

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Monday, 8 July 2024, 10.00 am



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Anna Kelly (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Phil Gadd
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Paul Martin

Other Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Jane Jenkinson, Senior HR Officer
Fran Beckitt, Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development
Michael Chester, Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader
Sam Fitt, Senior HR/Corporate Project Officer
Rhys Page, Operations Team Leader
Beth Randall, Housing Services Team Leader
Kev Taylor, CCTV Control Room Supervisor

1. Apologies for absence

All Committee members were present.

Cabinet Member Councillor Rhea Rayside gave apologies.

2. Disclosure of interests

There were no disclosures of interests.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024

The exempt and public minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 were approved, subject to Councillor Paul Martin's attendance at the meeting being reflected in the confirmed documents.

4. HR Dashboard and People Plan

Councillors considered a presentation from the Head of Service (Human Resources and Organisational Development) which gave an update on the HR metrics from the 2023/2024 financial year.

The HR Dashboard covered the following themes from the People Strategy:

- Recruitment and Workforce Planning
- Engagement
- Reward and Recognition
- Development
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Wellbeing

One notable highlight was that the sickness absence Key Performance Indicator (KPI) had been bettered with a year-on-year reduction in average days lost from 13.53 to 10.33 per FTE (full-time equivalent).

The Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development gave a presentation to members highlighting the recent SK Awards night, alongside further HR metrics. The following areas were discussed:

- There had been a significant drop in staff turnover, with less leavers than starters. Exit interviews were held with all leavers from the Council. The most common reason given for leaving the Council was career advancement.
- There were many initiatives that celebrated employees and their contributions, such as the Team:SK thank yous and long service achievement awards. Recently, an awards ceremony had been held at the Savoy Cinema, Grantham. Several award winners from that night were present in the Council Chamber to receive thanks from members, including Rhys Page (Waste), Michael Chester (Leisure), Jane Jenkinson (HR), Kev Taylor (CCTV), and Beth Randall (Housing).
- The Staff Engagement Survey had seen an 85% response rate. Engagement sessions had been held with each team, and this had contributed to a rise in engagement from 74% from the previous year.
- HR sessions run throughout the course of 2023-2024 included Team Spotlights, a focus on on-boarding, and social events such as the staff barbecue.

- The largest age demographic working at the Council was those aged between 50-59. The Council was working towards being an 'age-friendly employer'.
- There was no gender pay gap at the Council.
- As part of learning week, there had been sessions for officers' personal development, as well as the inclusion of training on key skills that had specifically been requested by the staff. There had also been the introduction of internal work experience; this was where colleagues would visit other teams and departments to learn more about other areas of the Council.
- Since the Covid-19 pandemic the amount of sickness absences had increased. The top reasons for this increase were mental health conditions and musculo-skeletal issues.
- Counsellors were available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP had fielded 48 calls from the Council during the last year. There had also been 95 visits from the mental health first aid network in the same period.
- 595 'return to work' conversations had taken place. These conversations occurred when a member of staff had returned to work following a sickness absence.
- It had been a busy period in the wellbeing calendar. For Mental Health Week, there were yoga sessions, the opportunity to use an exercise bike in the office, and the celebrations related to the 50th year anniversary of the formation of South Kesteven District Council.
- In terms of disciplinaries, there were 4 grievances and 15 investigations.
- For the Staff Engagement Survey, the same 60 questions used for the previous year's survey were used again. These questions asked staff to indicate a preference, but some boxes enabled staff to add their comments in a free text box.
- **ACTION** – the Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development was to share the statistics for disciplinaries with Committee Members, to include the departments of the staff members concerned.
- 83% of respondents to the Engagement Survey either 'strongly agreed', or 'agreed' that other colleagues supported them at work, demonstrating a good demographic of collaborative support at the Council.

The Employment Committee **NOTED** the information provided in the HR dashboard for the 12-month period of the 23/24 year.

5. SKDC Volunteer Policy - Update on Implementation

Members considered an update on the implementation of the 'Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy'.

The item had previously been considered at Employment Committee in September 2023. Progress had been made on its implementation, with volunteers in parks and the Arts being two particular areas of focus.

A recruitment drive had increased volunteering activity in Wyndham Park, Grantham, and also the Stamford Arts Centre.

There had been engagement with the Wyndham Park Forum and Friends of Wyndham Park. The Leader of the Council, alongside the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture had met with members of the Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park and talks between themselves and the Council were progressing.

It was crucial that people were safe at work through proper procedures and risk assessments. Much progress had been made since last year.

During debate, the following points were highlighted:

- Much of the volunteer work in the past was based on goodwill, but this policy makes clear that the Council was responsible for what happens in parks. The policy also brought together expectations of the Council alongside the creativity of the volunteers.
- The District would not run without volunteers. It was a key route to getting people back to work.
- Once the Policy was embedded within Grantham, it could be distributed as a template more widely through parish clerks if required.

The Employment Committee **NOTED** the progress on the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy.

