

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday 16 September 2014 at 12.15 pm in the Executive Meeting Room, third floor, The Guildhall, Portsmouth.

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

Present

Councillor Donna Jones (Chair)
Councillor Luke Stubbs (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Hugh Mason (deputising for Councillor Lynne Stagg)
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Councillor John Ferrett

Officers Present

David Williams, Chief Executive
Michael Lawther, City Solicitor
Jon Bell, Head of HR, Legal & Performance
Roland Bryant, HR

17 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lynne Stagg. Councillor Hugh Mason deputised for her.

18 Declarations of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of members' interests.

19 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 June 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Employment Committee held on 17 June 2014 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

20 Senior Management Structure

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that its purpose was to seek members' approval to conduct a review of the council's senior management structure. He explained that the environment in which the council operates continues to change rapidly and although the last review of the structure took place relatively recently in 2012, the need to identify financial savings is intensifying. He said it is important for the senior management structure to reflect the council's current and future priorities and said that it was right in the current climate that reductions in the cost of senior

management are sought. He said that it was his intention to bring a paper back to the November meeting of Employment Committee on this matter.

During discussion the following matters were clarified:

- The Chief Executive confirmed that the financial savings target outlined in the November 2013 budget would be addressed in this paper.
- Jon Bell confirmed that the consultation periods mentioned in the report were the statutory minimum and that these were not always rigidly adhered to and could be longer.

RESOLVED

- (1) that members welcome the reductions in senior management that have already taken place prior to this paper;**
- (2) to ask the Chief Executive to carry out a review of the council's senior management structure and report back to a future meeting with options for a new structure and a timetable for implementation**

21 Sickness Absence Quarterly Report

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Jon Bell introduced the report and said that the last few reports coming to this committee had shown a general decrease in sickness absence levels. However, in the period from 1 September 2013 to 31 August 2014, the level of sickness absence had increased from 8.26 to 8.97 average days per person per year. This is against a corporate target of an average eight days per person per year.

With regard to the Port, he said that the sickness levels were starting to reduce but agreed during discussion at the meeting that these were unlikely to reach the target of 9.4 average days by November 2014.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members felt that the rise in sickness absence levels was disappointing.
- Jon Bell said that it was difficult to pinpoint specific reasons for increases in absence but that organisational change such as that taking place in Adult Social Care often impacted on sickness absence.
- Members felt that the increase had been quite large and wanted reports to be able to track trends as the increase this time could have been owing to a very high level of sickness in the timescale covered by this report or a very low level of sickness absence in the timescale covered by the last report.
- Members felt that the introduction of the offer of flu jabs was very worthwhile.
- Jon Bell said that he would circulate a revised Appendix 1 to members as there was an error in the original version.

Members of the committee decided that it would be useful for all heads of service where sickness absence levels were high to be asked to attend the 4 November meeting of this committee to provide a five minute update explaining the reasons for sickness absence in their service. The heads of service concerned are the Head of Adult Social Care, the Head of Children's Social Care & Safeguarding, the Head of Corporate Assets, Business & Standards, the Head of Housing & Property Services, the Port Director and the Head of Revenues & Benefits .

Members noted that Gemma Limburn had now left the organisation and recorded their thanks to her for her work for this committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That Members continue to monitor sickness absence on a quarterly basis and to ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism; and**
- (2) That the heads of those services where the average per person per year sickness absence is shown on the appendix as being higher than eight days per year be asked to attend the next scheduled meeting of Employment Committee on 4 November 2014.**

22 Apprenticeships Progress Report

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Jon Bell introduced the report which was to update members of the Employment Committee on the progress of the action plan to recruit apprentices to the city council. He said that interest in apprenticeship opportunities within the city council had been strong with on average 50-100 applications per post. He said that following an initial sift of applications this usually resulted in 25-30 applicants being available to the manager to shortlist. He said that a target of 25 new apprenticeships per year had been proposed but that this had already been exceeded. He said that the number of apprenticeships that could be offered was dependent on the availability of vacancies, the nature of those vacancies and the costs of providing an appropriate qualification for them.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members discussed whether or not the current target figure proposed of 25 new apprenticeships each year for the next four years should be increased and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of including an actual figure.
- Members were advised that officers were working on producing a framework for apprenticeship providers to PCC.
- At present there were no concerns about apprentices achieving their qualification from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).
- Jon Bell confirmed that those applicants unsuccessful after the initial sift (referred to in 4.2 of the report) were kept on the records of the training providers in case other opportunities arose for which they were

suitable.

