

MINUTES

Employment Committee

Wednesday, 22 September 2021, 10:00

Council Chamber – South Kesteven House,
St. Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31 6PZ



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Sarah Trotter (Chairman)

Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Annie Mason
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew

Cabinet Members in attendance

Councillor Linda Wootten (Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance)

Officers in attendance

Karen Bradford (Chief Executive)
Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Ken Lyon (Assistant Chief Executive)
Jane Jenkinson (Senior HR Officer)
Alice Atkins (Democratic Officer)

22. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Barry Dobson and Councillor Anna Kelly.

Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew would be substituting for Councillor Barry Dobson, for this meeting only.

23. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

24. Minutes of the meetings held on:

25. 10 June 2021 (Special meeting)

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2021 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as a correct record.

26. 16 June 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- Correction of the spelling of the surname of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Kelham Cooke
- Correction of the spelling of the surname of the Deputy Chief Executive, Alan Robinson

27. 4 August 2021 (Special meeting)

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 August 2021 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

28. Work Programme 2021 - 2022

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Employment Committee Work Plan for the period 2021 -22. He noted that the Committee had added to the workplan during the meeting by receiving the action plan from the LGA Peer Review.

Members commented on:

- Whether the People Strategy would be factored in to the Work Plan.

It was confirmed that the HR team were currently working on plans regarding to the People Strategy and that this would likely be presented to Employment Committee in January.

- Whether a review of the SKDC intranet could be added to the Work Plan.

It was confirmed that this would be noted.

The Employment Committee noted the Work Plan 2021-22.

29. Updates from the previous meeting

The Chairman referred to Agenda Item Number 5 which was an update on the number and types of apprenticeships being supported at South Kesteven District Council (SKDC).

30. Apprenticeships Update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer communities presented the report which provided an update on current apprenticeships at SKDC. The report outlined how SKDC had met its annual apprenticeship target of 2.3% of its headcount. The report also provided information on funding for additional incentives for new starters as well as the Government scheme, Kickstart.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether the current apprenticeship target of 2.3% of headcount could be increased.

The Leader responded with support for more apprenticeships but noted that the Council should carefully consider all apprenticeships to ensure that they are meaningful and add value to the organisation.

- How many apprentices had entered into full time employment at the Council?

It was noted that the majority of apprentices did stay on and enter into full time employment at the Council. Officers stated that specific data relating to this could be provided to Members.

- Whether there was a mandatory period of time apprentices would stay at the Council following the completion of an apprenticeship.

It was confirmed that apprentices were not obligated to remain at the Council for any period of time following the completion of an apprenticeship. Officers advised that the costs associated with employing apprentices were mitigated by the existing Apprenticeship Levy.

- A query was raised relating to the age range of apprentices.

It was noted that there was no age limit for apprentices.

- Members discussed the need to communicate through the media the Council's work on apprenticeships.

The Leader proposed an amendment to the report's recommendation to include an expansion, with the additional wording underlined:

Notes the update on apprenticeships at South Kesteven District Council, celebrates all that has been achieved, and continues to ensure that all apprenticeship opportunities are maximised.

The proposal was seconded.

Following a vote, the amendment to the recommendation of the report was **AGREED.**

DECISION:

The Employment Committee noted the update on apprenticeships at South Kesteven District Council, celebrated all that has been achieved, and would continue to ensure that all apprenticeship opportunities are maximised.

31. Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report which provided an update on the Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan. The report highlighted the actions taken to support staff and Member wellbeing, including a range of mental and physical wellbeing sessions.

Updates around the issue of additional financial costs for staff working from home as well as how staff would be supported to maintain a healthy work life balance were provided by the Deputy Chief Executive.

It was noted that an additional Mental Health and Wellbeing 'pulse survey' would be undertaken by staff.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- What was the consensus amongst staff regarding working from home?

It was noted that the majority of staff had a preference for a blended approach of both home working and office-based working. It was noted that at present, senior leadership had been assessing office improvements. Officers noted that teamwork and in-person connection was important, and that priority should be placed on performance and outcomes rather than on presenteeism.

DECISION:

The Employment Committee noted the update on the Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan at South Kesteven District Council.

32. Onboarding Employees Update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report which provided an update on the onboarding of employees at SKDC. The report highlighted how the process was currently being refreshed to account for hybrid working conditions.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Members discussed the Buddy System currently operating at SKDC.

The Deputy Chief Executive spoke in support of the Buddy System, noting that it had helped him to settle into the Council quickly.