6. Pay Award 2024/25

Members of the Committee discussed the implementation of a pay award in line with the National Employers' final offer effective from 1 April 2024.

National discussions had taken place on the proposed pay award; however South Kesteven had a local framework separate to the national discussions. It could be the case that the award may be adjusted further once the results of ongoing national discussions were known.

Currently, there would be a £1290 pro rata pay uplift from those on salary point SK20 and lower. Above this salary point, it would be a 2.5% pay uplift. The proposal would achieve a bottom rate of pay of £23526 with effect from 1 April 2024, equality to a 5.8% increase for that grade.

The national employers' pay offer had not been accepted by Trade Unions nationally.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- If the uplift in salary was not paid until the final outcome of negotiations was known, it could be an issue for those officers entitled to benefits; any back pay could have the effect of unfairly penalising them as benefits were paid on a month-to-month basis.
- The benefit of issuing back pay now was to avoid issuing a much larger payment in the future.
- Full Council was required to agree any increases to members' allowances, but agreed the following at the meeting held on 26 May 2022:

“Member Allowances continue to be linked to any annual salary increase awarded to South Kesteven District Council Officers and that such index-linking continues until the next Independent Remuneration Panel’s report or for a period of 4 years, whichever is the sooner.”

- At the Budget meeting held in March 2024, there had been provision made for an uplift in salaries and allowances.

A brief discussion took place on whether Member allowances should be uplifted at the same time as officer salaries; it was agreed that an **ACTION** to take away was for the Chief Executive and Leader to discuss whether this uplift was implemented immediately, or when the outcome of national discussions was known.

Having previously been moved and seconded, and following a vote, it was AGREED that the Employment Committee endorses the Head of Paid Service and Leader of the Council’s decision to award a pay rise, effective from 1 April 2024, in line with the National Employers final offer:

- **£1290 (pro rata for part time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all pay points from SK2 –SK20.**
- **An increase of 2.5% on all pay points above SK20.**

7. Human Resources Policies

Members discussed the potential adoption of seven refreshed HR Policies, which included:

- Disciplinary Policy
- Paternity Policy
- Probation Policy
- DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Recruitment Policy
- Flexi-time Policy

The following information was highlighted to Members, prior to debate:

- The Disciplinary Policy was designed to maintain the standards of conduct and behaviour of staff. The major revision here was the timescales for warnings, alongside further guidance and clarity over the process.
- The proposed change to the Paternity Policy was a move from one to two week's fully paid paternity cover.
- More guidance was contained within the refreshed Probation Policy. There was also a proposed amendment around hearings – if a member of staff's probation could end in dismissal then that hearing would fall in line with SKDC's other processes.
- The DBS Policy was a new, rather than refreshed policy.
- The Attendance Policy contained more information and expectations over officers' responsibilities in this area. There was also an amendment to the attendance procedure.
- There were no changes recommended for either the Recruitment or Flexi-time policies, they were included for completeness.

All of the above had been discussed with, and accepted by the unions, and draft copies of all policies had been circulated to staff. Once policies were approved, they were published on the 'HR Hub' which could be viewed by all staff.

During debate, the following points were highlighted:

- There was already a refreshed Hybrid Working Policy which contained guidance for homeworking. Nationally, there were not many Councils that had such a policy. Staff were required to work a minimum of two days in the office (pro rata for part-time staff).
- Occupational health advice (OH) was sought when a sickness absence was maternity, or disability related. In these instances, reasonable adjustments would be likely be built in, and the absence trigger would not be met.
- Any illness that staff have that impacted their day-to-day life could be entitled to reasonable adjustments. Each absence was treated on a case-by-case basis.
- Each officer wanting to work from home had to complete a workstation assessment and send in a photograph of their workspace.

Recognition was given to the HR team for the range of policies that they had developed, as well as all of the hard work that they contributed on a day-to-day basis.

Having been moved and seconded, and following a vote it was AGREED that Employment Committee approves the adoption of the amended South Kesteven District Council HR policies:

- **Disciplinary Policy**

- **Paternity Policy**
- **Probation Policy**
- **DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Policy**
- **Attendance Policy**
- **Recruitment Policy**
- **Flexi-time Policy**

8. Work Programme 2024-2025

Members were all asked to check their availability for 4 September, as there would be an additional interview Panel for a senior position, involving all members of the Employment Committee.

There were no further amendments to the work programme.

9. Exclusion of Press and Public

Having been moved and seconded, and following a vote it was **AGREED** to exclude the press and public during discussion of the remaining agenda items because of the likelihood that information that was exempt under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) would have been disclosed to them.

For item 11, it was agreed to extend this exclusion to non-members (Councillors) of the Committee that may have been present.

10. HR Policy Update

The HR policy update was **NOTED** by members of the Committee. An exempt minute was circulated.

11. Proposed Director Targets 2024-2025

The Proposed Director Targets for 2024-2025 contained within the report were **APPROVED** by the Committee. Details of this was contained within an exempt minute.

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

There was none.

The meeting closed at 12:27pm.