeting, three workshops have taken place with 63 staff members attending at least one session. To help support attendance and improve health and wellbeing, HR has continued its proactive and data driven approach with new workshops designed have a preventative focus, whilst also covering the essential information managers require when dealing with sickness absence. Since its launch in June 2023, seven sessions have been held with 97 managers and supervisors attending to date. In addition, 33 champions have completed the mental health first aid (MHFA) training. Two new support groups have been launched (Neurodiversity and Perimenopause & Menopause groups) and meet monthly. To date 75 staff members have signed up to the Perimenopause and Menopause group and 17 for the Neurodiversity group. Council-wide wellbeing campaigns, events, activities and training opportunities on particular topics continue.

In response to questions from Members, the Assistant Director of HR agreed to investigate the potential for sickness absence data for each directorate to be presented as a percentage of staff in each directorate. She then clarified:

- The reductions in sickness absence at the Port and in Adult Social Care were a result of the proactive work including relating to back care being undertaken and the engagement of the trade unions.
- Psychological reasons for sickness absence were much higher for factors outside the workplace than for work related factors.
- The recommended change to the categorisation of muscular skeletal reasons for sickness absence will help accuracy in data collection.

Members commented that it was encouraging to see the significant decline in sickness absence for covid-19 (-140%) set out in Appendix 3 of the report.

RESOLVED to:

- a) **Note the change in absence levels across the organisation.**
- b) **Note the levels and causes of sickness absence across the council and by directorate.**
- c) **Note the changes in how Coronavirus absences are now being recorded.**
- d) **Note the activities and interventions undertaken to support attendance and improve health and wellbeing.**
- e) **Change the names of Musculoskeletal absences recorded in Fusion to:**
 - **Musculoskeletal - injury, fracture or operation**
 - **Musculoskeletal - back and neck**

The meeting concluded at 5.12pm

Councillor Stuart Brown
Chair