- Whether the Buddy System would be introduced for Members.

It was noted that any such system had previously been dealt with within the political groups. The Leader spoke in support for a Member/Officer buddy system and

referred to his experience at Lincolnshire County Council where this had been in operation.

- Members discussed the challenges associated with becoming a newly elected Councillor.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities noted that the induction process for Members was due to be reviewed. The Deputy Chief Executive noted that a Buddy System could be trialled following the upcoming by-election taking place in the District.

DECISION:

The Employment Committee noted the updated on the onboarding process for employees at the Council.

33. Name Blind Recruitment

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report which provided information on name blind recruitment, a recruitment process with the aim of removing unconscious bias and recommended that the Employment Committee consider the implementation of this.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Employment Committee had supported the implementation of name blind recruitment a number of years previously, but that the process had only been deemed viable now.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether some details, such as an applicant's address and educational background, were to be made known.

It was confirmed that an applicant's educational qualifications would be retained, but that the dates of these would not be made known unless necessary.

- Members discussed the issue of unconscious bias and expressed that it had not been an issue at SKDC.
- Members expressed support for the implementation of name blind recruitment but raised concerns about the level of detail included in the report.

The Leader proposed an alternative recommendation to that in the report, as follows:

That the Employment Committee support the use of name blind recruitment and at the next meeting would bring forward a policy document on the implementation of it.

The proposal was seconded.

Following a vote, the amendment to the recommendation of the report was **AGREED**.

DECISION:

The Employment Committee supported the use of name blind recruitment and at the next meeting agreed to bring forward a policy document on the implementation of it.

34. Local Government Association - Remote Peer Support - Final Report

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance presented the report which set out the findings of the Remote Peer Support, which was undertaken in July 2021, led by the Local Government Association (LGA) with input from leaders within the local government sector and also sets out the timetable for further engagement with the LGA peer support programme.

The Assistant Chief Executive expressed his thanks to the LGA and to Frances Marshall who had co-ordinated the Peer Support to SKDC.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether there was an indication as to how long the process would take.

It was confirmed that the LGA Peer Challenge would take place during the coming November, with a briefing to follow at the end of the Challenge. A few weeks following the briefing, a formal report would be received which would be presented to Cabinet and then to Full Council. It was noted that an action planning session was due to take place in a week's time in order to develop a prioritisation framework. This framework would be presented to Employment Committee in January.

- Members spoke positively of the peer review, citing how it had highlighted the recent successes of SKDC as well as the challenges the organisation had faced. Members expressed support for holding a peer review on a regular basis going forward.
- A concern was raised that the Council was committing to too many plans, in relation to the recommendations in the peer review report.

The Leader noted that due to external factors such as the impact of COVID-19 and a reduction in funding from Central Government, the Council had had to prioritise its ambitions. It was noted that difficult decisions must be made at present in order to future proof the organisation.

The Chief Executive also noted that the Council had to balance its plans with the funding and resources available. She noted that the new appraisal system was key

to delivering the Council's ambitions and would continue to be instrumental in ensuring the right resources and skill sets were available to do this. The Council's response to COVID-19 was commended and the level of change delivered during this period was highlighted.

DECISIONS:

The Employment Committee:

- 1. Noted the report from the Local Government Association and future actions, including a Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2021**
- 2. Formally thanked the Local Government Association and members of the peer team for their support in undertaking the review and developing the attached report**

35. Designation of Monitoring Officer

The Leader of the Council presented the report which provided the Employment Committee with the opportunity to consider a recommendation to Council in relation to the designation of the Council's Monitoring Officer.

The Deputy Chief Executive, Alan Robinson, left the room during the discussion and vote.

Members commented on:

- Members commended the conduct of Alan Robinson, who had been appointed as Deputy Chief Executive at SKDC in January 2021.

The recommendation within the report was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED**.

DECISION:

The Employment Committee recommended that Council designate Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive, as South Kesteven District Council's Monitoring Officer from 30 September 2021.

36. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

The Chairman invited Members to raise any other business.

The Leader wished to express his congratulations and thanks to the Head of Leisure, Karen Whitfield, and to all of the other Officers who had worked to launch LeisureSK and to TUPE transfer LeisureSK staff. LeisureSK had recently been nominated for an MJ (the Municipal Journal) Award and had been highly commended, especially for a company which had only been set up in January.

Thanks were given to all the members of staff and the Members who had been involved in the launch of LeisureSK.

37. Close of Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:23.