- It was confirmed that those who got through the initial sift process but were unsuccessful for the particular post were also looked at to see whether they would be suitable for other posts should they arise.
- Jon Bell said that with regard to specific targets he would stress that there are a number of factors outside PCC's control which included the need for suitable opportunities to be available. He said he accepted the need to increase the target figure from 25 but that the main constraint on specific numbers is suitable opportunities occurring.

It was proposed by Councillor Darren Sanders and seconded by Councillor Luke Stubbs that the recommendations in the report be amended to delete everything after the words "next four years" and add new recommendations (iii) encourage officers to explore how PCC can increase the current target and (iv) ask officers to bring back a report to the Employment Committee meeting in November that shows how other councils are delivering a higher number of apprenticeships.

A vote was taken on whether to include in proposed recommendation (iii) a specific target figure of 50 apprenticeships per year. This was lost.

Upon being put to the vote the recommendations as outlined above (without reference to a specific target figure) were carried.

RESOLVED that members

- (i) Note the positive progress to date in promoting apprenticeships within the council;**
- (ii) Approve the current target to recruit 25 new apprentices each year for the next four years;**
- (iii) encourage officers to explore how PCC can increase the current target;**
- (iv) ask officers to bring back a report to the Employment Committee meeting in November that shows how other councils are delivering a higher number of apprenticeships.**

23 Verbal Update on the Living Wage

Mr Jon Bell provided a verbal update on progress following the agreement in principle to adopt the living wage already taken by this committee. He said that there were some significant risks associated with the introduction of the living wage especially in relation to whether or not schools decided to introduce it. Following dialogue with the schools, it was clear that there were differing views and no consensus on this matter. In any event, most schools would not introduce the living wage until at least the academic year beginning September 2015. Mr Bell said that when the schools had made decisions on this matter, he would bring a report back to this committee as soon as he was in a position to do so. He said it was also necessary in his view to take account of the financial implications as there were likely to be more staff subject to the living wage as time goes on which affects the affordability of the

scheme. In these circumstances, there may be a need to review the situation.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- Councillors found it frustrating that PCC has no control over the decisions made by the schools but have liability in the event of any claims being made under equal pay.
- Members expressed concerns that a decision had been taken by Employment Committee to implement the living wage with effect from November 2014 but that this now seemed unlikely to happen.
- In response to questions, Jon Bell said that he had had extensive discussions with officers in Southampton but that the basic difference between Southampton and Portsmouth was their varying appetite for risk. He said that the situation in Southampton was not directly comparable as the living wage was being introduced as part of a general change to terms and conditions.
- Jon Bell said that he did not have updated figures at present and could not therefore advise members about the affordability of introducing the living wage at this time.

Michael Lawther said that the legal advice on this matter was around equal pay issues. Portsmouth City Council had a very good record on equal pay claims and his view was that introducing the living wage would involve PCC in financial risk. He said he would provide a note about this matter to members of the committee if that would be helpful and said that he would include information about potential levels of damages as he felt this would be useful for members to know.

Jon Bell said that some authorities had introduced the living wage without experiencing particular difficulties, but that these tended to be district councils that did not have responsibility for schools. He agreed to look into other comparable local authorities to see what their experiences were where they had introduced the living wage.

The chair said that although she did not oppose the introduction of the living wage there was a need to know the level of risk that would be involved if this was taken forward.

24 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 4 November 2014.

The meeting concluded at 1.20 pm.

Chair